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When and Why is it Wrong to Copy from Others? Variability in Students' Evaluations of Plagiarism

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Authors
Waltzer, Talia
Berman, Elina
Dahl, Audun

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WHEN AND WHY IS IT WRONG TO COPY FROM OTHERS?

VARIABILITY IN STUDENTS' EVALUATIONS OF PLAGIARISM

Presenter: Talia Waltzer
Co-authors: Elina Berman, Audun Dahl

Psychology Department
University of California, Santa Cruz
• varying reports of incidences
• varying reports of incidences
• more than 50% in an academic year
• varying reports of incidences

• more than 50% in an academic year

• some reports ~%80 during academic career
WHY?
WHY?

- People don’t care
  - Selfish motives?
WHY?

- People don’t care
  - Selfish motives?
  - Moral decay of our society?!?!?!
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- People don’t care
  - Selfish motives?
  - Moral decay of our society?!?!?!

- Judgments are highly contextualized
  - Some features of situations may lead to plagiarism
WHY?

- People don’t care
  - Selfish motives?
  - Moral decay of our society?!?!?!?

- Judgments are highly contextualized
  - Some features of situations may lead to plagiarism
  - Multiple considerations taken into account
30 undergraduate students at University of California, Santa Cruz
PARTICIPANTS

• 30 undergraduate students at University of California, Santa Cruz
  • Average age 20 years old
  • Variety of majors; 13 in Psychology
  • All but 5 from California
  • 4 international students; 3 from China
PARTICIPANTS

• 30 undergraduate students at University of California, Santa Cruz
  • Average age 20 years old
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  • 4 international students; 3 from China
• Given research credit for participation in 1-hr interview
It was expected (a) that children's judgments of moral events would be based on factors intrinsic to actions and not on the presence of a rule, and (b) that their judgments of social conventional events would be based on whether or not they are in violation of a rule. Second, it was hypothesized that moral events would produce different types of social interactions from those produced by social conventional events.

One question was whether children’s evaluations of moral situations were driven by aspects tied to actions themselves, or merely the existence of a rule. Another proposal was that children’s evaluations of social conventional situations would be based on breaking rules. The hypothesis was that moral events and social conventional events are distinct, and therefore they were expected to lead to different forms of social interactions.
CONTEXTUAL VARIATIONS

SIMILARITY

SITUATION
CONTEXTUAL VARIATIONS

SIMILARITY

• Similar
  • Only 10-20% of text changed to synonyms

• Ambiguous
  • 40-60% of text changed
  • Changes in sentence structure and order

• Paraphrased
  • No more than 3 words in a row identical
  • New ideas / examples

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CONTEXTUAL VARIATIONS

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SITUATION

• Take-home exam
• Essay assignment
• Group project
• Notes for class
QUESTIONS

• Was it **okay or not okay** for Adam to submit this?
  • **Why?**
  • **Rate** his action:

```
Really bad                                      Really good
                             1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10
```

• Did it count as **plagiarism**?
  • What if there were **no rule** against plagiarism?
  • Hypotheticals: what if he were under a lot of **pressure**? What if he **didn’t want to learn**?
RESULTS

• Did the presence of a rule against plagiarism influence judgments?

• Did the similarity of the texts influence judgments?
  • i.e., more similar texts judged to be less acceptable?

• Did the type of scenario influence judgments?
  • i.e., some cases seen as more serious?
Permissibility judgments for different similarity levels

Error bars represent standard errors of the mean.

*With rule vs No rule*

- **Similar (n=46)**
- **Ambiguous (n=31)**
- **Paraphrase (n=13)**

Proportion of all cases judged OK
Permissibility ratings by scenario and similarity level

Proportion of all cases judged OK

Scenario type

notes  home exam  essay  group

similar  ambiguous  paraphrase
JUSTIFICATIONS
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• Yes, it was okay
JUSTIFICATIONS

• Yes, it was okay
  • …because he’s trying to use his own words and he’s trying to understand it. But yes of course he does use some of the words, but it’s obvious that he kind of has to. To try to, I guess, relate it.
• Yes, it was okay
  • …because he’s trying to use his own words and he’s trying to understand it. But yes of course he does use some of the words, but it’s obvious that he kind of has to. To try to, I guess, relate it.
  • …yeah because she’s not breaking a rule. It’s not bad because it’s... accepted.
JUSTIFICATIONS

• No, it was not okay
• **No, it was not okay**
  • …because it shows that she really didn’t put as much thought and effort or creativity into it.
JUSTIFICATIONS

• **No, it was not okay**
  • …because it shows that she really didn't put as much thought and effort or creativity into it.
  • …even though your university says it's okay, it's not okay to take ownership of other people's work. that's why I feel it's wrong, because you're stealing someone else's things.
• **No, it was not okay**

  • …because it shows that she really didn't put as much thought and effort or creativity into it.

  • …even though your university says it's okay, it's not okay to take ownership of other people's work. that's why I feel it's wrong, because you're stealing someone else's things.

  • …stealing is disastrous for society.
DISCUSSION
1. Yes, people think plagiarism is wrong (correlation: .899)
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3. People provide a variety of justifications for why plagiarism is permissible or impermissible
1. Yes, people think plagiarism is wrong (correlation: .899)
2. But, there’s a lot of contextual variability
3. People provide a variety of justifications for why plagiarism is permissible or impermissible
4. Those justifications can help us understand how people view plagiarism in a certain situation
   • i.e., if emphasize learning, will not think it’s wrong if there isn’t much to learn
   • i.e., if emphasize rules, will not think it’s wrong when there are no rules
THANK YOU

- All of the research participants
- Advisor: Audun Dahl
- Co-author: Elina Berman
- Research assistants:
  - Giovanni Gonzalez
  - Kavitha Hari
- UCSC Early Social Interaction Lab
  - https://esil.ucsc.edu/
  - https://www.facebook.com/UCSCesil/
REFERENCES


