9-29-2017

Parallels of Unintentional Plagiarism and Predatory Publishing: Understanding Root Causes and Solutions

Monica Berger
CUNY New York City College of Technology

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

Monica Berger, Associate Professor, Library, NYC College of Technology, CUNY

Parallels of Unintentional Plagiarism and Predatory Publishing: Understanding Root Causes and

Solutions

CUNY-Wide Conference on Academic Integrity

Eugenio María de Hostos Community College

Sept. 29, 2017

Abstract

Plagiarism and predatory publishing share common attributes. Although students do not publish
in predatory journals, both plagiarism and predatory publishing fall under the umbrella of
academic integrity and scholarly ethics. Academic misconduct has many faces, ranging from
student cheating on exams to purchasing a doctoral thesis and claiming it as one's own work.
Some forms of academic misconduct, such as the examples above are always intentional.
However, many manifestations of academic misconduct are less clearly intentional. Students
often plagiarize unintentionally because they lack writing skills including paraphrasing and
citing. Faculty sometimes publish with predatory journals when they lack scholarly publishing
knowledge. Weak information literacy underpins both behaviors. However, other factors drive
both plagiarism and predatory publishing. Three broad areas are cultural considerations,
generational differences, and local academic values. The discourse related to cultural
considerations is especially fruitful to unpack. Unintentional and intentional violations of
academic integrity are the outgrowth of a scholarly ecosystem that is post-colonial and neo-
liberal. Students and faculty are under-supported, expected to produce too much with too little
time. Pedagogical solutions to academic integrity problems are helpful in the short term but
limited when the underlying system doesn't support positive change.

1. **Black Hats and White Hats, Trust and Theft [10 p.]**

I'm Monica Berger from City Tech and my scholarship focuses on predatory publishing. In the course of my reading, plagiarism came up repeatedly. Exploring the connections between predatory publishing and plagiarism, I learned that it is not easy or convenient to differentiate between deliberate and non-deliberate behaviors. I also learned that there is no consensus regarding what I call the "cultural argument" for plagiarism and predatory publishing. However, I found three takeaways:

1. L2 or **English as a Second Language** students and scholars have more challenges with plagiarism and predatory publishing specifically because of their challenges with the English language.
2. It takes **skills** to avoid plagiarism and predatory publishing in addition to an understanding of the ethical issues related to each. Information literacy and publishing scholarly literacy as well as ethical research conduct all part of the same coin. **[SLIDE 2]**
3. Our neo-liberalized university and science culture wants more and wants it faster, leaving our students and our colleagues overwhelmed. Plagiarism and predatory publishing are often the results of this situation.

Let us start within our traditional lens, black hats and white hats **[SLIDE 3]**. Academic integrity is about trust, the silent contract that underlies teaching and research. Plagiarism *can be* an unethical behavior. Predatory publishing *can be* another unethical academic behavior. Note the use of the word "can": this word choice is meaningful since I wish to imply that not every situation is a violation of trust or a malfeasance.

What is predatory publishing? Almost everyone has received a flattering email message inviting publication in an unfamiliar journal. These emails are from predatory publishers. Predatory publishing, crudely, is a type of scholarly vanity publishing. Deceit is a hallmark of predatory publishing. Publishers and their authors, who pay to publish, claim their journals are peer reviewed but peer review is non-existent or superficial. Why do predatory publishers exist? Chiefly to create income.

[SLIDE 4] Predatory journals use Open Access article processing charges to justify fees. The vast majority of Open Access journals are non-profit and do not charge these fees. Conflating Open Access and predatory publishing only encourages traditional, for-profit legacy publishing models. Innocent authors fall into the trap of predatory publishing. When they try to withdraw their article, the publisher asks for additional fees or ignores the author. In particular, we should be aware of copycat named journals and hijacked journals that directly take the name of a known, quality journal.

Understanding predatory publishing unpacks many problems with our current scholarly communications system. Looking at some of the similarities of the discourse on plagiarism and predatory publishing provides us with an opportunity to examine conscious and unconscious values influenced by post-Colonialism as well as our neo-liberalized university.

Trying to separate the intentional from the unintentional today, I came to realize that I was falling into the black hats/white hats conundrum. **[SLIDE 5]** Let us instead examine the many shades of gray!

2. The Cultural Argument, Student Plagiarism: Those who plagiarize and those who publish in predatory journals: **[SLIDE 6]** shouldn't *they* "know better? Are *they* simply ignorant? Or is it we who are ignorant of our culturally-based presumptions?

Different forms of academic cheating and gaming have varied levels of acceptance in different cultures.[1] Plagiarism is a Western concept. The idea of the author as sacrosanct and heroic, is referred to as the 'lone genius myth,' which Montuori describes as based on "American individualism and methodological reductionism."[2] Other societies place much more emphasis on group harmony.[3] Academic plagiarism is not a universal evil in all countries. It is less objectionable in some highly developed countries according to Bennett.[4] Chien comments that if students learn by rote learning, the potential for plagiarism is greater.[5] Or is it? **[SLIDE 7]**

Liu discussing ESOL or L2 students finds that cultural presumptions generate stereotyping and "false assumptions"[6] by teachers. Connecting rote learning to plagiarism, according to Liu, is illogical. L2 students plagiarize because of weak writing skills and weak English.[7] Heckler and Forde found no relationship between student cultural background and plagiarism. Despite the American fetish of individual achievement, students understood that plagiarism was an ethical problem and believed that "American cultural values deter plagiarism rather than contribute to it."[8] Faculty are over-extended and are unable to provide sufficient guidance to students.[9]

Information literacy is about critical thinking about information as well as *applying* a deeper understanding about the context and *use* of information in action. Lack of understanding about paraphrasing and attribution and creating a citation correlate to weak information literacy. Developing one's authorial voice and citing the work of others is a skill. Maxwell et al. concludes that *all* students have difficulty understanding plagiarism and that awareness of

plagiarism doesn't necessarily correlate to the ability to apply their knowledge in the form of writing without plagiarizing, especially for L2 students.[10] The best pedagogical solutions require scaffolded writing instruction and are very time-consuming. DeLong concludes that unintentional plagiarism seems to be culturally based but **that impression is superficial**. The underlying issue is weak information literacy knowledge resulting in unintentional plagiarism. "Plagiarism-prone students, regardless of cultural heritage, struggle with specific cognitive, emotional and attitudinal barriers that interfere with acquiring and/or applying basic information literacy principles."[11] Students can learn how to take ownership of their own thoughts as embodied by their own writing and expression rather than those of experts. In sum, we want to be extremely careful about generalizing about cultures, countries, and in turn, applying any of those generalizations to our students and colleagues.

What about students and scholarly plagiarism? Faculty publish their research with undergraduates and name the student as a second author. Mervis found in a 2013 survey that training of students in good research conduct was lacking. However, 96% of plagiarism came from faculty, not students.[12] This summer, the National Science Foundation issued a notice requiring that colleges and universities provide training to undergraduate researchers in responsible conduct of research.[13]

What about scholars and scientists who plagiarize? Today's graduate student is tomorrow's academic or researcher. Our student plagiarism problem is a "worldwide headache,"[14] and graduate students and doctoral candidates often copy and paste too.[15] They often also use "patchwriting" where content is taken from (online) sources without attribution and then unified into one uniform authorial voice.[16]

3. Scholarly plagiarism and other bad behaviors: [SLIDE 8] Scholarly plagiarism can be considered a form of academic unethical behavior or scientific misconduct which Gross defines as: fabrication, falsification, and plagiarism."[17] Fabrication is making up data or other information. Falsification is manipulation of data or other information. Gross, providing a meta-analysis of the research finds that "in most studies at least 10% of the scientists sampled reported having observed scientific misconduct"[18] Fang et al. (2012) found a tenfold increase in retractions for fraud or suspected fraud since 1975.[19]

Scholarly plagiarism includes not only taking text from other authors without attribution but claiming authorship of ideas, images, and data. Less well-known is self-plagiarism. Miguel Roig of St. John's University has written the definitive overview on the topic, including a review of the research, for the United States Health and Human Services Department's Office of Research Integrity which confirms that L2 academics are the most frequent plagiarizers.[20] In self-plagiarism, one republishes one's own writing without referencing the earlier publication or presentation. A form of self-plagiarism is salami slicing: chopping up an earlier article and adding minor new data or changes to publish several articles.[21] Duplicate publication is another egregious form of self-plagiarism: publishing the same content twice.

The worst scholarly plagiarism is outright purchase of papers for publication in journals or purchase of a dissertation. If unethical academic behavior is tolerated and is not punished, publication bazaars and ghostwriters flourish. Many have reported on massive plagiarism in China using academic ghostwriters and other paid forms of publishing.[22] Buying and selling dissertations in Iran is common due to a lack of "codified set of rules concerning academic

integrity." Academic ghostwriters exist in affluent countries as well. [23] Another bad form of scholarly behavior is fake peer review where authors use bogus email addresses for their friends or themselves to review themselves.[24] The publishing services in China also offer fake peer review.[25] Larger publishers have since learned how to detect fraudulent papers.[26]

Is scholarly plagiarism and other similar misconduct culturally based? What drives it and what does the research say? In sum, the research is mixed. **[SLIDE 9]** Stretton et al., in a study of article of first authors in articles, found that there was a pattern of plagiarism from specific countries. These are countries where there is a mandate to publish in English-language journals but authors have weak English skills. [27] Gansinger and Kole concur. Fang et al. found that China and India accounted for the most cases of duplicate publication and plagiarism.[28]

Elizabeth Wager, an expert on scholarly plagiarism, pushes against cultural excuses.[29] She also believes that distinguishing intentionality in plagiarism is a losing cause because of the challenges of proving intent.[30] This argument is helpful when discussing predatory publishing. Amos in her study of rate of plagiarism from country to country finds that "no country is unique in having to address issues of plagiarism and duplicate publication, although such unethical behaviors may be a more pressing concern for some countries than others."[31] Taking the long view, Gansinger and Kole see an oversupply of scientists and academics in increased competition for resources. The oversupply has increased all forms of unethical behavior including plagiarism.[32]

[SLIDE 10] The National Institute of Health has a grant-funded boot camp for scientists who "screwed up." Jim DuBois, who runs the boot camp, points to pedagogical solutions. Teaching skills rather than ethics, the scientists learned to identify what was keeping them from following responsible research as well as skills for the future. Many scientists were never taught the administrative and other skills related to responsible research behaviors. For 72% of the participants, scarcity of resources often underpinned taking shortcuts. The program has proven successful.[33]

Plagiarism in Predatory Journals: Predatory publishers typically do not check for plagiarism. Martin in a "sting" style article submitted his young son's work to a predatory publisher who in turn revised the article entirely using plagiarized scholarly content. The publisher has since vanished. [34] Gasparyan et al. also found a close connection between predatory journals and plagiarism because predatory journals are not indexed, eluding plagiarism detection more easily[35]

4. [SLIDE 11] The Cultural Argument: The Global South and Predatory Publishing The "Global South," where we presume most predatory publishing occurs, signifies less developed countries. Dados and Connell state:

> The term Global South functions as more than a metaphor for underdevelopment. It references an entire history of colonialism, neo-imperialism, and differential economic and social change through which large inequalities in living standards, life expectancy, and access to resources are maintained.[36]

Researchers and scholars in the Global South are grossly under resourced. Not only do they lack a research infrastructure, they also lack access to the research literature. Canagarajah explores the hegemonic, global politics of scholarship in his 2002 book, "A Geopolitics of Academic Writing,"[37] and he describes Global South scholars as positioned on the **"periphery."** Universities in the Global South value publication in Western journals but many researchers in the Global South are unable to meet the standards of those journals and end up publishing in predatory journals. Canagarajah notes that standards and conventions for scholarly writing as well as publishing vary from country to country.[38] Predatory and amateurish publishers fulfill a need. They provide a place for publishing for work that is lower tier. These journals also provide a venue for work of more localized focus or good but not great previously rejected work.

Why can't we evaluate scholarly products on a spectrum? Not all articles in the best journals turn out to be valuable. The reproducibility crisis in science points to publication in top journals as an indicator of originality, not rigor.[39] Not all articles in predatory journals are poor or scientifically invalid albeit it is unlikely they went through peer review. The discourse on predatory journals is heavily biased. Jeffrey Beall, a librarian in Colorado, coined the term predatory journals. He became the best-known expert. Until early in 2017, Beall maintained an extensive and highly controversial list of predatory journals and publishers on his website, Scholarly Open Access Publishing. Beall developed useful criteria for evaluating journals and significantly increased awareness of these journals.

Beall proved himself overly opinionated and biased against journals from the Global South. He also conflated Open Access with predatory publishing,[40] instead advocating for traditional corporate publishing that keeps content behind a paywall and accessible only to those at well-

funded institutions. Many have taken Beall to task.[41] [42] [43] Sometimes a publisher deemed predatory has different standards from what we commonly expect.

Traditional corporate scholarly publishing, which is immensely profitable, is also predatory. The largest corporate publishing conglomerate has had as much as a 40% profit margin. Only five big publishers publish the lion's share of social science and science. We should question our continued dependence on and support of legacy, corporate publishers.[44] Cara Bradley describes faculty's slavish respect for these publishers as "Addicted to the Brand."[45] Every day, Retraction Watch reports on articles published by the "best" publishers that require retraction. Corporate publisher also produce journals that are less rigorous if not mediocre. Those same publishers create the bibliometric indexes that many academics over-value. Most authors give away their labor in traditional publishing. Corporate publishers also exploit the "author pays" model of Open Access by charging authors and then libraries and other institutions for access to the same content in bundled collections. Traditional corporate publishers have engaged in a variety of unethical and low quality editorial behaviors including publishing gibberish papers and so-called advocacy research, paid content that serves to promote a business concern.[46]

Almost all the research on predatory publishing draws on Beall's List. This is incredibly problematic since Beall's List is flawed. We know relatively little about the academics and scientists who deliberately publish in predatory journals. Pyne wrote about how business faculty at a small business school found predatory journals to be rewarding in terms of promotion.[47] We also want to note that although earlier research by Xia[48] as well as by Shen and Bjork[49] conclude that the lion's share of authors in predatory journals are based in the Global South, newer research by Shamseer et al.[50] indicates that a significant number of authors in predatory journals are in the United States.

6. Conclusions. There are great resources online that can educate and assist scholars, particularly

[SLIDE 12] COPE, the Committee on Publication Ethics. Part of the solution is pedagogical.

Students need intensive support in their writing and more information literacy instruction.

Responsible research conduct and ethical scholarly behaviors require mentoring. The more

important solution is not pedagogical: it is structural and institutional. We must provide a

supportive and humane academic culture for all students and faculty where our teaching and our

scholarship can flourish.

---

[1] Bennett, "The Geopolitics of Academic Plagiarism," 209.
[2] Montuori and Purser, "Deconstructing the Lone Genius Myth," 70.
[3] Bennett, "The Geopolitics of Academic Plagiarism," 213.
[4] Ibid., 209–10.
[5] Chien, "Cultural Constructions of Plagiarism in Student Writing," 120.
[6] Liu, "Plagiarism in ESOL Students," 235.
[7] Ibid., 239.
[8] Heckler and Forde, "The Role of Cultural Values in Plagiarism in Higher Education," 72.
[9] Ibid., 71.
[10] Maxwell, Curtis, and Vardanega, "Does Culture Influence Understanding and Perceived Seriousness of Plagiarism?," 31.
[11] DeLong, "Propensity toward Unintentional Plagiarism," 150.
[12] Mervis, "NSF Reiterates Policy on Teaching Good Research Habits despite Its Limitations."
[13] National Science Foundation, "Important Notice No. 140: Training in Responsible Conduct of Research - A Reminder of the NSF Requirement (in140) | NSF - National Science Foundation."
[14] Gansinger and Kole, "Plagiarism and Profit. Ethical and Moral Issues of Scientific Writing and Academic Publishing in the 21st Century," 18.
[15] Ibid., 16–17.
[16] Goldsmith, "It's Not Plagiarism. In the Digital Age, It's 'Repurposing.'"
[17] Gross, "Scientific Misconduct," 693.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Fang, Steen, and Casadevall, "Misconduct Accounts for the Majority of Retracted Scientific Publications."
[20] Roig, "Avoiding Plagiarism, Self-Plagiarism, and Other Questionable Writing Practices: A Guide to Ethical Writing, 2015 Revision."
[21] Rosenzweig and Ercoli Schnitzer, "Self-Plagiarism," 492.
[22] Hvistendahl, "China's Publication Bazaar."

[23] Gansinger and Kole, "Plagiarism and Profit. Ethical and Moral Issues of Scientific Writing and Academic Publishing in the 21st Century," 19.

[24] Oransky, "Are Companies Selling Fake Peer Reviews to Help Papers Get Published?"

[25] Oransky, "BioMed Central Retracting 43 Papers for Fake Peer Review."

[26] Seife, "For Sale."

[27] Stretton et al., "Publication Misconduct and Plagiarism Retractions: A Systematic, Retrospective Study," 1576.

[28] Gross, "Scientific Misconduct," 698.

[29] Wager, "Defining and Responding to Plagiarism," 35.

[30] Ibid., 37.

[31] Amos, "The Ethics of Scholarly Publishing," 90.

[32] Gansinger and Kole, "Plagiarism and Profit. Ethical and Moral Issues of Scientific Writing and Academic Publishing in the 21st Century," 15.

[33] Pickett, "Scientist Screwed Up?"

[34] Martin and Martin, "A Not-so-harmless Experiment in Predatory Open Access Publishing," 2.

[35] Gasparyan et al., "Plagiarism in the Context of Education and Evolving Detection Strategies," 1221.

[36] dados and connell, "The Global South," 13.

[37] Canagarajah, *A Geopolitics of Academic Writing*.

[38] Ibid., 6–7.

[39] Denker, "Rigor."

[40] Bivens-Tatum, "Reactionary Rhetoric against Open Access Publishing."

[41] Emery, "Heard on the Net: It's a Small World After All: Traveling Beyond the Viewpoint of American Exceptionalism To the Rise of the Author."

[42] Coyle, "Predatory Publishers | Peer to Peer Review."

[43] Berger and Cirasella, "Beyond Beall's List Better Understanding Predatory Publishers."

[44] Larivière, Haustein, and Mongeon, "The Oligopoly of Academic Publishers in the Digital Era."

[45] Bradley, "Addicted to the Brand?: Brand Loyalty Theory as a Means of Understanding Academics' Scholarly Communication Practices."

[46] Miller and Wager, *Dirty Secrets of Fraudulent "Advocacy Research."*

[47] Pyne, "The Rewards of Predatory Publications at a Small Business School."

[48] Shen and Björk, "'Predatory'open Access: A Longitudinal Study of Article Volumes and Market Characteristics."

[49] Ibid.

[50] Shamseer et al., "Potential Predatory and Legitimate Biomedical Journals: Can You Tell the Difference? A Cross-Sectional Comparison."