

PERSPECTIVES

Invited article

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DÉJÀ-VU IN ACADEMIA: I HAVE SEEN THIS BEFORE!

HAVE YOU SEEN THIS OR NOT?

There are things that enter our lives that make us think: again? The plagiarism issue is one of those things that never seems to be resolved and it will probably not be eliminated.

Academic activity, regardless of its form, is mobilized around the search for solutions to the problems in action areas that result from new knowledge in any dimension. According to the word ontology, merit recognition to a given subject or group of subjects based on discovery, identification, or creation is a great honor for a researcher. In a broader sense, it is the recognition by peers, authorities, organizations, and society that fit in a given area of knowledge.

In Applied Social Sciences, which comprises an extensive range of focused knowledge, there are peculiar aspects, including the relatively lower tangibility. We do not have a vaccine, a *chip*, a sticker, a medicine for fungus, a new comet (I exaggerated the concept of tangibility) to present for display. I would like to acknowledge the merits of the ancestor who mastered fire, because we still benefit from it today. It is an example of a “seminal” contribution that benefits many areas. Anonymity prevents this person from being recognized today, but certainly this brilliant researcher must have received tremendous recognition and considerable power in the community.

In the areas comprised by Applied Social Sciences, contributions affect institutions. When this path is trodden, people welcome new contributions as solutions to problems, thus providing a relatively long way between innovation and use. Ruptures are rare, and the preponderance of innovation is incremental in essence and in the form of communication. In this combination, uniqueness is only identified and valued by a specialist, an aware and informed researcher. *Publishers* of books, articles, and academic journals in educational institutions have much to do with the problems and, especially, the solutions to valued recognition.

PLAGIARISM IN THE GENERATION OF KNOWLEDGE

Some activities do not add value in the academic environment, while others destroy it. This is a set of inadequate practices incorporated into the research process that socially tarnish the entire process of generating and communicating knowledge. Among them, plagiarism is a practice that always destroys value in the short and long term. It damages authors and the publishing macro-environment of authors, reviewers, readers, and other stakeholders. It destroys the logic of meritocracy, and the very motivation of a researcher when he is not identified, reported, and penalized. Someone wins while someone else loses, and a sense of justice is not maintained.

A sensitivity to the problems of plagiarism has developed among researchers, government agency employees, research institutions, and the public. It regards ethical conduct as essential to

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scientific research; consequently, collaboration and trust among agents may provide conditions for project development (Shamoo & Resnik, 2009).

The definition of plagiarism from Shamoo & Resnik (2009), would be: “Plagiarism is the appropriation of ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit” (p. 148).

It is believed that the environment can be improved if plagiarism is an issue to be solved according to its moral sense than in the legal sense, although this is not our researchers’ way of thinking.

Even though there are qualitative parameters to identify plagiarism, the qualitative logic is very strong. In some cases, the percentage of texts that are equal or even similar to what has been previously published facilitates the decision-making process of whether to treat a given case as plagiarism. I dealt with a case in which a single sentence unrelated to the citations made the article contribution innovative although it was not. Moreover, it had already been reported by another researcher. In other words, the qualitative issue of something relevant that has already been reported by others is crucial to tackling this issue.

Without exhausting the possibilities and even relating them to how they are captured, there are several practices that may be linked to plagiarism, according to the concept placed in this reflection. This includes plagiarism of the following: literature review texts, analysis, conclusions, references when cited by an author, but not read by him or her in the original source, texts in different languages, and tables and figures. This also includes self-plagiarism.

The question of self-plagiarism requires careful analysis because the argument that it does not harm other people is too simplistic (Shamoo & Resnik, 2009, p. 101). It does harm, since it fosters recognition of something that has already been communicated. Moreover, an author who develops such practices is more favorably placed in *rankings* and assessments than others. In the world of *Creative Commons*, this has no limit and it cannot be forgotten.

THE ONLY WAY TO SOLVE THIS PROBLEM IS TO UNDERSTAND THE CAUSES

What would be the causes of plagiarism? There may be several, and some of them are correlated. I am going to take a relatively heuristic approach to focus on reasons found in routine activities, not necessarily stemming from studies developed from rigorous statistical treatments. Considering several possibilities, I would like to highlight the following reasons, regardless of circumstances:

Disinformation

Let’s start with the benefit of the doubt. Among the several preventative, elucidative mechanisms on inadequate research practices, including plagiarism, the following ones may be mentioned: subjects that deal with ethical issues in the research process, ethics committees, *Committee on Publication Ethics* (COPE), extensive literature available in books, articles, and websites. Still, it is possible that a lack of awareness in implementing the citation commitment occurs (TurViñes, Fonseca-Mora, & Gutiérrez-San-Miguel, 2012).

Ways of working in teams

I cannot tolerate the catchphrase “Blame it on the intern” anymore. A research group must have a leader, someone who is committed to tutoring, coordinating, checking, and compiling. Students in scientific initiation projects, as well as master’s, doctorate, or post-doctoral degree students, integrate any group activity, whether it is a study among peers or even tutoring. In summary, someone should ensure that ethical procedures be followed. It is rather disappointing to see the widespread use of the intern’s strategy.

Pressure to look pretty in the picture and rapidly generate production

The career pressure (Goodstein, 2010) and the logic of productivism have been used to justify countless problems (Martins & Lucena, 2014). It is not that the pressure does not affect people, but to consider that this is the main great reason to justify fraud means to ignore people’s character. In the famous Enron case, an article was published defending the cause of fraud as the organization’s existing budget. It might be a good theme to employ the Attribution Theory. I understand that it is a variant of “blame it on the intern.” The difference is that there is no subject to counter.

An environment of impunity that pervades the world, in varied dimensions

I experienced a fraud situation in that the agent used this exact argument: If all do it, but nothing happens, why not do it? Unfortunately, it must be considered that, although there are set, publicized rules, people may perceive them as mere advice, not something to seriously respect. The academic environment is not excluded from this moment experienced by society as a whole.

Dishonesty, nature

I left this for last because I believe that the community is generous, smart, and it has a propensity to be honest. Leadership and clear rules can bring the benefit of guidance and reference to the environment. However, I must admit that there are those who do not stick to this rule and use plagiarism with or without ease (Trzesniak & Plata-Caviedes, 2012, p. 72). In some cases, they may adopt plagiarism as a strategy, with high technical efficiency and “professionalism.”

SO WHAT? WHAT CAN BE DONE TO REDUCE DÉJÀ-VU?

I offer this list of possible *drivers* to act against plagiarism:

1. Understanding that this is something that can only be tackled by a joint effort from several agents. This includes focusing on people in several roles (students, teachers, authors, reviewers, and editors), and on institutions directly related to people (journals, *publishers*, educational bodies, regulatory bodies, and financial institutions). Cavalcante (2006) identifies the university as the main center for the ethical aspect, under the focus of competences. However, each agent has a share in an environment surpassing national borders. In the United States, the Senate became involved in this issue with a very active committee engaged in coordinating efforts.
2. Regarding the institutional environment, there are actions that may be taken in undergraduate and graduate courses, congresses, and journals to repeatedly train through different perspectives and habits (Cavalcante, 2006). Whether we like it or not, repetition is a type of action that fosters the institutionalization of a habit. In view of the changes in technology, including plagiarism, training should be viewed as something recurrent, in the short, medium, and long terms. Divulging information on a website may be a start, but it is too little to bring change in the preventive approach to the subject.
3. Discussion groups/inter-institutional forums for more specific clarifications, about different real cases of plagiarisms. The idea to avoid internal discussions is a try to avoid corporatist, group aspects. The idea is to have an advisory body resembling that of COPE, but focused on local demands and specificities (Cavalcante, 2006).
4. Greater availability of devices that may identify potential plagiarism in academic journals: personnel, *software*, and allowing reviewers more time (Araújo, Azevedo, Vieira, Araújo, & Nascimento, 2017, p. 57). The existing *software* help identify potential plagiarism. Nonetheless, they do not function without human intervention, either judging convergence percentages or evaluating an essay clearly similar to another one that was not cited. Consequently, we will continue greatly depend on people’s involvement and maturity (Shamoo & Resnik, 2009, p. 118) until artificial intelligence reaches this stage.
5. Showing that “crime does not pay,” highlighting existing cases and what plagiarists have lost when they were identified. I understand that this suggestion may be easier said than done as it is complex and quite hard to implement. Thus, it may demand reasonable institutional support to develop. This must happen in one way or another.
6. Increased support for journals in terms of proactive mechanisms to avoid plagiarism. This is not just about IT tools, but more human resources for support structures or reviewers (Pearson & Sharma, 2015), investment in training, and greater dialogue with the community. This is only possible if the journals’ administrative bodies respond to such a challenge. Although I see this as hard to implement, I believe that the functionalist view requires some incentive within a graduate program evaluation, for example.
7. Attention to what happens in other areas of knowledge, whether they are close or distant, that may be perceived as similar and bring relevant learning. Some of them present extensive traditions to tackle the issue. Its importance is not only related to the mimetic opportunity, but the reflection of someone who is also learning to deal with such a complex question.
8. The internationalization movement, in which students and teachers are sent to and received from other research centers, provides an opportunity to emphasize the subject and note idiosyncrasies and solutions. I do not believe that this occurs in relationships with any center, but, in general, some benefit from promoting the theme is expected.

9. This issue cannot be overlooked, even when it seems as if the plagiarism cases have become extinct. It is possible to alter the *doxa* over time; however, the essence of the problem must be revisited and treated.
10. Practice of ethics in the broad sense, in a personal way, by everyone, in the various contexts of participants within the academic community, i.e., at home, in the research environment, and in the classroom. This one was placed in the end, but it should be the first to be challenged and developed. Without it, nothing changes. There is no use in complaining about other agents' actions without doing your/our part. This is the Attribution Theory, inverted.

FINAL REMARKS: WILL THIS HAPPEN AGAIN?

Several movies have somehow dealt with *déjà vu* or something similar. There comes a time when the will to change the end of the movie becomes relentless and infectious, and something changes. This does not happen because we pray to God to do something, but because each one of us, in our various roles, has mobilized to change. We believe that this is possible, and we do our part, as small as it may seem, as a personal yet collective commitment. Even the movies show that the end may be different. Let's go?

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