

Summary of Project

Researchers:

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Title

The Imitation Game: Psychological Predictors of University Plagiarism

Ethics approval number:

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Description:

The increase of plagiarism at universities is well documented with educational institutions taking a disciplined approach to identifying instances of plagiarism. However, less is known about why some students may engage in plagiarism whereas others do not. Based on an examination of previous literature, potential psychological predictors were identified as being likely to be related to students' attitudes toward plagiarism, understanding of plagiarism, and engagement in plagiarism that have not previously been explored. The aim of this study was to explore self-control and thinking styles as potential predictors of the eight identified types of plagiarism. The eight forms of plagiarism are identified as: sham paraphrasing, illicit paraphrasing, other plagiarism, verbatim copying, recycling, ghost writing and purloining.

Method:

Of the 276 students recruited to take part in the on-line questionnaire, 26 participants were excluded as the time taken to complete the questionnaire was not considered reasonable and there was little variation in their responses. A further 21 participants were identified as engaging in socially desirable responding. This left a total of 229 participants who made a reasonable attempt to answer the questionnaire in good conscience.

Of the remaining 229 participants, ages ranged from 17 to 56 years with 175 females, 50 males and 4 who did not specify gender. Participants were predominantly from Murdoch University (N = 217) with the remainder from the University of Western Sydney and the University of Western Australia.

To meet the aims of this study, the on-line questionnaire included the following measures:

1. Understanding, attitudes toward, and engagement in eight different forms of plagiarism.

Participants were presented with eight hypothetical scenarios representing the eight forms of plagiarism. For example, sham paraphrasing was represented with the following scenario: "A student copies a sentence directly from a journal article into his assignment. The student writes the name of the author and date of publication in brackets after the sentence, but does not include quotation marks or a page number."

Participants were asked whether the scenario constitutes cheating based on responses of 'Yes', 'No' and 'Not sure'.

To examine attitudes toward plagiarism, participants identified the behaviour as either ‘not at all serious’, ‘moderately serious’ or ‘very serious’.

Participants were asked to indicate whether they had engaged in a behaviour similar to the scenario to assess engagement in plagiarism.

Plagiarism intention was measured with participants indicating whether they would be likely to do something similar in the future.

Finally, participants indicated the frequency they believe other students engage in a similar behaviour to measure perceived norms.

2. Brief Self-Control Scale.

Individual differences in self-control was measured with the 13-item scale.

3. Rational-Experiential Multimodal Inventory.

Individual differences in thinking styles was measured with the 42-item measure to examine rational and experiential processing.

4. Lie Scale Items from the Constructive Thinking Inventory.

This measure was included to detect participants not adequately engaged or responding appropriately to the questionnaire, or attempting to present themselves in a positive light

Research Findings:

The results indicated that attitudes toward plagiarism, perceived norms and self-control predicted behavioural intentions, which in turn predicted engagement in behaviour. In addition, self-control had a direct effect on engagement in plagiarism. Self-control was also negatively correlated with engagement in plagiarism for four of the eight plagiarism types in sham paraphrasing, recycling, illicit paraphrasing and secondary plagiarism. In terms of individual thinking styles, a preference for rational thinking covaries with attitudes, perceived norms and self-control, but is not itself a predictor of plagiarism intentions or engagement in plagiarism. These findings inform us about what individual factors may predict plagiarism, which is an integral component to designing effective intervention strategies.