

EDITORIAL

Thieves and kidnappers

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Plagiarism, a term derived from the Latin word *plagiarius* which means kidnapper or thief, is the act of taking someone else's work and using it as one's own without proper attribution.¹

In academic writing, plagiarism is considered to be an unethical practice that undermines the very foundation of knowledge dissemination and violates the principles of intellectual honesty. The academic world has been in turmoil these last few months with the president of arguably the world's most prestigious university resigning due to accusations of plagiarism. As the president of Harvard University, Claudine Gay is no stranger to controversy. However, her recent plagiarism scandal has raised serious concerns about academic integrity at one of the nation's most prestigious universities. In Gay's case, it was discovered that she had lifted several passages from other authors without giving them credit in her own published works. This is a clear violation of Harvard's code of conduct and a breach of trust with the academic community.²

What makes this situation even more troubling is that Gay was not simply a faculty member or student, but the leader of one of the most prestigious universities in the world. As Harvard's first woman and first African American president, Gay held a position of great influence and responsibility. Her actions (or lack thereof) set an example for students, faculty and staff alike.

Considering this controversy, it is important to reflect on the culture of academia and the pressures that may lead individuals to commit plagiarism. The intense competition for funding, publications

and tenure can create a cutthroat environment in which originality and ethical conduct take a backseat. This is not to excuse Gay's actions, but rather to acknowledge the systemic issues that may have contributed to her behaviour.

It is also worth considering the consequences of Gay's plagiarism. While some may argue that it was a minor transgression, the reality is that plagiarism erodes the very foundation of academic pursuit: truth and knowledge. It undermines the integrity of research and devalues the hard work and contributions of others.

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The plastic surgery community is not immune from these controversies. Legend has it that a very esteemed Australian cleft surgeon (now deceased) in the 1980s had done a series of meticulous anatomical dissections on stillborn fetuses with cleft deformities. The story goes that a very high-profile visiting professor from a top overseas university ‘borrowed’ the photographs from his presentation and then published the work under his own name. In this journal we have previously published accounts of historic controversy regarding the origin of the TRAM flap.³

One of the most famous examples of stolen work in plastic surgery research is that of Dr Paolo Macchiarini. In 2008, Dr Macchiarini and his team performed a groundbreaking surgery to replace a patient’s trachea with an artificial one made from stem cells. The procedure gained worldwide attention and was published in prestigious medical journals, making Dr Macchiarini a household name in the medical community.

However, in 2014, investigations revealed that the patient’s medical records and images used in the publications were fabricated. It was also discovered that Dr Macchiarini had not obtained proper ethics approval for the surgery and had failed to disclose conflicts of interest with a biotech company involved in the procedure. This case not only showed blatant plagiarism but also highlighted the ethical issues surrounding research in plastic surgery.⁴

More recently, Australian plastic surgeons Corduff and Taylor were surprised to see a paper published in a prominent aesthetic journal last year describing a ‘new’ technique of breast mastopexy. The technique seems very similar to that described in their article published some 14 years earlier. Given the similarities, they wondered why their article was not acknowledged.^{5,6} This begs the question whether it is plagiarism or just an incomplete literature review? Either way the original paper should be cited by the journal as a correction when discovered. As the old saying goes, ‘If you think you’ve discovered something new in medicine you don’t speak German’.

Helpful tools

With the rise of digital technology and easy access to vast amounts of information through the internet, detecting plagiarism has become increasingly challenging. In this editorial, we will discuss some software and AI programs that may help writers avoid and detect unintentional plagiarism. Three popular options include:

1. Grammarly (Grammarly Inc, San Francisco, USA)—a writing assistant that includes a plagiarism checker and offers suggestions for rephrasing sentences or citing sources.
2. Turnitin (Turnitin LLC, Oakland, USA)—a widely used tool by educational institutions that checks submitted work against a large database of existing content to identify potential plagiarism.
3. Copyscape (Indigo Stream Technologies Ltd, Tel Aviv, Israel)—a web-based tool that helps detect duplicate content on the internet, including text and images.

Artificial intelligence (AI) has also been leveraged in the fight against plagiarism. Some of the popular AI programs used to detect plagiarism include:

1. Ouriginal (Turnitin LLC, Oakland, USA)—an AI-based system that checks submitted work against a large database of web pages, academic journals and other sources to identify potential instances of plagiarism.
2. PlagScan (Turnitin LLC, Oakland, USA)—a web-based tool that uses advanced AI algorithms to check for similarities between submitted work and existing content.
3. Plagiarism (Lingua Intellegens, UAB, Lithuania)—an AI-powered plagiarism detection tool that also offers grammar checking and citation assistance.

When using any software to avoid plagiarism, it is essential to understand their limitations. These tools are not foolproof and may not detect all instances of plagiarism. It is still important for writers to be vigilant and properly cite sources to avoid any potential issues.

While AI programs are more advanced than traditional software, they still have limitations. They may not always detect subtle instances of plagiarism or properly identify paraphrased content. Therefore, it is crucial for writers to use these tools as a supplement and not solely rely on them.

Limitations of these tools

Grammar and plagiarism checkers can help users improve their writing and check for plagiarism. While they are widely used, they have some limitations that users should be aware of.

- **Not 100 per cent accurate:** grammar checkers are not perfect. They may miss some grammatical errors or suggest incorrect corrections. It is always recommended to review the suggestions made by the grammar checker and use your own judgement.
- **Limited vocabulary suggestions:** grammar checkers offer vocabulary enhancement suggestions to improve the readability of your writing. However, these suggestions are limited and may not always be suitable for all types of writing.

- **Not compatible with all platforms:** grammar checkers may be designed as a browser extension or a Microsoft Word add-in. This means they may not work on other platforms such as Google Docs, which can be a limitation for some users.
- **Not free:** some grammar and plagiarism checkers are paid services that require a subscription or license. This may not be affordable for individual users, especially if they do not have access to educational institutions.
- **Delay in results:** as plagiarism checkers compare a submitted document against a vast database, it may take some time to generate results. This can be an issue if you need immediate feedback on your writing.
- **Limited usage:** plagiarism checkers are primarily used by educational institutions, which means they may not be accessible to everyone. This limits their usage for non-academic purposes.

Simple ways to avoid plagiarism

To overcome the limitations of grammar and plagiarism checkers, there are a few things you can do:

- **Proofread your work:** while software programs can help identify some grammatical errors, it is always best to proofread your work yourself. This way, you can ensure that your writing is error-free and conveys the intended meaning.
- **Use multiple tools:** instead of relying solely on one tool, consider using multiple tools for improving your writing and detecting plagiarism. This way, you can get a more comprehensive analysis of your work.
- **Seek human feedback:** while online tools are helpful, they cannot replace feedback and guidance from a human. Ask a friend or a colleague to review your work and provide constructive criticism.
- **Understand the limitations:** by understanding the limitations of these tools, you can use them more effectively. Be aware of their strengths and weaknesses so you can make informed decisions.^{7,8}

Conclusion

As responsible researchers and practitioners, it is our duty to uphold the integrity of plastic surgery research by giving proper credit to the original work and following ethical guidelines. Plagiarism not only hinders scientific progress but also has severe consequences for patients' well-being. Let

us collectively work towards promoting a culture of integrity and honesty in plastic surgery research. With the availability of various software and AI programs, writers have access to powerful tools to help them avoid unintentional plagiarism and detect any potential issues in their work. However, it is essential to use these tools cautiously and not solely rely on them. Proper citation practices and understanding the concept of plagiarism are still crucial for maintaining academic integrity. Claudine Gay's plagiarism scandal serves as a wake-up call for Harvard University and the broader academic community. It is a reminder that integrity and ethical conduct must be at the forefront of our pursuits, and that no one is above accountability. We can use this unfortunate example as an opportunity to reflect, learn and strive for a better future for academic integrity.

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