Ethical Issues of Plagiarism of Professional Standards for Psychologists

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Abstract

Plagiarism is a form of serious ethical misconduct. Professional standard 8.11 obligates psychologists to credit all data sources and another’s work, even if cited occasionally. This paper provides a brief overview of plagiarism and its ethical implications. Plagiarism-related standards for psychologists are discussed. The paper explains the reasons why professional psychologists must avoid plagiarism by all means. Recommendations for professional psychologists are provided.
OUTLINE

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Ethical Issues of Plagiarism and Professional Standards for Psychologists

Plagiarism is a form of serious ethical misconduct. Professionals in all fields, professions and jobs are obliged to follow the principal rules of ethical decision-making. Plagiarism is no exception: professional psychologists must avoid taking credit of someone else’s work. More often than not, avoiding plagiarism is easy. In other cases, plagiarism may be less obvious than it seems. Nevertheless, plagiarism is virtually the same as cheating. The reasons why professional psychologists must avoid plagiarism are numerous. First, plagiarism is unethical. Second, plagiarism presents a serious threat to psychologists’ professional integrity. Third, plagiarism is a symptom of professional incompetence. To avoid plagiarism, professional psychologists must cite and reference everything they borrow from other sources. All these sources must be credited and cited according to the requirements of the American Psychological Association.

Plagiarism is one of the most serious ethical problems in professional psychology. Despite the growing body of research regarding plagiarism, students in psychology courses and psychology professionals use others’ works without crediting the original source. Needless to say, plagiarism is essentially the same as cheating. As a result, whenever professional psychologists engage in plagiarism, they commit a serious scientific and ethical misconduct. Professional standards obligate psychologists to avoid plagiarism and give credit to every single piece of work, which is borrowed and used in professional, scholarly research.

Professional standard 8.11 obligates psychologists to avoid plagiarism in all forms. According to Standard 8.11, “psychologists do not present portions of another’s work or data as their own, even if the other work or data source is cited occasionally” (Plante, 2005, p.526). Simply stated, professional psychologists are legally responsible for citing, referencing, and crediting information and ideas from other sources in their professional works (Jacob, Decker & Hartshorne, 2010). Psychologists are obliged to acknowledge written
and oral, published and unpublished materials that were used and influenced the development of the final research manuscript (Jacob, Decker & Hartshorne, 2010). Psychologists must take credit solely for the portion of work they performed personally or to which they were able to make scientific contribution (Jacob, Decker & Hartshorne, 2010).

The reasons why professional psychologists must avoid plagiarism are numerous and varied. First, plagiarism is a form of serious ethical misconduct. From the viewpoint of Kantian deontology, plagiarism exemplifies a breach of another’s rights and a serious violation of authorship. From the utilitarian standpoint, plagiarism leads to numerous unethical consequences, from falsification to the distortion and misinterpretation of scientific information and research. Needless to say, plagiarism can profoundly affect the lives and careers of everyone involved in this form of cheating. As a result, psychologists must think twice, before they borrow information from external sources without crediting it.

Second, plagiarism presents a serious threat to psychologists’ professional integrity. Plagiarism deceives readers and clients and makes them believe that the ideas and words of professional psychologies are original to them (Fisher, 2011). Plagiarism as a form of professional cheating signifies the decline in morality and ethical standards in professional psychology (Hulsart & McCarthy, 2009). Unfortunately, codes of ethical conduct are not always effective, since the philosophy of personal and professional integrity is something that is coming from within. Hulsart and McCarthy (2009) are correct in that integrity is unique to each professional and individual, but plagiarism disrupts this integrity and leaves little room for professional and personal growth.

Third, plagiarism is always a sign of one’s professional incompetence. This is particularly relevant for psychologists. Competence is believed to be fundamental for any professional psychologist (Morrissey & Reddy, 2006). Competence covers skills, knowledge, and experience needed to provide high-quality, professional services to individuals
Qualified psychology professionals must avoid misrepresenting their competence and experience and refrain from providing help and advice beyond their competence (Morrissey & Reddy, 2006). Incompetent psychologists cannot be considered professional and qualified. In this sense, ethics training is vital for developing and maintaining competence in professional psychologists. It should be noted, that ethical competence means that professional psychologists can adopt and appraise their own ethical models of decision-making, recognize and resolve ethical dilemmas, reconcile ethical conflicts, and have skills and knowledge needed to resolve ethical issues appropriately (Morrissey & Reddy, 2006).

It goes without saying that plagiarism is a serious symptom of professional incompetence. It means that psychologists misrepresent their competence or, more importantly, lack skills, knowledge, and experience to produce original work. In either case, professional psychologists who fail to credit another’s work intentionally or unintentionally disrupt the positive image and ethical reputation of all professionals working in this field. However, avoiding plagiarism is not as difficult as it seems.

Professional psychologists can avoid plagiarism if they take credit only for work or a portion of work they personally completed or to which they made personal contribution (Kitchener, 2010). Also, all information borrowed from external sources, either published or unpublished, must be properly referenced and cited in accordance with the APA requirements. Even paraphrased sentences and expression require proper citation, if taken from someone else’s work.

**Conclusion**

Plagiarism exemplifies a form of serious ethical misconduct. Ethical standards and codes of ethics obligate professional psychologists to credit all sources even when used occasionally. The reasons why professional psychologists must avoid plagiarism are
numerous. Suffice it to say, plagiarism disrupts professional integrity and is a symptom of psychologists’ incompetence. Professional psychologists can avoid plagiarism if they take credit only for work or a portion of work they personally completed or to which they made personal contribution.
References


