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Where Plagiarism Ends, but Intellectual Dishonesty Persists

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Abstract Plagiarism and intellectual dishonesty extend beyond students to professors, researchers, and professionals. While student plagiarism is well-documented, cases involving professionals receive less attention despite their serious consequences. These unethical practices damage institutional reputations, distort research, and weaken public trust. Addressing the issue requires clear policies, ethical guidelines, and rigorous enforcement, yet challenges persist due to varying definitions and inconsistent application across disciplines. This article explores various forms of plagiarism, such as self-plagiarism, ghostwriting, and unethical co-authorship, shedding light on their ethical implications. It also explores the link between academic misconduct and workplace ethics, emphasizing the need for stronger preventive measures. As artificial intelligence and digital access transform content creation, entities must rethink their strategies to safeguard integrity. Strengthening ethical awareness is not just an academic necessity; it is a professional imperative.

Keywords Plagiarism, Professional Ethics, Scientific Misconduct, Intellectual Dishonesty, Ethical Standards, Academic Misconduct

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1. Introduction

Plagiarism is often perceived as an issue exclusive to students—a mere academic oversight. However, it also affects professors, researchers, and professionals, with far-reaching consequences. These actions undermine the credibility of entities, distort scientific research, and erode public trust. Although ethical codes and institutional policies exist, their inconsistent application creates gray areas and enables questionable practices.

This issue extends beyond copyright infringement; it fundamentally concerns intellectual and professional integrity. From self-plagiarism to ghostwriting, from honorary co-authorship to collective plagiarism, breaches of ethics take various forms, some of which are difficult to detect and assess. As artificial intelligence reshapes content creation and access to information becomes limitless, the real challenge is no longer just detecting plagiarism; it is redefining integrity in a digital world.

This article examines the issue of professional plagiarism, exploring its causes, consequences, and potential solutions. It analyzes various plagiarism-related practices, their impact on academic and professional communities, and poses a critical question: where does plagiarism end, but intellectual dishonesty persist? Is plagiarism merely a technical violation, or is it a symptom of a deeper ethical crisis in academia and the professional world? In an era of artificial intelligence and unlimited access to information, how can these deviations be prevented? How can we foster a culture of integrity?

2. Plagiarism and Intellectual Dishonesty: Defining the Boundaries

Plagiarism, in its broadest definition, is defined as “The action or practice of taking someone else’s work, idea, etc., and passing it off as one’s own; literary theft.”¹ Plagiarism is essentially characterized by the absence of an appropriate reference to the original author. It is generally considered a serious academic offense and is explicitly prohibited by university policies and scientific publications². The notion that only students plagiarize is wrong: professors and professionals also engage in it in the exercise of their duties. Several studies confirm this, such as the one by Pahlevi et al. (2023, p. 912) stating that: “... plagiarism is a reality that often occurs in academic circles, students, lecturers and even professors have committed plagiarism.” However, this subject remains taboo, as if these practices were nonexistent. Yet ignoring the problem does not make it disappear.

Plagiarism is a well-documented form of academic misconduct, but intellectual dishonesty encompasses a broader range of unethical behaviors. Dishonesty is defined as: “lack of probity or integrity; disposition to deceive, defraud, or steal; thievishness; theft; fraud.”¹ The concept of intellectual dishonesty encompasses a broader range of behaviors that violate ethical norms, even if they do not strictly meet the definition of plagiarism. This includes manipulating data, exaggerating contributions, omitting crucial information, or engaging in deceptive citation practices. Some actions may be legally permissible but are nonetheless deeply unethical (Kim et al., 2017). A professor who pressures students to cite their work to boost his/her citation index is not plagiarizing per se but is certainly acting unethically. Similarly, an employee who uses a colleague's document from another company in his/her own workplace crosses ethical boundaries.

While the boundaries between plagiarism and intellectual dishonesty are sometimes blurred, one fact remains: both practices undermine the integrity of academic and professional work.

3. Plagiarism in Academia: Student-Teacher Interactions Challenge

Students may inadvertently plagiarize due to a lack of knowledge or skills. While this is still plagiarism, it can be assessed with some understanding. However, it seems inconceivable that a professor, having earned a master’s or doctoral degree, could invoke such excuses. In a professional setting, one would assume that an author masters referencing guidelines. However, Bailey (2017, p. 7) highlights that “...in a professional environment, one would usually expect a writer to be familiar with the rules of citation. Still, it’s often amazing how far writers can go through their education without really learning the rules of avoiding plagiarism.”

¹Oxford English Dictionary, <https://www.oed.com/>. (January 17, 2025)

² In the context of scientific publications, Lalwani (2024) describes in detail the main types of plagiarism and their consequences, the detection tools available, and finally suggests diverse ways to avoid it.

3.1 Plagiarism Cases Involving Students

Educators are the first line of defense in detecting and reporting student plagiarism. Academic institutions then intervene to ensure the offender receives appropriate remedial training or sanctions. Tolerating plagiarism can trivialize the act and reduce its perceived severity among students. To prevent this, teachers must be trained in plagiarism detection. Assuming that professors fully understand all aspects of plagiarism is a mistake. While 'copy-pasting' is the most obvious example, other, more discreet practices complicate the identification of problematic cases.

Plagiarism takes many forms—paraphrasing (patchwork), mosaic plagiarism, or ghostwriting (contract cheating)—and continues to evolve, especially with AI-powered writing assistants. Additionally, it evolves over time, particularly with the development of AI-powered writing assistants. Plagiarism remains poorly understood by many students and, surprisingly, even by some professors.

Khoii et al. (2019, p. 3235) conclude that "The results of this study confirm what other researchers have reported in similar studies in both EFL³ Eastern and non-Eastern contexts in that both professors and students seem to lack sufficient understanding of the nature of plagiarism and the ways to avoid it." While their results suggest a relatively deeper understanding of plagiarism among professors, the difference is not significant. For an educator's role to be effective, they must fully grasp the subject themselves. However, according to Halupa et al. (2013), some professors admit to not clearly understanding the concept of plagiarism, while also believing that their students do not understand it either.

Institutional support is crucial for professors in detecting and reporting plagiarism, yet such support is often lacking. A comprehensive definition of plagiarism, clear policies and regulations on its zero tolerance, and an established reporting process are essential. The absence of clear policies creates a climate of uncertainty. Dewantara et al. (2022) note that many institutions delay action, leaving professors without guidance in addressing student plagiarism. Student plagiarism may stem from ignorance, but when professors engage in it, they directly undermine the very academic integrity they are meant to uphold.

3.2 The Student–Thesis Supervisor Relationship

A student enrolled in a doctoral program—or a master's program with a thesis component—must fully commit to succeeding. He/she must demonstrate competence and skills by contributing new knowledge through original research. These criteria form the foundation of all scientific research, whether it is eventually published. Although constantly guided by his/her thesis supervisor the student is primarily responsible for the research content. In many cases, an article derived from a dissertation lists both the student and the supervisor as co-authors, sometimes with the supervisor as the first one. If the supervisor has made a real intellectual contribution, co-authorship is justified. But when his/her name appears without meaningful involvement, it becomes 'gift authorship'—an ethical gray area. This practice, common in certain scientific disciplines, raises ethical concerns about the fair recognition of contributions. The thesis supervisor supports the student's learning process but does not conduct the research itself. In other words, a doctoral dissertation is an academic achievement that primarily results from the student's personal efforts.

Out of gratitude—or because he/she feels obliged—the doctoral student often accepts adding the supervisor's name to publications derived from his/her thesis. Is this plagiarism? No. Intellectual dishonesty? That depends on one's perspective. There is a fine distinction—sometimes subtle—between guidance and participation. In response to this ethical and pedagogical dilemma, Wang et al. (2024, p.1) propose: "We respond to this ambiguity by proposing a new term, 'collaborative co-authorship,' reconceptualizing supervisor-candidate co-authorship in a way that clarifies perceptions towards the practice and presents it as a pedagogical approach to apprentice doctoral students to become fully-fledged academics." Another approach could be to include a footnote indicating the origin of the article's content within the training program.

3.3 Ethical Boundaries in Paid Research Collaboration

It is common for researchers to seek assistance, often from students in the same field. In other words, a professor receiving a research grant may hire a graduate student to assist with his/her work. The student may be paid to

³ EFL: English as a Foreign Language

conduct a literature review or participate in data analysis. Under the supervision of the principal investigator—or a research team—such participation could be part of the student's training. For researchers, this practice is widespread and generally efficient when the tasks are basic or repetitive. In most cases, the hired student's name does not appear in the final publication's authors list, nor even in the acknowledgments. Is this plagiarism? At first glance, no—if the work is clerical, such as compiling a summary table of research findings, entering data, or proofreading for language errors.

The real issue? Defining the boundary between legitimate assistance and intellectual contribution. For example, a hired student might propose an innovative analysis that influences the direction of the research. In such cases, it would be fair to acknowledge his/her contribution as a co-author rather than merely considered her/him as an employee. Some assistants add real value to research through their intellectual input. A typical example is a research assistant who writes an entire section of a paper but is not credited, despite significantly contributing beyond basic support. Is this plagiarism? Not necessarily. Intellectual dishonesty? That depends. One thing is certain: failing to recognize someone's contribution is problematic.

This issue also arises in another context—student ghostwriting. Paying someone to write an academic homework for a degree program is a blatant form of cheating. Is it plagiarism if the writer agrees to remain uncredited? It fits the definition, although some might argue otherwise due to mutual consent. However, for students, this practice is clearly unacceptable as it undermines academic integrity. Ghostwriting destroys the very foundation of academic learning, which is the acquisition of personal skills. This phenomenon, known as "contract cheating," is rising sharply and is now considered a serious offense in higher education (Ali et al., 2020).

Let's revisit the scenario where a professor-researcher hires a student to assist with his/her work. At first glance, this might appear like student ghostwriting. However, the distinction lies in the nature of the contribution. Academic assistance can take many forms—sometimes limited to technical or formatting support (the "container"), other times directly influencing the research itself (the "content"), or a combination of both. When determining authorship, assigning credit, or writing acknowledgments, a researcher must carefully evaluate the actual contribution of those involved. This ensures that professional ethics are upheld and that, in good conscience, any risk of plagiarism is avoided.⁴

4. Plagiarism in Academia: A Challenge for Professors and Scholars

Professors are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity, serving as both educators and role models for students. However, plagiarism among faculty members remains a significant yet often overlooked issue. Beyond damaging individual reputations, academic dishonesty among professors undermines the credibility of research and the integrity of scholarly institutions. Plagiarism in academia is a complex issue, raising ethical dilemmas in an increasingly competitive and publication-driven landscape.

4.1 Plagiarism Among Professors

Plagiarism among professors can take various forms, ranging from reusing a colleague's lecture notes without permission to copying entire sections of scientific papers without proper attribution⁵. For instance, an instructor who downloads a syllabus from a colleague and uses it without modification or credit commits academic plagiarism. Another common case is a researcher using data or results from a colleague's study without attributing authorship. Plagiarism, in any form or degree, is an ethical violation. Professors who are plagiarized may report it, but recognition of their intellectual property is far from guaranteed. Failing to recognize authorship can have serious psychological, social, and financial repercussions. As for the professor accused of plagiarism, it can be said that his/her academic career could be severely tainted. This is the case, for example, of several researchers whose appointments to scientific evaluation committees were cancelled after the discovery of plagiarism, or of teachers whose contracts were not renewed because of an academic scandal. Beyond plagiarism between academic colleagues, scientific publications are also concerned by these issues.

Today, many academic journals claim to enforce a zero-tolerance policy on plagiarism, offering some recourse for affected authors. Journals may reject or retract a plagiarized article or, in some cases, request corrections. The

⁴ Kim et al.(2017, p. 58)present and comment on some academic situations with the aim of helping professors establish the boundaries of ethical writing help.

⁵Deslauriers (2024) presents an in-depth analysis of the circumstances surrounding academic plagiarism between professors.

question of the severity of plagiarism is controversial in the scientific community. Shashok (2011) observes that most scientific journals do not differentiate between minor and major plagiarism. The item is then automatically removed. However, some argue that the extent of the fault could be considered. While some mistakes result from a clear intention to deceive, others may simply be oversights. Storm (2021) distinguishes between cases of minor plagiarism, which are considered harmless. As such, Geraldi (2021) suggests a more nuanced approach: instead of systematically removing the article, a correction could be required. The scientific community would still benefit from the content of the article, and its author would not suffer major consequences. As for Das (2018), he suggests sanctions for plagiarism depending on the level of similarity of the targeted text. The reprimand or sanction thus becomes proportional to the severity of the fault.

Assuming that one wants to establish different solutions depending on the degree of plagiarism, the resulting problem is to determine the extent of the fault. At what point is it a major mistake? Once a case of plagiarism is detected, the institutional response may be unclear or uneven. As Rancic (2023) points out, "... it is not always clear what the next steps should be after the misconduct comes to light". Let's be clear, voluntary academic and scientific plagiarism is fraud, not just an error (Braude, 2021).

4.2 Self-plagiarism

Self-plagiarism occurs when an author reuses excerpts from his/her own previous work without citing the source. For example, a researcher who publishes an article that includes entire sections from his/her doctoral dissertation without citation commits self-plagiarism. Similarly, an academic who uses essentially the same database to excessively divide the results into multiple publications circumvents academic norms. At first glance, this may seem harmless since it does not involve stealing someone else's ideas. However, self-plagiarism is indeed a form of plagiarism, just like direct copying or paraphrasing. Some researchers avoid accusations of self-plagiarism by systematically citing their own work, whereas others rephrase their writing to conceal similarities. Why is this practice problematic? Krishnamurthy et al. (2021) emphasize that the originality of a text and the number of publications are key indicators of a researcher's contribution. However, self-plagiarism distorts these benchmarks and skews academic recognition.

Submitting the same article with minor modifications to multiple journals, known as "salami slicing,"⁶ also artificially inflates an author's publication record and reputation. Patel (2023) explains the difference between self-plagiarism and "auto-plagiarism," which involves submitting the same paper to multiple journals, conferences, or other venues. This is simply duplication. The excessive use or self-citation of one's own work can therefore create confusion as stated by Lalwani (2025, p. S38): "... they come at a cost—distortion of the literature, a skewed database, an influx of literature without genuine scientific advancement, and a waste of reviewers' and editors' time and resources." This article also suggests that authors should transparently disclose their sources and clarify the relationship between their various studies.

Moreover, citing one's own work is tempting but not always necessary (Kandil, 2021). Is it plagiarism? Not exactly. Intellectual dishonesty? That depends on the circumstances. There is a subtle distinction between relevance (fair use) and opportunism. Some researchers argue that publication incentives contribute to the prevalence of plagiarism, particularly self-citation plagiarism. As a solution to this issue, the evaluation of a scientist's contributions could be revised. Pradhan (2024, p. 2) proposes: "Rewarding authors who manifest an understanding of the value of originality, and quality work over quantity, can reduce the temptation to plagiarize."

4.3 The Pressure to 'Publish or Perish': Ethical Implications

Academic platforms and databases now centralize thousands of scientific articles. They simplify access to publications but also raise ethical concerns. These sites, which allow keyword-based searches for references, also provide basic metrics such as the number of reads, citations, downloads, and recommendations per article. On one hand, this offers valuable insights for researchers regarding their personal reputation, promotion prospects, or funding opportunities (Sayeda, 2024). It also enables researchers within the same field or topic to establish connections across institutions. On the other hand, it intensifies the current emphasis on visibility and readership. A

⁶Some institutions distinguish self-plagiarism from 'text recycling,' which may be acceptable under certain conditions. For example, reusing a previously published passage can be permissible if it is clearly indicated and justified. Fundamentally, plagiarism is defined by the absence of proper attribution to the original source. When an appropriate citation is provided, it is no longer plagiarism but a transparent and acknowledged reuse of content.

researcher who wants to know the geographical origin of their readers often must pay an additional fee. Consider the promotional claim: "*Papers uploaded to X receive a 55% boost in citations over three years.*" This raises questions. While such claims remain unproven, it would be important to determine whether "premium" articles enjoy greater exposure in search engines. If so, this would skew literature reviews and constitute an ethical breach in academic and professional integrity.

4.4 Ethical Challenges in Co-Authorship

Having multiple authors for a research article is common and has become even more frequent over the years (Henrikson, 2016). In other words, single-author publications are becoming rarer. In a scientific collaboration, several authors work together to produce a research article. Readers generally expect each contributor to have participated relatively equally. However, this ideal distribution is not always upheld. In principle, names are listed alphabetically unless one author played a leading role. Kendil (2021) points out that some senior researchers impose their names on junior authors despite making little or no contribution. A renowned professor, for instance, might engage in this practice. Is this a moral dilemma?

Co-authorship becomes problematic when contributions are unequal, or when the team splits into subgroups before a final merger. For example, two individuals might work mainly on one project while two others primarily handle another. As a result, the name of each of the four people appears on two publications instead of one. Is this plagiarism? Not necessarily. Intellectual dishonesty? It depends on the context. There is a fine line—sometimes subtle—between collaboration and collusion (Kim et al., 2018).

Be it for funding, promotions, or recognition, visibility and prestige remain key motivations. Without additional information, assessing the individual contribution of each co-author is difficult. However, in some cases, the contribution of each group member is detailed in a footnote, as seen in Aubert Bonn et al. (2019, p. 352). This is an ethical practice worth adopting for the sake of transparency (Kandil, 2021).

While plagiarism is often discussed in the context of student misconduct, it is not confined to this situation. Professors themselves may engage in unethical practices, raising questions about integrity at the highest levels of scholarship. These same ethical dilemmas extend beyond academia, as plagiarism and intellectual dishonesty are also prevalent in professional settings, where they can undermine credibility, innovation, and trust in various industries.

5. Plagiarism Beyond Academia: Ethical Challenges in the Workplace

Few empirical studies focus on professional plagiarism, meaning plagiarism that occurs outside the academic world (Rayman, 2008; Khan et al., 2021). However, it would be naïve to assume that it does not exist. Public debates occasionally arise over patent ownership or music rights, for example, often leading to lengthy and costly civil legal proceedings. However, these cases may only represent the tip of the iceberg. Student plagiarism in academia is on the rise, and evidence suggests a similar trend in the workplace. As noted by Nitterhouse (2003, p. 215): "Traditionally regarded as 'just an academic' problem, plagiarism is now recognized as a serious and growing problem for all types and sizes of business and professional organizations."

5.1 Academic Misconduct and Unethical Practices

The habits that students develop in academia shape their professional ethics, including their approach to intellectual dishonesty and its consequences. A student who plagiarizes without facing repercussions during his/her studies may be tempted to replicate this behavior in his/her professional life. Research consistently demonstrates that academic dishonesty frequently translates into unethical behavior in the workplace. For example, in the context of corruption, Guerrero-Dib et al. (2020, p. 1) found that: "The results reflect that students who report committing acts against academic integrity also report being involved in dishonest activities in other contexts, and that students who consider academic breaches less serious report being engaged in academic misconduct more frequently in different contexts." Khan et al. (2021), Mulisa et al. (2021), and Martin et al. (2009) similarly point out that students who engage in academic misconduct tend to adopt unethical workplace practices.

In many ways, the professional world subject to the same imperatives as academia, where plagiarism of ideas, texts, approaches, designs, or documents can occur. Just like students, employees may lack proper training in source attribution. They also face similar pressures to achieve strong results, often within tight deadlines. As noted by

Nitterhouse (2003, p. 224): "Business practitioners need to be aware of possible ethical and legal risks and problems that can arise from their employees' ignorance of or failure to adhere to proper plagiarism and acknowledgment standards."

Researchers focusing on this issue emphasize the importance of increasing awareness of plagiarism within academic environments (Nealy, 2011). Many institutions already take measures to educate students on the subject and implement policies to address it (Deslauriers, 2025). However, it appears necessary to go beyond the academic scope by instilling the importance of ethical behavior in all circumstances. For instance, integrating practical scenario analyses into syllabi and classrooms could be beneficial. A student educated about plagiarism and its consequences—including potential legal repercussions—may develop a stronger sense of organizational ethics. Mulisa et al. (2021, p. 3) summarize this idea well: "Thus, it may be conceivable to increase the sensitivity of educational stakeholders to academic dishonesty and the determination of higher education institutions to combat dishonest behaviors." Despite these observations, relatively few studies have examined the long-term effects of academic plagiarism.

The transition from academia to the professional world does not necessarily lead to a change in ethical behavior. A student who habitually plagiarized assignments without facing consequences may continue similar practices in the workplace—sometimes without even realizing it. For instance, an engineer accustomed to "copy-pasting" in university reports might be tempted to incorporate excerpts from confidential documents of a previous employer into a new project. This case illustrates how behaviors learned in academia shape professional ethics, reinforcing the need to educate students not only on academic integrity but also on the ethical challenges they will encounter throughout their careers. Academic misconduct does not end at graduation; its consequences extend into professional life.

5.2 Professional Ethics

Ethics "refers to the moral principles that govern a person's behavior or the conducting of an activity."⁷ It is a broad term that encompasses appropriate behaviors, decisions, and practices by individuals, groups, or entities. In recent years, discussions about ethics have increased, emphasizing transparency, accountability, respect, fairness, and integrity. Plagiarism is a clear example of an ethical breach.⁸ A marketing consultant might take credit for a colleague's work. Likewise, copying an advertising campaign or an iconic logo illustrates how plagiarism extends beyond academia into the professional world. In such cases, the theft of ideas or documents is not only an ethical violation but also a form of intellectual dishonesty. Access to better working conditions or financial benefits is a strong motivator for those who "cheat" (Sayeda, 2024). A well-known example is that of fashion brands accused of copying independent designers without authorization, sparking debates about the recognition of artistic work. For the plagiarists, the outcome is faster and less expensive—they hope to quickly expand their clientele and increase profits.

The presence of a code of ethics can help curb undesirable behaviors, especially in a strong organizational culture. Many companies adopt codes of ethics to define core values and principles, aiming to prevent misconduct and foster a culture of integrity. In other words, the aim is to prevent unethical behavior that could damage an entity's reputation or lead to resource depletion and structural setbacks. Spichiger (2021) advocates for the presence of such a code in all organizations: "Whether a company is in a regulated industry or not, they and their employees will undoubtedly face ethical dilemmas. Therefore, it is advisable that there be a code of conduct to provide guidelines when making decisions." However, few ethical codes explicitly reference plagiarism. Some researchers have examined whether the presence of such codes reduces unethical behavior, and Jannat et al. (2021) confirm this link. However, they also stress that having a code alone is insufficient—proper training and support services are necessary to ensure effectiveness. These findings align with Babri et al. (2021, p. 104), who state: "CCEs are perceived to be effective and seem to be effective in terms of controlling unethical behavior to a limited extent."⁹

5.3 Professional Associations

Certain professions, such as engineering and law, require membership in a professional association, making practitioners subject to a code of professional conduct. For example, certified public accountants (CPAs) who are

⁷Oxford English Dictionary, <https://www.oed.com/>. (February 5, 2025)

⁸Although unethical actions take various forms, such as manipulating the results of a study, failing to comply with the clauses of a contract, falsifying published information or overcharging customers, this article focuses on the circumstances related to plagiarism.

⁹ CCE: Corporate Code of Ethics

members of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) must comply to its *Code of Professional Conduct*. This membership is essential for maintaining their professional status. A professional code of conduct defines the rules, duties, and responsibilities of its members to protect the public interest and reinforce ethical behavior.

Most codes of ethics establish general conduct rules but rarely mention plagiarism explicitly. However, researchers have shown interest in their effectiveness, particularly in the field of accounting. Thorne et al. (2023, p. 547) note: "Our experiment provides evidence of the effectiveness of codes of ethics for changing professional perceptions which adds to the body of literature which suggests that codes are a codification of norms that influence professional judgments and not simply window dressing." Similarly, Anwar (2024) and Adams (2024) argue that well-clarified and well-understood ethical principles help professionals make better ethical judgments in their roles. Unsurprisingly, professional codes of ethics appear to have a positive impact on behavior.

5.4 Paid Creative Work

Employees receive compensation for their services and perform work for an employer, who may then use it as they see fit. Clients may be aware of the individuals involved, but the final report is usually credited to the employer. The same applies when a group of employees creates online informational content or analyzes market research data on behalf of their employer. Many employment contracts state—either implicitly or explicitly—that anything developed or created for the employer remains the employer's property. Is this plagiarism? No. Intellectual dishonesty? No, because the exchange of work for compensation ensures balance. However, out of respect for professional expertise and individual contributions, this practice could be reconsidered. A simple acknowledgment of contributions, when it is major or original, is always valuable.

It is essential to distinguish this context from paid collaboration in academia (see Section 3.3). In academia, the primary goal is learning, which shifts the ethical evaluation of plagiarism circumstances.

5.5 Collective Plagiarism

Unethical actions can be carried out by a group of individuals, either in their own name or on behalf of their organization. Consider a research team working on a government-funded project. The team leader, pressured to meet tight deadlines and secure future grants, encourages junior researchers to "borrow" sections from previous internal reports without proper attribution. These reports were written by former team members who have since left the institution. Since the content is not publicly available, the leader assumes the plagiarism will go unnoticed.

Endorsing or accepting misconduct makes individuals accomplices, regardless of their level of involvement. In principle, they share joint responsibility. In financial fraud, for example, it is often said that such crimes are more commonly committed by individuals than by groups. While collusion can enhance the effectiveness of a scheme, it also increases the risk of detection—as accomplices must trust one another not to expose the misconduct. On the other hand, the collective denial of a bad deed is stronger. Teamwork, by fostering transparency and shared responsibility, may help limit voluntary collective plagiarism in organizations.

Hierarchical relationships in the workplace also influence ethical behavior. A junior employee eager to please his/her superior or secure a promotion may struggle to refuse certain requests. This pressure can lead him/her to tolerate or even participate in questionable practices, such as plagiarism. Is this a moral dilemma?

In the hierarchical relationship between senior and junior employees, fear plays a crucial role. Santosuosso (2016, p. 29) examines its impact on employees' choices: "Like other basic emotions, fear affects human reactions, altering individuals' choices and behaviors. On the basis of these phenomena, fear could therefore be used by managers to motivate employees to achieve business goals, raising a number of relevant ethical questions." A supervisor could, implicitly, encourage an employee to reuse an existing document, with or without modifications. For example, a senior manager might ask an employee to copy a PowerPoint presentation made elsewhere, changing only the photo on the cover page or replacing a few words with synonyms. The employee, for fear of contradicting his superior, could accept, even though the act constitutes a form of plagiarism. When multiple people are involved in plagiarism, untangling individual responsibility becomes a legal and ethical minefield. Depending on the circumstances, a distinction could be made between primary and secondary responsibility, and different levels between the two. In any case, in unethical situations, it seems essential to examine an employer's position of authority or influence from an ethical perspective.

6. Whistleblowing

Should plagiarism be reported? Theoretically, yes. To uphold fairness and justice? Without a doubt. However, reality is far more complex. A poorly defined or nonexistent reporting process risks being ineffective and may even lead to negative consequences, for both the whistleblower and other involved parties. Additionally, the difficulty of proving plagiarism *beyond a reasonable doubt* often discourages potential disclosures.

Plagiarism is an undeniable ethical violation. But how does an individual's conscience factor into its reporting?

Reporting plagiarism is not merely a moral or institutional duty—it is also a personal stance on intellectual integrity. Someone aware of plagiarism may face a dilemma: prioritize ethics by exposing the misconduct or preserve professional relationships and avoid potential retaliation. Consequently, reporting plagiarism is not just about rule compliance—it is also a reflection on individual responsibility and the ability to act in alignment with one's conscience.

6.1 The Consequences of Whistleblowing

The path for a wronged individual seeking to file a complaint within a university is not always straightforward. While the process for reporting and sanctioning student plagiarism is relatively well-supervised, the handling of plagiarism cases involving professors or researchers remains ambiguous. In some universities, faculty members who have reported plagiarism have faced marginalization or career stagnation due to a lack of institutional support. It seems as if institutions struggle to acknowledge or accept that one of their own employees could engage in misconduct. Plagiarism cases involving professors suffer from a lack of standardization across institutions. As a result, allegations of academic misconduct are often assessed based on broad policies or general guidelines regarding research integrity and probity. Ali et al. (2020) highlights that the scientific literature lacks clear standards for structuring policies on academic misconduct. Professors who have been plagiarized may find themselves powerless when attempting to navigate the reporting process. Even when a formal procedure exists, most institutions tend to handle such matters privately, fearing damage to their reputation. Furthermore, the significant impact on the career and personal life of a professor accused of plagiarism—even if the accusations are later proven unfounded—must also be considered. Only the most blatant or severe cases of plagiarism among academics, occasionally uncovered by journalists, gain public attention (Rancic, 2023).

When plagiarism occurs in a scientific journal, reporting the issue becomes easier and more accessible to the affected party. As mentioned earlier, most editors will simply retract the plagiarized article. Since such actions may have serious consequences for the accused author, the complainant must exercise due diligence and ensure his/her claim is well-founded. Currently, only a limited number of retraction cases are publicly known. Given the vast number of journals across multiple countries, compiling a comprehensive and up-to-date database on article retractions is challenging. The actual number of retracted articles may be higher than commonly assumed (Braude, 2021).

It is, of course, possible to file a complaint for breach of an entity or professional code of ethics due to plagiarism. Someone whose work has been misrepresented as someone else's may turn to his/her employer or professional association for recourse. However, such cases are rare or are simply handled behind closed doors. As previously mentioned, plagiarism is rarely explicitly addressed in ethical codes. An individual may hesitate to file a complaint if the code, written in overly general terms, suggests that the concept of plagiarism is not covered. Additionally, uncertainty regarding how the case will be evaluated can be a further deterrent. Employees or professionals considering disclosing a serious ethical violation should have access to appropriate support and protection measures. Thorne et al. (2023, p. 547) highlight that: "... with explicit language and detailed expectations included in the Code of Ethics, clarity of professional responsibility is increased, and the reporting of illegal acts to an external authority will be elevated." While this confirms the value of a clear and well-structured code, identifying the factors that facilitate whistleblowing may contribute to reducing instances of misconduct in the long run.

6.2 Ethics, Sanctions and the Law

The discussion on codes of conduct and professional associations is highly relevant, as these frameworks help regulate ethical behavior within various fields. However, drawing a parallel with academic sanctions could further enrich the analysis. Just as professional misconduct can lead to disciplinary actions such as suspension or disbarment, academic violations—such as plagiarism or fraud—can result in severe penalties, including expulsion or even degree revocation. Academic institutions rely on internal ethics and professional conduct policies as well as the

widely accepted definition of plagiarism. Similarly, corporate and professional association codes of ethics aim to promote ethical behavior. Whether these guidelines are referred to as rules, standards, or any other similar term, it is essential to understand that they do not carry the full weight of the law. Certainly, a professor, employee, or professional found guilty of misconduct may face suspension, job loss, or even the revocation of his/her professional title. However, it is crucial to distinguish between ethical violations and legal infractions. An action can be unethical without necessarily being illegal. As Sokołowska (2022, p. 363) states, "Plagiarism committed with the consent of the other members of the creative team will not constitute copyright infringement, although it will still constitute plagiarism."

This comparison highlights how ethical breaches are addressed in both educational and professional contexts, reinforcing the idea that ethical responsibility begins in academic training and continues throughout one's career.

Never forget that plagiarism, though sanctioned by academic and professional ethics, is not explicitly covered by law.

Relevant legislation, such as the Copyright Act, primarily concern intellectual property rights. Yet, it is well known that professors rarely take the time—or even think about—officially registering their lecture notes, academic work, research papers, or teaching materials. Similarly, in the corporate world, many internal reports, training manuals, and business presentations remain unregistered, leaving them vulnerable to unauthorized use.

The law protects registered original works. Whether or not a work is legally certified does not change the fact that plagiarism is still plagiarism when it occurs. Ideas, for example, fall within the scope of plagiarism (section 2.). However, if a plagiarism allegation were to reach a court of law, the plaintiff would likely struggle to assert his/her rights, even when arguing that plagiarism constitutes intellectual theft. Regardless of their good faith and the evidence presented, pursuing a legal claim is challenging and almost doomed to fail due to the lack of official copyright protection for their work. Quite simply, they do not own the copyright!

6.3 The Impact of Plagiarism

Throughout this article, various examples of consequences, harm, and damages resulting from intellectual misconduct have been mentioned. Every intellectual violation has human, organizational, financial, and social repercussions, both direct and indirect. In a case of plagiarism, the victim loses far more than just a text: his/her credibility and intellectual work are misappropriated, often without any real recourse. Unless the situation involves a clear violation of Copyright law, which can be addressed through legal proceedings, obtaining any financial compensation proportional to the damages suffered is rare. Proving plagiarism is one thing; receiving adequate compensation for the damages suffered is another.

For individuals or entities accused of plagiarism or found guilty, the consequences can be severe. A tarnished reputation, lost jobs, cancelled contracts, disrupted personal lives, and shaken organizational cultures are just a few possible outcomes. Stepping back, it becomes clear that plagiarism creates challenges for all parties involved. Therefore, prevention—through education and awareness—remains the most positive and effective approach to combat this issue.

7. Conclusion

Plagiarism and intellectual dishonesty are not confined to university classrooms. They also infiltrate the professional world, shaping research practices, influencing the credibility of publications, and impacting strategic decision-making within organizations. Despite this reality, entities' responses often remain insufficient: unclear policies, inconsistent sanctions, and inadequate prevention efforts. The line between negligence, opportunism, and deliberate fraud is often razor-thin. Does a student who plagiarizes today risk becoming an unethical professional tomorrow? The connections between academic misconduct and fraudulent behavior in the workplace must be further explored and understood.

Artificial intelligence and digital content overload are reshaping the landscape of intellectual production. This raises a crucial question: how can institutions adapt their policies and strengthen vigilance to protect academic and professional integrity? Beyond merely detecting and sanctioning misconduct, institutions must take proactive measures, such as improving faculty training on ethical research practices, implementing clearer policies for faculty misconduct, and integrating professional ethics education into university curricula. Establishing a culture of integrity from the start will help bridge the gap between academic principles and professional responsibilities.

Ultimately, upholding intellectual integrity is not just about avoiding misconduct—it is about fostering a culture where originality and ethical rigor define both academic and professional excellence. Preserving intellectual honesty isn't just about avoiding misconduct—it's about shaping a world where ethics and integrity remain non-negotiable.¹⁰

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¹⁰The examples presented in this paper are drawn from direct observations, discussions with students, faculty members, and professionals encountered throughout the author's academic career. Various instances of plagiarism and professional misconduct have been documented over time for the purpose of analysis and deeper understanding. While these cases are anonymized and not tied to specific individuals or institutions, they reflect real-world scenarios that illustrate the complexities of academic and professional integrity.

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