

EDITORIAL

PLAGIARISM ON INTELLECTUAL PRODUCTION AND GUIDELINES

*Alina Coutinho Rodrigues Feitosa**

Corresponding author: alinafeitosa@bahiana.edu.br

* Endocrinology PhD in USP. Associate professor in BAHIANA - School of Medicine and Public Health

Antoine Laurent Lavoisier, a French chemist considered the father of modern chemistry and celebrated for his studies, was immortalized by his findings and by the popular phrase “in nature nothing is created, nothing is lost, everything is transformed”.⁽¹⁾ This phrase is valuable to the natural and life processes. However, in science, the researcher is always creating; but the preceding information must not be lost and as it is to be employed to compose new knowledge. Therefore, science has been always evolving and transforming itself. For the production of new knowledge, the reference to the prior information and the modification of somebody else’s work require the urgent need to give due credit right to whom credit is due. One must cite correctly!

Taking other people’ work as your own defines plagiarism. It is an illegal and unethical copy of someone else’s work and authorship as yours. The origin of the word plagiarism lies in the Latin *plagere* = theft and *plagiatum* = to rob someone. Plagiarism can be comprised of stolen ideas, statements, phrases and even some other author’s linguistic style.⁽²⁾

The American Association of University Professors defines plagiarism as “taking ideas, methods or written words of others without their consent with the intent that the authorship of copied material would be misleadingly assigned to whoever has copied them”.⁽³⁾ It can also be defined as “the act of appropriation or copy of written works and artistic creative work of others as their own, in part or whole, without specifying the source or original authorship”.⁽²⁾

According to data from the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME), the precise definition of plagiarism would be to copy 6 consecutive words^(4,5) in a continuous 30 words length text . The WAME set codes of conduct for medical journal editors and guidelines on authorship and publication ethics (www.wame.org). Plagiarism is perceived in the scientific community as a fraud, a way to trick the reader, as a theft or appropriation of ideas or work of another and it can destroy the reputation and eventually the career of a researcher. An interesting comment attributed to Samuel Johnson, the famous English writer, portrays what can be thought of when reading a text in which plagiarism is identified: “*your manuscript is both good and original, but the part that is good is not original and the part that is original is not good*”.

The act of plagiarizing is widely known in the literary world and science for centuries. A quick search for the word “plagiarism” in Medline generates over 1400 publication outcomes on that subject. However, despite being widely combated and that it can bring dire consequences for the work and career of a researcher or writer, plagiarism is one of the most reported misconducts in research, ahead

of counterfeiting and manufacturing data according to the National Science Foundation,⁽⁶⁾ an United States government agency that promotes research and fundamental education in the fields of science and engineering.

Plagiarism happens for several reasons: academic pressure for promotion, recognition, funding, personal ambition, financial pressure and laziness.⁽⁷⁾

It also happens outside science. Some cases are famous and well known such as that when the singers Roberto Carlos and Erasmos Carlos were penalized with a seven digit fine by the Brazilian Supreme Court for copying the first ten beats of "Oddities of Love", a song by the composer Sebastião Braga. The plagiarized song is called "The Old-Schooler". The work plagiarized was removed from the discographic catalog by Roberto Carlos.⁽⁸⁾ In 2014, Brazilian researchers Carlos Brito Negrato and Marilia Gomes were accused of plagiarism in the journal "Diabetes & Metabolic Syndrome" after investigation of the Biomed Central group, that publishes the magazine. According to Negrato, information that may be similar to that of other studies that have not been consulted had been used, but the Biomed Central replied that their "plagiarism detection software showed a significant amount of identical material copied from previous publications".⁽⁹⁾ The article was then retracted. The retraction is an alert mechanism for readers to be made aware that a given scientific publication contains serious flaws or errors in data well as in their findings and therefore conclusions cannot be used. Shame is on the researcher!

There are distinct types of plagiarism: the direct, which is the complete or partial copy of the material; the mosaic form, which "borrows ideas and opinions from the original source, replacing few words or phrases and self-plagiarism, which is the re-use of one's own source material, without mentioning the primary source.⁽⁷⁾

Not only plagiarism concerns and demands attention from researchers but also misquoting should be given proper attention. It is necessary that

the researcher is aware not to attribute the quote authorship through an inappropriate reference. This is rather common in scientific texts: the author quotes a text or phrase and gives credit to others instead. The reader, when delving deeper in the quoted text, realizes that it is actually an indirect quotation, a passage which does not come from the cited work but it is itself a citation within the cited work. This type of citation should be preceded by *apud*, which means "near, near," eg. : Masic, *apud* Armstrong 1983 (meaning the excerpt can be found in the text by Masic, but was originally comes from Armstrong 1983). This type of citation should be employed mostly when the original works are difficult to be found, rare, in older publications, or texts in less accessible languages. The excessive use of *apud* can be interpreted as the author's laziness who may be thought to have had refused to read the original work.

Despite all the information, plagiarism continues to happen. The pressure to publish at any cost and greed may cause a researcher/writer to forsake the ethical path. An ethical, honest career and a serious scientific legacy may take decades to be built and seconds to be destroyed along with the reputation, integrity and credibility all because of plagiarism! We must be attentive and vigilant.

In order for plagiarism to not take place, the researcher and his team (yes, the text of the student you advise is under your responsibility!) must be properly advised and educated so that plagiarism can be avoided. Guidelines advise authors and publishers of the principles of transparency on publications,⁽¹⁰⁾ but it is very simple to avoid or minimize plagiarism: just give credit to who holds the authorship and follow the rules of scientific research.⁽²⁾ Please always cite publications, facts, findings, published and not yet published ideas and words by other researchers in their original form. Use the Quotation Citation Reference system. Put quotation marks "" when referring to more than 6 consecutive words *ipsi litteris*. Request permission to reproduce material (text, images, tables, graphs),

and sign declaration of originality and contribution of each author separately.

Even with all due attention, unintentional plagiarism can still happen but the lack of intent does not exempt the perpetrator. The researcher can use the new technologies to identify plagiarism through computer programs such as PlagScan, iThenticate, CheckForPlagiarism.net and Plagiarism Sniffer. The “sniffer plagiarism” is free and was developed by a Brazilian computing engineer. It is available on the website (<http://www.plagiarismcombat.com>) and it allows for greater automation on the plagiarism detection. After careful review of your text, you scan it on the program to identify plagiarism that may have gone unnoticed to the watchful eyes and scientific content of the researcher.

Being careful and with the aid of technology, the originality of your text and your reputation will remain unblemished will be preserved. Enjoy your writing!

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