Abstract

Title of Document: PARADIGM DISGUISE: SYSTEMIC INFLUENCES ON NEWSPAPER PLAGIARISM

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Directed By: Dean Thomas Kunkel
Philip Merrill College of Journalism

A first-ever study of newspaper plagiarism behavior affirms that plagiarism is not merely an individual-level violation of journalism ethics, but results from a professional ideology that justifies copying and minimizes attribution. The inductive study analyzed all known plagiarism cases over a 10-year period at U.S. daily newspapers, complemented by depth interviews with eight of those journalists. Only five of the 76 cases studied involve the acute type of plagiarism associated with Jayson Blair of the New York Times; the vast majority of cases in a four-factor typology involve garden-variety plagiarism that afflicts exemplary journalists, including two Pulitzer-Prize winners.

Even when controlling for the fact that bigger newspapers have more employees, plagiarism cases occur disproportionately more often at newspapers with circulations greater than 250,000. Larger papers also are more likely to retain journalists accused of plagiarism, while papers below that size are more likely to dismiss. Sanctions are

associated with terminology; public use of "plagiarism" correlates with dismissal, while the use of synonyms is related to retention of the employee. Since Blair, the rate of cases has roughly tripled, a change that probably reflects greater transparency rather than an increase in behavior, and the percentage of plagiarism cases that ends in dismissal has grown.

A model is created that identifies four antecedents of plagiarism behavior. Two causes are individual, rationalizing dishonesty and problematic techniques, and two are situational, definitional ambiguity and attribution aversion. Definitions and sanctions vary widely, in part because they are situationally determined; newspapers allow perceived intent, genre and zero-tolerance policies to define plagiarism, while sanctions are influenced by the paper's prior ethical infractions and a desire to engage in impression management. Newspapers contribute to plagiarism behavior by substituting injunctions for clear definitions and by preferring paraphrasing to attribution. The study advances the theoretical construct of paradigm disguise to explain the relatively harsh sanctions administered for plagiarism, which can be seen as exposing a journalistic pretense of originality. Plagiarism masks an underlying problem: a refusal to admit that newspaper journalism is built upon copying and imitation. The study concludes with suggestions for how newspapers can reduce plagiarism behavior.

PARADIGM DISGUISE:
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ON NEWSPAPER PLAGIARISM

By

Norman P. Lewis

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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Advisory Committee:
Dean Thomas Kunkel, Chair
Dr. Kathryn Bartol
Dr. Maurine Beasley
Dr. Michael Gurevitch
Dr. Chris Hanson

Acknowledgements

In September 2004, Dean Thomas Kunkel spoke to our doctoral cohort and urged us to choose academically rigorous dissertations that might have practical value to the profession. That call resonated with an ink-stained wretch just a few weeks removed from a quarter-century in the profession, barely aware of a "literature review" and clueless as to how "theory" fit with nuts-and-bolts journalism. After doctoral studies director Dr. Kathy McAdams affirmed plagiarism two months later as a potential topic, Dean Kunkel not only enthusiastically supported the choice but also agreed to serve as dissertation committee chair. When Dr. McAdams proposed seeking doctoral seminars in the Robert H. Smith School of Business and suggested contacting Professor Kay Bartol, my luck doubled. Dean Kunkel, buttressed by journalism ethics czar Dr. Chris Hanson, helped conceive the research plan of this dissertation while Dr. Bartol provided the organizational behavior structure and grounding in motivation theory. Dr. Michael Gurevitch and his penetrating questions pushed the journalistic theory component of this work while Dr. Maureen Beasley stimulated thinking about gender, definitions and research questions. Words of gratitude are insufficient in recognizing the considerable influence the aforementioned faculty have had in shaping not only this dissertation, but also in transforming me from an editor to an academic. Any errors in this dissertation, either in detail or in conceptualization, are solely mine, and probably the result of not listening carefully enough to the adroit guidance my dissertation committee generously provided. Also significant to shaping my thinking on this subject were the ruminative brilliance of the professor for whom I have worked these past three years, the incomparable Gene Roberts.

The remarkable contributions of my wife, Julie, and our still-at-home twin children, Kyle and Megan, cannot be overemphasized. The tissue box emptied when Dad broached the subject of leaving friends, moving 3,000 miles, emptying the unused college funds allocated to our older boys Steve and Nathan, and returning to school – only to pick up and move yet again when the doctorate was completed. This is no small matter for Kyle and Megan, who are now freshmen in high school, yet their unwavering support for their father's educational ambition has been inspiring. Julie had to learn what a literature review was, too, as she proofed my papers and silently endured a husband hunkered in the basement for months on end. She did more than support me in this journey; she fitted her plans and ambitions around this dissertation and was an active partner. She is the love of my life, and my best friend.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Study Purpose and Justification

After a high-profile case of plagiarism in 2006, *New York* magazine writer David Edelstein wrote an essay that shook the publishing world. His evaluation of the Harvard student whose first novel turned out to be pinched contextualized Kaavya Viswanathan in the array of notorious plagiarists such as Jayson Blair of the *New York Times* and provocatively asked, "Is everything we read now swiped from somewhere else?" He justified the breast-beating that follows revelations of copying among fiction writers and journalists, broached the why-does-this-happen questions that arise each time a prominent case of literary theft surfaces and acknowledged the Internet's influence on cut-and-paste plagiarism.[1] But it wasn't his pithy erudition of an ethical problem that attracted attention. It was the fact that, aside from the preceding quotation and an ending paragraph, the entire essay was plagiarized. Edelstein's pilfering did not go undetected for long, however. Jim Romenesko of the Poynter Institute, whose online compilation of newspaper tribulations and ethical infractions is widely followed by journalists, posted a link to Edelstein's essay. Just 25 minutes later, a *Romenesko* reader was the first person to wag an accusatory finger at Edelstein, who revealed it was all a prank.[2]

It is no surprise that a reader of the newspaper-oriented *Romenesko* Web site would blow the first whistle on a case of plagiarized writing about plagiarism, for the industry is sensitive about an ethical infraction that seems to stick like a leech. In 1983, Clark wrote a seminal essay in the forerunner of *American Journalism Review* about the

[1] David Edelstein, "Where Have I Read That Before?" *New York*, May 15, 2006.

[2] David Edelstein, "A Stunt Explained," *New York*, May 22, 2006.

pervasive nature of plagiarism and listed several examples.[3] Shaw wrote a two-part series on newspaper plagiarism for the *Los Angeles Times* the following year.[4] A fresh review of cases followed in 1995 in *Columbia Journalism Review*,[5] and in 2001 *AJR* made another outbreak of plagiarism a cover story.[6] Introspection grew exponentially when Blair's extensive plagiarism and fabrication rocked the *New York Times* in 2003, spawning more than 3,600 newspaper stories in eight months,[7] cover stories in *Newsweek*[8] and *Atlantic*[9] magazines and two books.[10] The case "gripped editors everywhere like an icy hand on the neck"[11] and their resolve to eliminate the scourge from the profession was summarized in a 2004 *AJR* article entitled, "We Mean Business."[12] Some 350 editors responding to an American Society of Newspaper Editors survey said the Blair case had prompted them to take some "specific action."[13] The profession condemns plagiarism as "one of journalism's unforgivable sins"[14] and "a

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[3] Roy Peter Clark, "The Unoriginal Sin," *Washington Journalism Review*, March 1983, 43-47.

[4] David Shaw, "Plagiarism: a Taint in Journalism," *Los Angeles Times,* July 5, 1984; "Recycling the News: Just Laziness or Plagiarism?" *Los Angeles Times*, July 6, 1984.

[5] Trudy Lieberman, "Plagiarize, Plagiarize, Plagiarize … Only be Sure to Call it Research," *Columbia Journalism Review*, July/August 1995.

[6] "Breaking the Rules: The Fabrication and Plagiarism Outbreak" *American Journalism Review*, March 2001.

[7] Nexis database search of "Jayson Blair" for "all newspapers" in 2003.

[8] May 18, 2003.

[9] May 2004.

[10] Jayson Blair, *Burning Down My Masters' House: My Life at* The New York Times (Beverly Hills: New Millennium Press, 2004); Seth Mnookin, *Hard News: The Scandals at* The New York Times *and Their Meaning for American Media* (New York: Random House, 2004).

[11] Margaret Wolf Freivogel, "Newsroom Views," *Journalism Studies* 5 (2004): 571-572.

[12] Jill Rosen, "We Mean Business," *American Journalism Review*, June/July 2004, 22-29.

[13] Paul McMasters, "Commentary" (part of three-person "debate" on "The Jayson Blair Case and Newsroom Ethics"), *Journalism Studies* 5 (2004): 399-408, 407.

[14] *Washington Post* Standards and Ethics, http://www.asne.org/ideas/codes/washingtonpost.htm.

cardinal sin."[15] Avoiding plagiarism is an unspoken baseline expectation of journalists.[16] Yet despite the sense of shame over Blair's betrayal of the profession, zero-tolerance policies and diligent enforcers like *Romenesko* and its readers, newspaper plagiarism isn't going away.

The purpose of this research is to examine why plagiarism continues to stain the newspaper profession by studying behavior. A typology of plagiarism and antecedents will be offered based on analysis of all known cases over the past 10 years and interviews with eight journalists accused of plagiarism. The dissertation is informed by media theories of professional ideology and paradigm repair, and applies insights from organizational behavior, especially motivation theory, to identify systemic factors influencing plagiarism behavior. It extends paradigm repair theory in a new direction, coining "paradigm disguise" to explain why the profession treats plagiarism as a more serious offense than accuracy or conflicts of interest that compromise integrity. The dissertation concludes with applications for the newspaper profession and offers suggestions for further study.

The topic is important to the profession and to academic research. Plagiarism reduces credibility,[17] which harms newspapers[18] and the readers who depend upon them. By omitting attribution, plagiarism deprives readers of the opportunity to know and evaluate the sources used by journalists and fails to "honor precedence."[19] Yet

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[15] *Orlando Sentinel* Editorial Code of Ethics, http://www.asne.org/index.cfm?ID=410.

[16] Deni Elliott-Boyle, "A Conceptual Analysis of Ethics Codes," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 1(1): 22-26.

[17] Jan Johnson Yopp and Katherine C. McAdams, *Reaching Audiences: A Guide to Media Writing,* 3rd ed. (Boston: Pearson Education, 2003), 246.

[18] Philip Meyer, *The Vanishing Newspaper: Saving Journalism in the Information Age* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 98.

[19] Edward Wasserman, "Plagiarism and Precedence," *Media Ethics,* Fall 2006, 20.

researchers have largely ignored the subject. As Chapter 3 will detail, only eight articles published in peer-reviewed academic journals have addressed newspaper plagiarism, and most of those have been expositional essays. No research has been published that examines plagiarism behavior and its causes. Thus, this research fills an important gap in the academic literature and benefits professionals who want to reduce plagiarism episodes at their organizations.

1.2 Conceptualizing the Problem

Part of the reason why plagiarism has not received much attention from researchers may stem from how it has been conceptualized. The newspaper profession generally treats plagiarism as an individual-level issue and an obvious wrong. It is often described as an open-and-shut case: compare the story with the original and if the two seem similar, it's plagiarism.[20] Unlike other ethical issues such as conflicts of interest or undercover reporting, plagiarism engenders little debate in classrooms or textbooks. Plagiarists alternately are seen as (1) devious miscreants who slipped through rigorous hiring processes, (2) wayward individuals who in a moment of weakness took a shortcut they knew to be wrong, or, in the most generous scenario, (3) good people who got sloppy in mixing up their notes. Typical is a headline over a 2000 *Editor & Publisher* story about a rash of plagiarism cases that asked, "Why they do it," and then answered: "Desperation? Kleptomania? Stupidity? Or just plain lazy."[21] Regardless of the circumstances, plagiarism is considered to be an individual violation of clearly

[20] Professor Haynes Johnson, University of Maryland Philip Merrill College of Journalism, personal conversation, April 2006.

[21] Mark Fitzgerald, "Why they do it: Desperation? Kleptomania? Stupidity? Or just plain lazy," *Editor & Publisher*, Aug. 7, 2000, 23.

understood standards. That presumption is reinforced by the fact that detecting plagiarism is a relatively rare event. This research has found 76 individuals accused of plagiarism at U.S. daily newspapers over a 10-year period, a fraction of the roughly 55,000 people employed in newsrooms during that same period.[22]

The common view that plagiarism is a relatively clear-cut wrong undeserving of much discussion is reflected in how little space the profession gives the subject in its ethics codes. The American Society of Newspaper Editors was formed in 1922 in part to establish ethical standards for the newspaper industry,[23] yet its ethics code ignores plagiarism.[24] The ethics code of the Society of Professional Journalists gives the topic all of two words: "Never plagiarize."[25] The Associated Press Managing Editors Association offers only eight words: "The newspaper should not plagiarize words or images."[26] Prominent newspaper companies that have news-related ethics codes are no better. Gannett, Dow Jones, Lee Enterprises and, when it existed, Knight Ridder, did not address plagiarism.[27] The Hearst code simply says, "Plagiarism is never acceptable."[28] The E.W. Scripps code is slightly longer: "No employee may submit the work of another person without complete attribution of the true source."[29] The New York Times Co., whose ethics code was updated after the Blair case, says only that it "will not tolerate such

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[22] American Society of Newspaper Editors annual census, http://www.asne.org/index.cfm?id=5646.

[23] A brief history of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, http://www.asne.org/index.cfm?ID=3460.

[24] American Society of Newspaper Editors ethics code, http://www.asne.org/kiosk/archive/principl.htm.

[25] Society of Professional Journalists ethics code, http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp.

[26] Associated Press Managing Editors ethics code, http://www.apme.com/ethics.

[27] All but Lee Enterprises archived at http://www.asne.org/index.cfm?id=387; Lee Enterprises newsroom ethics code, http://editorialmatters.lee.net/articles/2006/10/06/principles_for_quality_journalism/princip.txt.

[28] Hearst Newspapers Statement of Professional Principles, http://www.asne.org/index.cfm?id=387.

[29] E.W. Scripps Co. ethics code, http://www.asne.org/index.cfm?ID=395.

behavior."[30] However brief the injunction, at least those organizations acknowledged plagiarism as an issue. Fifteen of 35 newspaper ethics codes archived on the American Society of Newspaper Editors Web site make no mention of plagiarism or attribution issues.[31] Codes that slice conflicts of interest into fine slivers probably ignore plagiarism for the same reason they don't expressly prohibit journalists from engaging in extortion: it's obviously wrong, and there's no need to state the obvious.

However, the normative view that plagiarism is an uncomplicated issue overlooks nuances that surface in a comparison of the 20 newspaper ethics codes that address the ethical infraction. Plagiarism generally is regarded as copying words, but there is no standard for how much copying is unacceptable. Ethics codes vary in calculating copying at the level of "words,"[32] "phrases,"[33] "distinctive language"[34] and "wholesale lifting."[35] Codes also disagree on whether copying from previous stories is acceptable. Some require that material taken from the newspaper's files be attributed[36] while others state that only outside sources must be recognized.[37] Only one code addresses self-plagiarism.[38] In terms of format, most codes speak of plagiarism as a text-only issue; only

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[30] New York Times Co., *Ethical Journalism: A Handbook of Values and Practices for the News and Editorial Departments*, September 2004, 7, http://www.nytco.com/pdf/NYT_Ethical_Journalism_0904.pdf.

[31] http://www.asne.org/index.cfm?id=387. The exact date of authorship is unstated. Most of the ethics codes were posted on the Web site in 1999; about a third have been updated or posted since then.

[32] *(Neptune, NJ) Asbury Park Press* ethics code, http://www.asne.org/ideas/codes/asburyparkpress.htm.

[33] *(Champaign, IL) News-Gazette* ethics code, http://www.asne.org/ideas/codes/newsgazette.htm.

[34] *Orlando Sentinel* ethics code, http://www.asne.org/index.cfm?ID=410.

[35] *San Jose Mercury News* ethics code, http://www.asne.org/ideas/codes/sanjosemercurynews.htm; *Kansas City Star* ethics code, http://www.asne.org/ideas/codes/sanjosemercurynews.htm.

[36] *Dallas Morning News* ethics code, http://www.asne.org/ideas/codes/dallasmorningnews.htm; *San Antonio Express-News* ethics code, http://www.asne.org/index.cfm?ID=3554.

[37] *(Salem, OR) Statesman Journal* ethics code, http://www.asne.org/ideas/codes/statesmanjournal.htm; *Richmond (VA) Times Dispatch* ethics code, http://www.asne.org/ideas/codes/richmondtimesdispatch.htm.

[38] *Seattle Times* Plagiarism Guidelines, http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/contactus/plagiarism.html.

two of the 20 codes mention images or graphics.[39] Some included ideas as something that can be plagiarized even though stealing ideas is considered normal.[40] Two codes said that reporting on a topic published first by another newspaper must be acknowledged, but only if the story is an "exclusive" that is "worthy of coverage";[41] no other codes required attribution of purloined ideas. Codes also differ in the critical issue of intent. Three codes proclaim that plagiarism is passing off someone else's work as one's own[42] while another code is slightly more explicit in saying that plagiarism involves "the deliberate submission"[43] of someone else's material without attribution. The variations in these codes reveal significant gradations in what constitutes plagiarism.

Far from being a cut-and-dried matter, newspaper plagiarism involves compromises inherent in a medium that values readability over attribution and does not use footnotes. The Holy Grail in newspaper writing is the narrative form, recreating events without attribution.[44] Reporting that draws from the Associated Press newsgathering cooperative can give a general nod to the wire service at the end if attribution within the story would "interrupt story flow."[45] The *Seattle Times* says its

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[39] *San Francisco Chronicle* ethics code, http://www.asne.org/ideas/codes/sanfranciscochronicle.htm; *San Antonio Express-News* ethics code. http://www.asne.org/index.cfm?ID=3554.

[40] Steve Buttry, "When Does Sloppy Attribution Become Plagiarism?" Sept. 20, 2006, American Press Institute, http://www.americanpressinstitute.org/pages/resources/2006/09/when_does_sloppy_attribution_b/

[41] *Washington Post* Standards and Ethics, http://www.asne.org/ideas/codes/washingtonpost.htm; *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* ethics code, http://www.asne.org/index.cfm?id=5108.

[42] *(Phoenix) Arizona Republic* ethics code, http://www.asne.org/ideas/codes/arizonarepublic.htm; *Lincoln (NE) Journal Star* ethics code, http://www.asne.org/ideas/codes/lincolnjournalstar.htm; and the *(White Plains, NY) Journal News* ethics code, http://www.asne.org/ideas/codes/gannettsuburban.htm.

[43] *San Antonio Express-News* ethics code, http://www.asne.org/index.cfm?ID=3554.

[44] Roy Peter Clark, *Writing Tools: 50 Essential Strategies for Every Writer* (New York: Little, Brown & Co., 2006), 169.

[45] *Seattle Times* Plagiarism Guidelines, http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/contactus/plagiarism.html.

reporters can use quotes they did not hear so long as they add "told reporters,"[46] a phrase that hides from readers the reality that the *Seattle Times* envoy was absent. There is no need to credit "information that is generally known,"[47] which begs the question of when unique information transforms into common knowledge[48] and exempts many forms of borrowed information from attribution requirements.

Further, the common notion that plagiarism is solely an individual-level issue overlooks the influence of culture, rewards and other circumstances on behavior. In 2005, *American Journalism Review* postulated that ongoing cases of plagiarism and fabrication may result not just from a few bad apples, but also from a newsroom culture that rewards beating the competition more than it does accuracy.[49] Journalism philosopher Carey faulted the *New York Times* for publishing 14,000 words exposing Jayson Blair's misdeeds without acknowledging its complicity. "Institutions get the kind of deviant behavior they deserve: A society that reveres property is likely to experience quite a bit of theft; universities that sanctify intellectual achievement are rewarded with breathtaking amounts of cheating; and newspapers that value the original, amazing and speedy are likely to run into a lot of plagiarism and fabrication."[50] National surveys of journalists

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[46] Ibid.

[47] *(Champaign, IL) News-Gazette* ethics code, http://www.asne.org/ideas/codes/newsgazette.htm.

[48] Gil Cranberg, "Reconsidering our code of ethics," *The Masthead* (quarterly publication of the National Conference of Editorial Writers), Fall 2002.

[49] Lori Robertson, "Confronting the Culture," *American Journalism Review*, August/September 2005, 34-41.

[50] James W. Carey, "Mirror of the Times," *The Nation*, June 16, 2003.

have found the greatest influence shaping ethical conduct is not a code, the person's upbringing or journalism teachers, but newsroom culture.[51]

When plagiarism is viewed in the context of newsroom culture instead of merely as an individual-level problem, and when it is seen as an issue more complex than a simple "never plagiarize" directive implies, a more intricate web of causes and influences unfolds. Plagiarism can be seen not merely as a fraud perpetuated by journalistic rogues but as an extension of an ethos that encourages imitation in a murky ethical climate. A more expansive view of plagiarism encourages an examination of newsroom practices and acknowledges that journalism is an inherently unoriginal activity, as former *Washington Post* reporter Malcolm Gladwell observed:

> When I worked at a newspaper, we were routinely dispatched to "match" a story from the *[New York] Times*: to do a new version of someone else's idea. But had we "matched" any of the *Times'* words – even the most banal of phrases – it could have been a firing offense. The ethics of plagiarism have turned in to the narcissism of small differences: because journalism cannot own up to its heavily derivative nature, it must enforce originality on the level of the sentence.[52]

Looking at situational factors that contribute to plagiarism does not suggest that the environment lures unsuspecting individuals into egregious behavior. In some cases, people who plagiarize are choosing to do something they know to be wrong. Editors can no more take full responsibility for the decisions of journalists to engage in grand larceny than chief financial officers can be blamed for accountants who embezzle. However, as will be shown in later chapters, most plagiarism is not akin to embezzlement, but exists amid an organizational backdrop of definitional ambiguity and an aversion to attribution.

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[51] David H. Weaver, Randal A. Beam, Bonnie J. Brownlee, Paul S. Voakes and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, *The American Journalist in the 21st Century: U.S. News People at the Dawn of a New Millennium* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2007), 159.

[52] Malcolm Gladwell, "Something Borrowed," *New Yorker*, Nov. 22, 2004, 47.

Envisioning plagiarism as solely a personal failing misses the interwoven issues and context revealed by a wider-ranging examination. As Shoemaker and Reese have advised, presuming that "individual-level factors are the sole causes of behavior" can lead to research errors.[53] Therefore, this dissertation examines plagiarism behavior as an individual and an organizational phenomenon.

1.3 Defining Plagiarism

The equivocation that emerges when examining plagiarism renders a definition inherently problematic, and not just for newspapers. A business professor observed, "plagiarism is a *relative*, not *absolute* matter."[54] Mallon wrote that the lack of a definition resurfaces each time a new case arises and "people whose business is words start asking themselves, yet again, just what plagiarism is and whether it's really so bad."[55] Academics fail to differentiate between "ethical collaboration and unethical plagiarism."[56] An examination of nearly 70 textbooks on writing revealed "no single standard definition of plagiarism."[57] A lack of consensus in defining the term means that plagiarism is a subjective concept, "in the eye of the beholder."[58] Or as St. Onge noted,

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[53] Pamela J. Shoemaker and Stephen D. Reese, *Mediating the Message: Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content,* 2nd ed. (White Plains, NY: Longman Publishers, 1996), 20.

[54] Daphne A. Jameson, "The Ethics of Plagiarism: How Genre Affects Writers' Use of Source Materials," *Bulletin of the Association for Business Communication* 56 (1993): 18-28, 18 (italics in original).

[55] Thomas Mallon, *Stolen Words* (San Diego: Harcourt, 2001), 240.

[56] Henry L. Wilson, "When Collaboration Becomes Plagiarism," in *Perspectives on Plagiarism and Intellectual Property in a Postmodern World*, ed. Lise Buranen and Alice M. Roy (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1999), 218.

[57] David Leight, "Plagiarism as Metaphor," in *Perspectives on Plagiarism,* 221.

[58] Marilyn Randall, *Pragmatic Plagiarism: Authorship, Profit, and Power*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 189.

"Plagiarism shares a curious semantic feature with the term pornography. Even though we cannot agree on specifics, 'We know it when we see it.'"[59]

Plagiarism is most often considered to be a form of theft, a connotation derived from the word's etymology. In the third century B.C.E. in Rome, those who took or captured slaves were sentenced to the whip, or in Latin, *ad plagia*, and the act itself was called *plagium*, or kidnapping.[60] The word was applied to writing in the 1600s, after the European discovery of moveable type facilitated publication[61] and writing could be viewed as a trade.[62] Unlike kidnapping a slave, however, plagiarism rarely involves taking someone else's property in a way that deprives that person of monetary value. Potential financial harm to the person whose work was taken is more serious than plagiarism; it is a violation of copyright law,[63] which is "designed to deal with the wholesale piracy and unauthorized publication of entire works."[64] Plagiarism rarely involves copyright law, but instead, is considered an ethical or moral violation[65] – deception,[66] fraud[67] or cheating.[68] Defining plagiarism as theft or stealing[69] is of limited practical use.

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[59] K.R. St. Onge, *The Melancholy Anatomy of Plagiarism* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America), 1988, 51 (underline in original).

[60] Randall, *Pragmatic Plagiarism,* 61-62.

[61] *Oxford English Dictionary* plagiarism entry, accessed through University of Maryland online library.

[62] Mallon, *Stolen Words*, 3.

[63] Stuart P. Green, "Plagiarism, Norms, and the Limits of Theft Law: Some Observations on the Use of Criminal Sanctions in Enforcing Intellectual Property Rights," *Hastings Law Journal*, 54 (2002): 167-242.

[64] Mallon, *Stolen Words*, 242.

[65] Edward M. White, "Student Plagiarism as an Institutional and Social Issue," in *Perspectives on Plagiarism*, 206.

[66] Sissela Bok, *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life* (New York: Random House, 1999), 207n.

[67] St. Onge, *Melancholy Anatomy*, 62.

[68] Laurie Stearns, "Plagiarism, Process, Property, and the Law," in *Perspectives on Plagiarism*, 7.

Posner advocated replacing the notion of plagiarism as theft with a test of whether the expectations of the audience were violated. Lawyers do not expect a judicial opinion to have been written by the presiding judge because they know clerks often do that work. Since there is no expectation that the judge wrote the signed opinion, there is no plagiarism, Posner said.[70] But a parallel practice, of having a professor claim authorship for a published paper researched and written by a student assistant, would be plagiarism – in the United States, anyway. It would not be considered plagiarism in European countries where professors are expected to appropriate the work of their assistants.[71] The definition of plagiarism varies, depending on the expectations of the audience for the works involved.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines plagiarism as:

1. The action or practice of plagiarizing; the wrongful appropriation or purloining, and publication as one's own, of the ideas, or the expression of the ideas (literary, artistic, musical, mechanical, etc.) of another.
2. A purloined idea, design, passage or work.[72]

The definition leaves some questions unanswered. As Chapter 3 will describe, journalists vary widely in deciding when "appropriation" is "wrongful," and reject the notion that stealing ideas is plagiarism. Also, the definition does not establish parameters for measuring plagiarism, which also vary widely. The Office of Research Integrity in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services considers plagiarism to originate at the

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[69] Leight, "Plagiarism and Metaphor," 222.

[70] Richard A. Posner, *The Little Book of Plagiarism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007), 49.

[71] Ibid, 31.

[72] *Oxford English Dictionary*, accessed through University of Maryland online library.

level of a sentence,[73] as does Randall,[74] while St. Onge believes the threshold should be "set in the neighborhood of the paragraph."[75]

The *Oxford* definition also gives credence to those who argue that plagiarism requires malicious intent. A reader's representative for the *(Minneapolis) Star Tribune* wrote that plagiarism requires motive; those who plagiarize are committing intentional theft, while those who did not intend to copy are guilty only of being sloppy.[76] When a media reporter for an alternative weekly in St. Louis caught the *Post-Dispatch* plagiarizing in a 1998 editorial, the paper's editor denied it was plagiarism because the newspaper did not intend to deceive.[77] Similarly, a *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* food writer wrote that her extensive copying from a book in 2000 was not plagiarism because "what I did was not deliberate."[78] An editorial page editor who resigned in 2004 after working for the same newspaper for 42 years denounced the use of the word "plagiarism" in describing his actions because, he said, he lacked intent.[79] Therefore, it is no surprise that lack of intent is "the most easily copped plea"[80] of people accused of plagiarism.

Intent matters in defining plagiarism, but its role should be restricted. Journalism ethicist Wasserman argues that to commit plagiarism, "concealment of origin is deliberate" – the journalist must know that the information used came from somewhere

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[73] Office of Research Integrity newsletter, December 1994, http://ori.dhhs.gov/policies/plagiarism.shtml.

[74] Randall, *Pragmatic Plagiarism*, 150.

[75] St. Onge, *Melancholy Anatomy*, 54.

[76] Kate Parry, "Can a Writer Unintentionally Plagiarize?" *(Minneapolis) Star Tribune*, Nov. 19, 2006.

[77] David Noack, "St. Louis Post-Dispatch Denies Plagiarism Charge," *Editor & Publisher*, Oct. 24, 1998

[78] Hsiao-Ching Chou, "Key Ingredient was Omitted: The Credit," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Aug. 30, 2000.

[79] Carl Cannon, "Editorial Page Editor Resigns; Publisher Pledges Highest Standards," *(Jacksonville) Florida Times-Union*, Nov. 2, 2004.

[80] Mallon, *Stolen Words*, 243.

else.[81] Wasserman's point speaks less to intent than to ignorance or forgetfulness regarding the origin of the material. Journalists learn how to write by copying the rhythms and stylings of others, and can be influenced by an interesting fact or turn of a phrase that sticks in the memory and innocently dislodges at a future date. However, such ignorance regarding the origin of material used is not what journalists describe when they claim a lack of intent, for they know full well the source of the information copied without attribution. Instead, journalistic invocations of inadvertency are more precisely claims that they did not intend to give the impression that the material was original to them, or that they had meant to attribute the information. It is no wonder that longtime media reporter Kurtz observed that a claim of mixed-up notes is "the first refuge of every plagiarist."[82] While such after-the-fact assertions of meaning to attribute information deserve a healthy degree of skepticism, given the human tendency to cloak questionable actions in the garb of good intentions, the greater problem is that allowing intent to define plagiarism reduces occurrences to extreme cases of piracy. If more typical copying of paragraphs that should have been attributed is not plagiarism, then the word has lost its meaning. Moreover, reserving the term for the outliers perpetuates the newspaper profession's tendency to wash its hands of plagiarism by defining it as so radical that only psychotics can commit it. Allowing intent to demarcate plagiarism not only inappropriately narrows the definition, but also puts the cart before the horse. The time to consider intent is in deciding sanctions, not in defining whether obviously duplicated material was plagiarized. Finally, reserving "plagiarism" for premeditated looting inappropriately links the definition with sanctions by virtually demanding that

[81] Wasserman, "Plagiarism and Precedence," *Media Ethics*, 16.

[82] Howard Kurtz, quoted in Mnookin, *Hard News*, 128.

perpetrators be fired. As Chapter 4 will detail, this study reveals that newspapers tend to use the term "plagiarism" when a journalist is dismissed, and employ a synonym when keeping the journalist. Allowing the definition to be mixed with the sanction results in sophistry incongruent with the journalistic mission of plainspoken honesty.

Because some of the struggle over intent reflects a denial that one meant to claim someone else's work as one's own, a better definition of newspaper plagiarism would be something like: Using someone else's words or original ideas without attribution. This removes intent from the equation and places the emphasis on attribution. After all, the opposite of plagiarism is not paraphrasing, but attribution. In many cases in which journalists have been accused of plagiarism, they have said they should have done a better job of paraphrasing. Yet treating paraphrasing as a plagiarism panacea ignores the fact that a person who cribs from someone else's work is still cribbing, even if he or she is adept at rewording. In other words, copying does not have to be verbatim to be plagiarism.

Defining plagiarism as using someone else's words or original ideas without attribution is still vague; it does not describe how many words or what kinds of ideas need attribution. As Chapter 3 will detail, journalism operates on a continuum of borrowing. Delineating how many consecutive words constitute plagiarism ignores factors such as the source of the information and its relative uniqueness. Subsequent chapters will show that journalistic conventions about attributing ideas vary according to the type of idea and the newspaper department involved. There are simply too many variables to reduce a plagiarism definition to a mathematical formula. The fact that

plagiarism proves to be difficult to nail down does not mean it is indefinable. It simply means that uncertainty is part of the equation.

Even a newspaper that has tried to be exhaustive in its plagiarism policy cannot eliminate the ambiguity. Unlike other newspaper plagiarism policies that average three sentences, the *Seattle Times* has one that exceeds 3,000 words and may be the most detailed in the nation. The extensive code was a result of the unmasking of business columnist Stephen H. Dunphy as a serial plagiarist in 2004.[83] Yet despite its length, the *Seattle Times* policy does not address whether plagiarism happens at the level of a phrase, sentence or paragraph, or whether ideas can be plagiarized. It is vague in other spots: information from the files has to be attributed only if it is "extensive" and verbatim copying of anything but quotes from press releases is "discouraged" but not prohibited.[84] In fact, only one of 35 newspaper ethics codes examined for this study acknowledges plagiarism is something less than straightforward. "'Gray areas' do exist," the *San Francisco Chronicle* policy says.[85]

However difficult plagiarism may be to define, it is generally considered to be a taboo, except among some literary scholars who say plagiarism is a Western idea[86] rendered obsolete by postmodern philosophy.[87] Halbert says that plagiarism is "the logical outgrowth of the creation of intellectual property" and that "no concept of

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[83] Michael R. Fancher, "Times Business Columnist Resigns Over Plagiarism," *Seattle Times*, Aug. 22, 2004.

[84] *Seattle Times* Plagiarism Guidelines, http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/contactus/plagiarism.html.

[85] *San Francisco Chronicle*: Ethical News Gathering, http://www.asne.org/ideas/codes/sanfranciscochronicle.htm.

[86] C. Jan Swearingen, "Originality, Authenticity, Imitation, and Plagiarism: Augustine's Chinese Cousins," in *Perspectives on Plagiarism*, 19.

[87] Introduction, *Perspectives on Plagiarism*, xviii.

intellectual property should exist in a feminist future."[88] Randall considers plagiarism a "legitimate act of revenge" against Western colonizers.[89] Howard contends that copying another writer's style is an exemplary form of learning that should be celebrated as "patchwriting" rather than condemned as plagiarism.[90] But while such ideas may be debated in some academic circles, the discussion has not been extended to newspaper journalism.

Finally, plagiarism should be defined in terms of what it is not: fabrication. The two issues tend to get lumped together, as evidenced by a pre-Blair *American Journalism Review* cover on "the fabrication and plagiarism outbreak,"[91] yet they are discrete behaviors. Plagiarism involves using someone else's words or original ideas without attribution. The issue is not whether the story is true, but whether the information reported was properly attributed and the wording employed original to the writer. Fabrication involves falsehoods, creating details, events or people that do not exist while misleading readers into thinking they are genuine. Because the motivations, justifications and explanations for using unattributed information have little in common with creating fiction, fabrication is a disparate ethical subject and should not be conflated with plagiarism.

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[88] Debora Halbert, "Poaching and Plagiarizing," in *Perspectives on Plagiarism*, 111, 119.

[89] Marilyn Randall, "Imperial Plagiarism," in *Perspectives on Plagiarism*, 139.

[90] Rebecca Moore Howard, *Standing in the Shadow of Giants: Plagiarists, Authors, Collaborators* (Stamford, CT: Ablex Publishing, 1999), xvii.

[91] *American Journalism Review*, March 2001.

CHAPTER 2: THEORY

Because this dissertation examines human behavior from both an organizational and an individual perspective, it incorporates sociological and psychological theories. The sociological perspective ingrained in journalism theories is useful in examining newsroom culture and the organizational-level issues that may influence how groups of people behave. The psychological perspective that permeates much of organizational behavior literature explains how and why individuals respond to workplace stimuli. These discrete disciplines are critical to an examination of systemic workplace issues that may affect how individuals think and respond. Particularly useful for this study are two sociological theories from journalism and three psychological theories from organizational behavior.

2.1 Journalism Theory

Two related journalistic theories, professional ideology and paradigm repair, inform this study by predicting how journalists envision plagiarism and respond to episodes.

2.1.1 Professional Ideology Theory

Most journalists consider themselves part of a profession, even though journalism does not fit conventional sociological definitions of one. The practice is ill-defined – journalists can include everything from White House correspondents to celebrity talk show hosts interviewing other celebrities. There is no barrier to entry; anyone can consider himself or herself a journalist. Unlike doctors, lawyers or accountants,

journalism lacks a dominant organization to which many of its practitioners belong. The leading journalism organization, the Society of Professional Journalists, attracts only 9 percent of U.S. journalists, compared to 30 percent of doctors in the American Medical Association, 35 percent of lawyers in the American Bar Association and 53 percent of accountants in the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants.[1] The most-read trade journal among journalists, *American Journalism Review*, is read regularly by only 15 percent of those in the profession, even though it is provided free to many newsrooms.[2] Yet despite a lack of definition or entrance requirements, an umbrella organization or a common publication, most journalists consider themselves part of a profession and adopt its shared beliefs, at least within each medium such as television or newspapers.[3]

The evolution of journalism as a profession is generally seen as a 20th century reaction to the excesses of the sensational press, although Banning traced its ideological roots to the postbellum period, finding 25 references to journalism as a profession in 10 years of minutes of the nascent Missouri Press Association.[4] The first collegiate journalism school, a signifier of the profession's development, was in 1908 at Missouri.[5] Thirty years later, Curtis MacDougall published his influential textbook on "interpretive reporting," which he defined as providing context and clarity to events in a way that promoted independence and affirmed the fourth estate role of the profession. Concluded

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[1] David H. Weaver, Randal A. Beam, Bonnie J. Brownlee, Paul S. Voakes and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, *The American Journalist in the 21st Century: U.S. News People at the Dawn of a New Millennium* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2007), 134.

[2] Ibid, 135.

[3] Ibid, 243.

[4] Stephen A. Banning, "The Professionalization of Journalism," *Journalism History* 24 (1998): 157-163.

[5] University of Missouri School of Journalism, http://journalism.missouri.edu/about/history.html.

Brennen, "*Interpretive Reporting* reinforced an ideology of journalism that elevated the role of the journalist to an almost sacred commitment."[6] The professional model has continued to evolve "as the best solution to a particular set of demands required of the occupation."[7]

The interplay between the employer and the profession is an important element of journalistic ideology. The ideology of the profession serves to legitimize the position of journalists in society[8] and is one of Schudson's two "master trends" (the other is commercialization) "that have deeply affected the American experience of news."[9] Tuchman blended those two elements, concluding in her study of newsrooms that professionalism serves media owners by defining news as privately owned.[10] "Among reporters," she found, "professionalism is knowing how to get a story that meets organizational needs and standards."[11] Journalistic introspection spawned by declining circulation has often emphasized the need for "local" reporting, which Pauly and Eckert identified as an undefined and romanticized mythology,[12] and which serves the business interests of the newspaper owners. A survey of journalists at a major metropolitan newspaper revealed strong identifications with both their employers and their profession,

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[6] Bonnie S. Brennen, "What the Hacks Say: The Ideological Prism of US Journalism Texts," *Journalism* 1 (2000): 106-113.

[7] Marianne Allison, "A Literature Review of Approaches to the Professionalism of Journalists," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 1 (1986): 5-19, 14.

[8] Mark Deuze, "What is Journalism? Professional Identity and Ideology of Journalists Reconsidered," *Journalism* 6 (2005): 442-464, 446.

[9] Michael Schudson, *The Sociology of News* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), 71.

[10] Gaye Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of News* (New York: Free Press, 1978), 210.

[11] Ibid, 66.

[12] John J. Pauly and Melissa Eckert, "The Myth of 'The Local' in American Journalism," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 79 (2002): 310-326.

and found a significant correlation between those identities.[13] The professional ideology of journalism cannot be divorced from the media industry, which affirms the value of examining journalistic practice in an organizational context.

The core of professional ideology can vary according to the educational background and setting of the journalist (urban or community),[14] but a common set of values exists across typologies. Kovach and Rosenstiel listed nine such beliefs, such as pursuing truth, maintaining independence and offering a public forum.[15] Drawing on their list and those of others, Deuze identified five ideal-typical values: watchdog, objective, autonomous, focused on the immediate and ethical.[16] Beam, who concluded that journalism is "semi-professionalized" because practitioners have only partial control over their work, identified six general work standards that characterize journalists: they (1) are liberally educated and pursue ongoing learning, (2) are impartial in covering the news, (3) emphasize accuracy, (4) participate in professional organizations, (5) seek to maintain access to public records and (6) serve the public.[17] Elliott found three essential shared values: that news stories should be "accurate, balanced, relevant, and complete," that the story should not "badly hurt" another person and that the journalist should provide

[13] Tracy Callaway Russo, "Organizational Professional Identification," *Management Communication Quarterly* 12 (1998): 72-111.

[14] John W.C. Johnstone, Edward J. Slawski, William W. Bowman, "The Professional Values of American Newsmen," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36 (1972): 522-540.

[15] Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect* (New York: Crown, 2001), table of contents.

[16] Deuze, "What is Journalism?"

[17] Randal A. Beam, "Journalism Professionalism as an Organizational-Level Concept," *Journalism Monographs* 121 (1990), 8.

information needed by the audience.[18] Most significant to this study are the beliefs in the immediacy of news, which creates time pressure, and autonomy.

These core values are idealized. None of the typologies acknowledge that most U.S. journalists practice their craft within for-profit companies and therefore must advance a business purpose. For example, a public-service value disregards the business reality that newspapers, which obtain two-thirds of their revenue from advertising, are successful only if they reach a demographic that advertisers want; newspapers do not target as customers people with minimal disposable income. Or consider the gap in education between newspaper journalists, 91 percent of whom have a college diploma,[19] and the public they purport to represent, only 24 percent of which has a four-year degree.[20] Journalists generally believe that newsrooms should reflect the gender and racial diversity around them but do not advocate, in order to better reflect their communities, hiring staffers whose education stopped at high school. College-educated journalists tend to write for a like-minded audience.

For this study, professional ideology theory predicts that journalists will behave as if the field is a profession defined by speed and marked by the autonomy granted its practitioners. It predicts that when plagiarism cases arise, journalists will consider time pressure an inadequate excuse because deadline stress comes with the job, and will hold ignorance an unacceptable claim because ethical standards are intuitively understood. Further, it predicts that the autonomy norm will preclude any consideration of

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[18] Deni Elliott, "All is Not Relative: Essential Shared Values and the Press," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 3 (1988): 28-32.

[19] Weaver, et al, *The American Journalist*, 38.

[20] 2000 census data file SP-4, http://factfinder.census.gov.

independent bodies adjudicating ethical infractions and allow individual variation in establishing ethical parameters.

2.1.2 Paradigm Repair Theory

Paradigm repair describes the response of journalists to episodes that violate the tenants of professional ideology. As Berkowitz summarizes, "When journalists stray from correctly enacting their professional ideology in a way that is visible to both their peers and to society, ritual newswork in the form of paradigm repair is begun to demonstrate that while individuals might have strayed, the institution itself has remained intact."[21] Journalists deploying paradigm repair are expelling the strays. Those engaging in questionable practices are labeled as operating outside the boundaries of the professional ideology, thereby allowing journalistic practices to escape more profound scrutiny.

The theory of paradigm repair can be traced to a case study of a 1983 episode in which an Anniston, Ala., television station filmed a man setting himself on fire in the Jacksonville, Ala., town square. The man alerted the station ahead of the time, waited until the camera crew arrived, doused himself in lighter fluid and ignited his clothes. After 37 seconds, a camera operator sought to assist the man engulfed in flames. Although the local station never broadcast the film, it appeared on all three networks' evening news shows and the episode was covered in national news magazines, the *New York Times* and the Soviet *Pravda*. The universal response was that the self-immolation wasn't a story and the television camera crew erred by thinking it was. "As if orchestrated by the same composer, the national coverage of the Jacksonville incident led

[21] Dan Berkowitz, "Doing Double Duty: Paradigm Repair and the Princess Diana What-a-Story," *Journalism* 1 (2000): 125-143, 129.

the news audience to a paradigm-defending conclusion and in many cases imposed the conclusion, in an editorial fashion, in the text of the news stories themselves."[22] Since then, paradigm repair theory has predicted journalistic responses to a *Wall Street Journal* reporter who revealed in 1988 that he was a radical socialist,[23] the paparazzi chasing Princess Diana when she died in 1997 in a car crash,[24] the 1998 CNN/*Time* "Tailwind" story[25] and the 2003 Jayson Blair case.[26]

Paradigm repair presumes that journalists understand and follow a professional ideology and that trouble comes when the norms aren't followed. "When these errors of interpretation or professional discretion occur, blame is then placed on the person or news organization that made an error in practice – that broke the paradigm's procedures – rather than on the institution that stakes its reputation on the effectiveness of practicing that paradigm."[27] The photographers who followed Princess Diana took photos that mainstream journalism organizations wanted, but when she died, the focus was on the shameful paparazzi nourished by the bottom-feeding tabloid press. As one newspaper editorialized, "the paparazzi are part of the chaff of journalism, egged on by tabloids whose weak values and disregard for truth hurt everyone."[28] After isolating the

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[22] W. Lance Bennett, Lynne A. Gressett, and William Haltom, "Repairing the News: A Case Study of the News Paradigm," *Journal of Communication* 35 (1985): 50-68, 64.

[23] Stephen D. Reese, "The News Paradigm and the Ideology of Objectivity: A Socialist at The Wall Street Journal," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 7 (1990): 390-409.

[24] Berkowitz, "Doing Double Duty"; Ronald Bishop, "From Behind the Walls: Boundary Work by News Organizations in Their Coverage of Princess Diana's Death," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 23 (1999): 90-112.

[25] Matthew Cecil, "Bad Apples: Paradigm Overhaul and the CNN/*Time* 'Tailwind' Story," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 26 (2006): 46-58.

[26] Elizabeth Blanks Hindman, "Jayson Blair, *The New York Times*, and Paradigm Repair," *Journal of Communication* 55 (2005): 225-241.

[27] Berkowitz, "Doing Double Duty," 128.

[28] Ibid, 134.

photographers and the tabloids, the mainstream press even blamed the audience for craving celebrity news.[29] Such cases of intense news coverage often turn into a self-examination narrative that critiques the journalistic process in earnest yet superficial tones on programs such as CNN's *Reliable Sources* and then affirms the integrity of the newsgathering paradigm.[30] "It has become a job routine," Bishop concluded.[31]

For the organization, paradigm repair is a cleansing mechanism. "Bad" journalists are purged from the system, restoring the organization to health.[32] The response of the *New York Times* and the newspaper industry to Blair is reminiscent of native tribal rituals in which offenders are excommunicated. "By the same token, purging news fabricators might be seen as an act of decontamination in which journalists unite to declare their basic commitment to truth and honesty," Hanson wrote.[33] Engaging in paradigm repair also protects organizations such as the *Times* from having to make substantive changes in processes or culture[34] and restore its image.[35] This was no easy task for the *Times*, which Hindman found portrayed Blair as both a genius and a dunce. "Even as it attempted to shift blame and marginalize Blair by casting him as an incapable reporter, the Times faced a dilemma. If Blair was inept, how could he have misled his colleagues and editors for so long? In order to demonstrate its own lack of culpability, the Times had to

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[29] Bishop, "From Behind the Walls," 94.

[30] Cecil, "Bad Apples," 52.

[31] Bishop, "From Behind the Walls," 109.

[32] Cecil, "Bad Apples," 56.

[33] Christopher Hanson, "Blair, Kelley, Glass, and Cooke: Scoundrels or Scapegoats, Symptoms or Flukes?" *Journalism Studies* 5 (2004): 399-403, 402.

[34] Robert G. Picard, "Organizational Failures in the Jayson Blair Incident," *Journalism Studies* 5 (2004): 403-406, 406.

[35] Hindman, "Jayson Blair," 230.

contradict its marginalization of Blair by depicting him as extremely able in his ability to deceive others."[36]

Paradigm repair theory predicts how journalists will respond not just to serious cases of malfeasance but also to routine plagiarism episodes. Newspapers confronted by plagiarism cases will retreat to a defensive position that protects established beliefs about the essential goodness and integrity of the newsgathering process and sees wrongdoing as an individual-level problem. Rather than consider whether a lack of definitional clarity or varying attribution standards contribute to plagiarism behavior, journalists will assert that the rules are self-evident, that newsrooms cannot be inoculated against the deviously unethical who game the system, that the offenders are solely responsible for their behavior and are in no way representative of typical journalists, that no substantive changes are necessary because everyone else in the newsroom is a trustworthy compatriot, that normative practices continue to serve journalists and the public – and proclaim the journalistic paradigm repaired.

2.2 Motivation Theory

Newsrooms are socialized environments not unlike other workplaces studied by organizational behavior, a field of academic inquiry traditionally situated in business schools and informed by other disciplines, chiefly psychology. The field involves the study of individuals as well as organizations.[37] Organizational behavior research rarely appears in journalism publications, yet its theories and principles offer a rich set of

[36] Ibid, 230.

[37] John B. Miner, *Organizational Behavior 1: Essential Theories of Motivation and Leadership* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2005), 3.

explanations for the behavior of journalists and their employers. Especially valuable is motivation theory, which addresses the fundamental question in this study: why won't newspaper plagiarism go away? Motivation theories address how values, goals and beliefs influence action.[38] Motivation is not an inherent individual trait, but a state that can be changed by "the continuous interplay of personal, social, and organizational factors."[39] Two sets of motivations are significant: the employee who commits plagiarism, and the editor or manager who responds to episodes. While several motivation theories can inform the behaviors of employees and editors, three are especially salient: expectancy, equity and attribution.

2.2.1 Expectancy Theory

Expectancy theory describes the process by which people are motivated to achieve rewards. Although expectancy first surfaced in the 1930s,[40] theoretical development generally is traced to Vroom, who in the 1960s created a formula for the interplay among valence, instrumentality and expectancy. Vroom began with the observation that people attach *valence* to outcomes they prefer, believe in the *instrumentality* of performance to achieve those outcomes, and *expect(ancy)* their effort will achieve the desired performance.[41] The theory presumes a level of rational[42] thought

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[38] Jacquelynne S. Eccles and Allan Wigfield, "Motivational Beliefs, Values, and Goals," *Annual Review of Psychology* 53 (2002): 109-132.

[39] Ruth Kanfer, "Motivation," Vol. 11 in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Management: Organizational Behavior*, 2nd ed., ed. Nigel Nicholson, Pino G. Audia and Madan M. Pillutla (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 233.

[40] James A. Shepperd, "Productivity Loss in Performance Groups: A Motivation Analysis," *Psychological Bulletin* 113 (1993): 67-81, 69.

[41] Victor H. Vroom, *Work and Motivation* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1964).

[42] Miner, *Organizational Behavior 1*, 98.

that effort leads to performance, which leads to valued rewards. Mitchell summarized the theory as contending "people use a calculative process to select behaviors that will maximize their payoff."[43] More expressive is Kerr's classic essay "On the Folly of Rewarding A, While Hoping for B." He described how the U.S. military during the Vietnam War tended to assign a mutineer to rest and rehabilitation rather than punishment, which rewarded soldiers not for obedience but for disobeying orders. He also cited how major universities hope for good teaching from their professors but reward only those who publish, and noted that governments hope for prudent spending yet punish agencies that conserve money by giving them smaller budgets the next year.[44] Expectancy theory articulates why it's what gets rewarded that gets done.

Among motivation theories, expectancy may be the most researched.[45] The elements in expectancy theory explain variance in test scores better than a more general motivation measure.[46] The theory also predicts a student will exert effort to raise a grade when the payoff, or valence, is greatest – which a study found was most often to raise the GPA rather than prepare for a career or for the sake of learning.[47] Expectancy explains impression management, or the tendency of people to put on a good face in front of

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[43] Terence R. Mitchell, "Matching Motivational Strategies with Organizational Contexts," in *Research in Organizational Behavior,* Vol. 19, ed. L.L. Cummings and Barry M. Staw (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1997) 57-149, 83.

[44] Steven Kerr, "On the Folly of Rewarding A, While Hoping for B," *Academy of Management Journal* 18 (1975): 769-783; reprinted 20 years later in *Academy of Management Executive* 9 (1995): 7-14.

[45] Mark E. Tubbs, Donna M. Boehne and James G. Dahl, "Expectancy, Valence, and Motivational Force Functions in Goal-Setting Research: An Empirical Test," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 78 (1993): 361-373, 361.

[46] Rudolph J. Sanchez, Donald M. Truxillo and Talya N. Bauer, "Development and Examination of an Expectancy-Based Measure of Test-Taking Motivation," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 85 (2000): 739-750.

[47] Marshall A. Geiger and Elizabeth A. Cooper, "Using Expectancy Theory to Assess Student Motivation," *Issues in Accounting Education* 11 (1996): 113-129.

others, especially if they are seeking cover for unethical behavior.[48] A work in-basket experiment found that outcome expectancies, fueled by perceived rewards and punishments, were a powerful influence on ethical decision-making.[49] The desire to achieve specific outcomes resulted in a greater likelihood to engage in unethical behavior.[50] In an experiment comparing negotiations in cases in which $1 and $100 were at stake, subjects vying for the higher reward were much more likely to lie, 41 percent versus 69 percent.[51]

For newspapers, expectancy theory predicts that people will adjust behavior to reach desired rewards and may be tempted to cut corners to achieve those rewards. Further, employees are attuned to the reward process at work in the newsroom. For example, if people are rewarded for turning in exclusive stories on deadline without regard to how the stories were discovered and developed, reporters who want to get on the good side of management may be motivated to deliver what the editor wants, even if that takes a little copying to deliver it quickly.

2.2.2 Equity Theory

Equity theory can describe both an individual theory first postulated by J. Stacy Adams and serve as an umbrella term for related theories such as organizational justice,

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[48] Stephen B. Knouse and Robert A. Giacalone, "Ethical Decision-Making in Business: Behavioral Issues and Concerns," *Journal of Business Ethics* 11 (1992): 369-377; Mark R. Leary and Robin M. Kowalski, Impression Management: "A Literature Review and Two-Component Model," *Psychological Bulletin* 107 (1990): 34-47.

[49] Linda Klebe Treviño and Stuart A. Youngblood, "Bad Apples in Bad Barrels: A Causal Analysis of Ethical Decision-Making Behavior," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 75 (1990): 378-385, 383.

[50] Maurice E. Schweitzer, Lisa Ordóñez and Bambi Douma, "Goal Setting as a Motivator of Unethical Behavior," *Academy of Management Journal* 47 (2004): 422-432.

[51] Ann E. Tenbrunsel, "Misrepresentation and Expectations of Misrepresentation in an Ethical Dilemma: The Role of Incentives and Temptation," *Academy of Management Journal* 41 (1998): 330-339, 334.

social exchange and perceived organizational support. Justice theories can break down into distributive (outcomes), procedural (process) and interactional (interpersonal) justice. Rather than maintain fine distinctions among various components of justice and equity theories, this study considers equity theory largely as Adams envisioned it, and its logical extensions into organizational behavior.[52]

Equity theory predicts that when the relationship between expectations and rewards are out of balance, people seek to restore equilibrium. As Miner summarized, the theory is probably better stated as *inequity* theory, because it is the imbalance – either under-reward or over-reward situations – that motivates people. In infrequent over-reward situations, people may exert more effort to compensate, although research shows the too-big rewards must be sizeable.[53] Especially applicable to this study is the other side of the coin, in which people perceive they are under-rewarded and they withhold effort or engage in unethical behavior as payback. A study showed that professional basketball players who were comparatively underpaid responded by becoming selfish, taking more shots.[54] A 15 percent pay cut stimulated employee theft, though theft rates reduced when employees were given a detailed and sensitive explanation for the pay cut.[55] Students who perceived greater inequity in their university settings were more likely to engage in vandalism.[56] Employees surveyed at four companies who thought they were treated unfairly were more likely to witness unethical behavior and less likely to

[52] Miner, *Organizational Behavior 1*, 134-158.

[53] Ibid, 137.

[54] Joseph W. Harder, "Play for Pay: Effects of Inequity in a Pay-For-Performance Context," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 37 (1992): 321-335.

[55] Jerald Greenberg, "Employee Theft as a Reaction to Underpayment Inequity: The Hidden Cost of Pay Cuts," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 75 (1990): 561-568.

[56] Sylvia W. DeMore, Jeffrey D. Fisher and Reuben M. Baron, "The Equity Control Model as a Predictor of Vandalism Among College Students," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 18 (1988): 80-91.

report it.[57] Turiel observed that otherwise honest people "engage in covert acts of subterfuge and subversion aimed at circumventing norms and practices judged unfair."[58] Wrote Callahan, "people are prone to invent their own morality when the rules don't seem fair to them."[59] A meta-analysis of 183 justice studies showed high correlations between employees' perceptions of a just workplace with organizational commitment and lack of withdrawal behaviors.[60]

Combined, these findings suggest that journalists who feel they are being treated unfairly – perhaps in pay levels or job assignments – will be more willing to even the score by withholding effort or engaging in more serious acts of deviance such as theft. Journalists who feel they are being held to unfair expectations, to deliver too much too fast, may rationalize cheating as a way to correct the inequity.

2.2.3 Attribution Theory

Attribution theory, which addresses perceived causes of events, refers to several strains of thought from social psychology. Its place in motivation literature stems from the theory that an individual's explanation for an outcome motivates future effort.[61] That is, if a person believes a promotion was the result of hard work, that individual is likely to

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[57] Linda Klebe Treviño and Gary R. Weaver, "Organizational Justice and Ethics Program 'Follow-Through': Influences on Employees' Harmful and Helpful Behavior," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 11 (2001): 651-671.

[58] Elliot Turiel, *The Culture of Morality: Social Development, Context, and Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 261.

[59] David Callahan, *The Cheating Culture: Why More Americans Are Doing Wrong to Get Ahead* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2004), 168.

[60] Jason A. Colquitt, Donald E. Conlon, Michael J. Wesson, Christopher O.L.H. Porter and K. Yee Ng, "Justice at the Millennium: A Meta-Analytic Review of 25 Years of Organizational Justice Research," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 86 (2001): 425-445, 434.

[61] Eccles and Wigfield, "Motivational Beliefs," 117.

continue to work hard. If the person believes a promotion is due to external factors such as connections with a higher-ranking associate, he or she is likely to focus on cultivating valuable work relationships. At the core of attribution theory is Weiner's distinction between internal factors such as effort and ability, and external factors such as task difficulty and luck.[62] Individuals tend to ascribe their own successful outcomes to internal (sometimes called dispositional) factors such as hard work, while attributing the success of others to external (sometimes called situational) factors such as serendipity. The reverse is true when desired outcomes are not reached: individuals attribute their own shortcomings to misfortune or lousy bosses, while ascribing failure in others to a lack of effort or ability. This self-serving bias sometimes is called the fundamental attribution error,[63] which states that people overemphasize internal factors and underemphasize external factors. Attribution errors are especially common among journalists, who tend to over-attribute outcomes to political leaders, chief executives and football quarterbacks while failing to consider situational factors such as timing, market fluctuations and play calling.[64]

Attribution theory is particularly salient in predicting how bosses will respond to poor performance situations. A study of nursing supervisors showed they were more likely to attribute employee mistakes to internal causes, such as inadequate effort or skill, in cases in which the consequences of the performance was serious. Those internal

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[62] Miner, *Organizational Behavior 1*, 186, citing Bernard Weiner, *Theories of Motivation: From Mechanism to Cognition* (Chicago: Markham, 1972).

[63] This term is usually attributed to Lee D. Ross in a 1977 book chapter, although Ross contends the term "fundamental" has been misconstrued as "irreducible" and the phrase has been misinterpreted. See target article by John Sabini, Michael Siepmann and Julia Stein, "The Really Fundamental Attribution Error in Social Psychological Research," *Psychological Inquiry* 12 (2001): 1-15, and following commentary in the same issue, including by Ross.

[64] Mathew L.A. Hayward, Violina P. Rindova and Timothy G. Pollock, "Believing One's Own Press: The Causes and Consequences of CEO Celebrity," *Strategic Management Journal* 25 (2004): 637-653.

attributions were likely to result in punitive responses rather than coaching or training.[65] Managers also display a preference reversal regarding whether they are judging past actions of employees or predicting future ones. A study of managers evaluating weak performance of employees showed they made internal attributions, holding employees responsible for the outcomes. But when considering how to improve the performance of employees, managers tended to believe they were far more capable of influencing future events than the employees were.[66]

The theory is also useful in predicting employee behavior. Gioia and Sims documented a leniency effect in which managers changed their attributions following face-to-face performance reviews. Before meeting with employees, managers followed the path predicted by attribution theory: if the employee performance was good, it was due to external circumstances; if the employee performance was bad, it was the employee's fault. But when the employees met with their bosses, employees were able to convince bosses to shift their explanations, and give the employee more credit for good performance and recognize extenuating circumstances in performance-shortfall situations.[67] Especially noteworthy is a study published in 2006 comparing mistakes made due to competence with those made due to dishonesty. The results showed that the attribution an employee should make differs in those two cases. When a violation involves competence, an employee is best suited by accepting blame and making an

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[65] Terence R. Mitchell and Robert E. Wood, "Supervisor's Responses to Subordinate Poor Performance: A Test of an Attributional Model," *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance* 25 (1980): 123-138.

[66] Martin Goerke, Jens Möller, Stefan Schulz-Hardt, Uwe Napiersky and Dieter Frey, "'It's Not My Fault – But Only I Can Change It': Counterfactual and Prefactual Thoughts of Managers," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 89 (2004): 279-292, 287.

[67] Dennis A. Gioia and Henry P. Sims Jr., *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 37 (1986): 197-229.

internal attribution, such as saying the mistake was due to a lack of ability. But when a violation involves dishonesty, trust is repaired more successfully when employees made external attributions, such as saying the mistake was due to a mix-up or a misunderstanding.[68]

For this study, attribution theory predicts that employees accused of plagiarism are likely to blame external circumstances, such as mixing up notes or being under pressure. It predicts that managers will see a plagiarism violation as an individual failing due to lack of effort or ability, and are inclined to take punitive measures if they believe the violation was serious. The theory also predicts that managers may soften their responses if the employees persuade them of their good intentions or extenuating circumstances. In turn, employees accused of plagiarism may see themselves as victims of marauding supervisors whose motives are suspect. The theory predicts journalists in general will hold suspected plagiarists solely to blame for their behavior and are unlikely to consider systemic factors as causal elements.

[68] Peter H. Kim, Kurt T. Dirks, Cecily D. Cooper and Donald L. Ferrin, "When More Blame is Better Than Less: The Implications of Internal vs. External Attributions for the Repair of Trust After a Competence- vs. Integrity-Based Trust Violation," *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 99 (2006): 49-65, 59.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Newspaper Plagiarism Studies

Only three studies of newspaper plagiarism have been published in peer-reviewed journals. In 1985, Cheney and Duncan published a study comparing the attitudes of journalism professors with professionals on plagiarism definitions. They found that while 36 percent of academics considered borrowing ideas to be plagiarism, only 17 percent of editors agreed. They also found differences in whether maps and pictures could be plagiarized.[1] In 1989, undergraduate student White wrote an essay describing a few plagiarism cases and citations from journalism ethics codes. She concluded that newspaper codes should be more specific to help journalists know when a lack of attribution becomes plagiarism.[2] In 2006, Fedler took a historical view of attitudes toward plagiarism. He found that plagiarism was a common feature of newspapers through the 1800s as they copied their rivals, but became unacceptable in the 20th century.[3]

Academic journals have published five essays in response to the Jayson Blair case. Sylvie examined the behavior of deposed *New York Times* editor Howell Raines through the lens of timing theory, concluding that Raines pushed for change too quickly.[4] *Journalism Studies* asked three experts to consider whether news organizations shared responsibility for unethical behavior such as Blair's. All three found shared

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[1] Jerry Chaney and Tom Duncan, "Editors, Teachers Disagree About Definition of Plagiarism," *Journalism Educator*, 40 (1985): 13-16.

[2] Marie Dunne White, "Plagiarism and the News Media," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 4 (1989) 265-280.

[3] Fred Fedler, "Plagiarism Persists in News Despite Changing Attitudes," *Newspaper Research Journal* 27 (2006): 24-37.

[4] George Sylvie, "A Lesson From The New York Times: Timing and the Management of Cultural Change," *JMM: The International Journal on Media Management*, 5 (2003): 294-304.

responsibility, primarily in management's inadequate and sometimes mixed responses to initial doubts about Blair's accuracy and an overemphasis on bottom-line economics.[5] A *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* senior editor wrote a two-page essay describing how the case exposed personal ambition, time pressure and expectations of conformity.[6] In 2005, Hindman applied paradigm repair theory (see Chapter 2) to the *Times's* response to Blair's misdeeds.[7] Patterson and Urbanski compared the Blair case with the Janet Cooke episode and concluded that their newspapers allowed an institutional "commitment to truth (to) become shrouded by less noble motives like ambition and the thrill of the scoop."[8]

These eight journal articles constitute the universe of academic literature on U.S. newspaper plagiarism.[9] *Pacific Journalism Review* carried a piece in 2005 that referenced the Blair case, but the article was about plagiarism in New Zealand, whose press laws and practices differ from those in the United States.[10] No dissertations have been written on newspaper plagiarism, according to a search of the Digital Dissertations database.[11] The

[5] Christopher Hanson, Robert G. Picard and Paul McMasters, "Debate: The Jayson Blair Case and Newsroom Ethics," *Journalism Studies* 5 (2004): 399-408.

[6] Margaret Wolf Freivogel, "Newsroom Views," *Journalism Studies* 5 (2004): 571-572.

[7] Elizabeth Blanks Hindman, "Jayson Blair, The New York Times, and Paradigm Repair," *Journal of Communication* 55 (2005): 225-241.

[8] Maggie Jones Patterson and Steve Urbanski, "What Jayson Blair and Janet Cooke Say About the Press and the Erosion of Public Trust," *Journalism Studies* 7 (2006): 828-850, 829.

[9] The Communication and Mass Media database was searched using the wildcard term "plagiar*" to capture all forms of the word, including plagiary, plagiarism, plagiarizing and plagiarist, with "journalism" as a delimiting term.

[10] Alan Samson, "Plagiarism and Fabulism: Dishonesty in the Newsroom," *Pacific Journalism Review* 11 (2005): 84-100.

[11] The wildcard term "plagiar*" was used without qualification, and then each entry was examined to determine if it dealt with newspapers.

Blair case has been the subject of two popular-press books, one by Blair[12] and another by *Newsweek* writer Seth Mnookin.[13] Other books about journalism ethics have touched on plagiarism, such as and *The News at Any Cost*[14] and *Media Circus*.[15] Several articles in professional journalism magazines, most notably *American Journalism Review* and *Columbia Journalism Review*, have also addressed plagiarism, and so have staff members at the Poynter Institute who write for the organization's Web site. Academic research, however, is quite limited.

3.2 Student Plagiarism

Most plagiarism research has involved college students. Roig has documented definitional disagreement among undergraduates, who in 40 to 50 percent of cases classified plagiarized copy as acceptable paraphrasing,[16] and among professors, whose definitions range widely, even when they were in the same academic discipline.[17] Such disagreements are amplified by growing use of the Internet, which has resulted in higher incidences of plagiarism. McCabe's longitudinal study shows the percentage of college students who say they have plagiarized increased from about 10 percent in 1999 to almost 40 percent in 2005. The 2005 surveys also reveal that 77 percent of students believe cut-

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[12] Jayson Blair, *Burning Down My Masters' House: My Life at* The New York Times (Beverly Hills: New Millennium Press, 2004).

[13] Seth Mnookin, *Hard News: The Scandals at* The New York Times *and Their Meaning for American Media* (New York: Random House, 2004).

[14] Tom Goldstein, *The News at Any Cost* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985).

[15] Howard Kurtz, *Media Circus: The Trouble with America's Newspapers* (New York: Times Books, 1993).

[16] Miguel Roig, "Can Undergraduate Students Determine Whether Text Has Been Plagiarized?" *Psychological Record* 47 (1997): 113-122.

[17] Miguel Roig, "Plagiarism and Paraphrasing Criteria of College and University Professors," *Ethics & Behavior* 11 (2001): 307-323, 319.

and-paste plagiarism is not a big deal,[18] an attitude they may bring with them to the workplace. Significantly, McCabe's national studies also show that the attitudes of journalism students toward plagiarism are statistically no different than those of their peers in other disciplines.[19] Among graduate students, 22 percent of non-business students (and 33 percent of the MBA students) admitted to cut-and-paste plagiarism in a nationwide study published in 2006.[20] When asked what sanctions they would apply to plagiarism episodes if they were in charge, self-reported student plagiarists were more lenient than other students.[21] Roig found performance as measured by grades did not predict frequency of self-reported plagiarism,[22] while a British study showed fear of failure did.[23] The British study also showed a slight gender difference; 25 percent of women and 35 percent of men said plagiarism was acceptable in some situations.[24] However, most research on antecedents seems to have focused more broadly on academic integrity (cheating, copying, fabricating, unauthorized collaboration, etc.) than on plagiarism specifically.[25]

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[18] Center for Academic Integrity report, http://www.academicintegrity.org/cai_research.asp.

[19] Donald L. McCabe, a Rutgers University management professor and founding president of the Center for Academic Integrity, e-mail to author, April 29, 2006.

[20] Donald L. McCabe, Kenneth D. Butterfield and Linda Klebe Treviño, "Academic Dishonesty in Graduate Business Programs: Prevalence, Causes, and Proposed Action," *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 5 (2006): 294-305, 300.

[21] Jeffrey A. Miles and Todd S. Palmer, "Peer Versus Authority as Decision Maker: Are the Demographics of the Perceiver Related to the Judgements (cq) of Fairness?" *Psychological Reports* 88 (2001): 1107-1118, 1115.

[22] Miguel Roig, "Lying and Cheating: Fraudulent Excuse Making, Cheating, and Plagiarism," *The Journal of Psychology* 139 (2005): 485-494.

[23] Jean Underwood and Attila Szabo, "Academic Offences and E-Learning: Individual Propensities in Cheating," *British Journal of Educational Technology* 34 (2003): 467-477.

[24] Ibid, 475.

[25] For example, Donald L. McCabe and Linda Klebe Treviño, "Individual and Contextual Influences on Academic Dishonesty: A Multicampus Investigation," *Research in Higher Education* 38 (1997): 379-396,

3.3 Murky Boundaries

Plagiarism exists in a milieu of borrowing, imitation and stealing ideas. Although the opposite of plagiarism is attribution, in everyday newsroom practice attribution is applied inconsistently, adding to ambiguity about when copying is acceptable. The uncertainty begins the moment a reporter is assigned to a new subject and is told to check the files for previous stories. Information from the archives is considered background material to be inserted in the new story. A press release is used both as background and to draw quotes. A search of the Nexis archive on almost any topic reveals several newspaper stories reporting the same figures and details. How much of this material needs to be attributed is almost never explained.

A beginning reporting textbook says plagiarism occurs when individuals present others' information "and use it as their own without crediting the original source."[26] Given the reality that most news stories contains background information obtained from somewhere else, yet often presented without attribution, this simple rule is violated as a matter of routine. The *Washington Post* ethics code says, "Attribution of material from other newspapers and other media must be total."[27] Yet the *Post* publishes statistics such as newspaper profit margins without attribution, does not credit smaller newspapers from which it gets ideas for regional stories, and publishes excerpts devoid of attribution from books written by *Post* reporters, such as Bob Woodward's *State of Denial* and Karen

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found age, gender and grades can predict how students respond to a dozen types of academic dishonesty. Those dozen were combined to form one dependent variable, and plagiarism was not teased out separately.

[26] Jan Johnson Yopp and Katherine C. McAdams, *Reaching Audiences: A Guide to Media Writing*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2003), 245.

[27] *Washington Post* ethics code, http://www.asne.org/ideas/codes/washingtonpost.htm and confirmed in the company's intranet on Sept. 26, 2006.

DeYoung's *Soldier: The Life of Colin Powell*.[28] The *Post* is by no means unusual in picking and choosing when to attribute information, and no newspaper could adhere to a standard of "total" attribution without retarding the newsgathering process. The issue, however, is deeper than merely a case of practice not matching policy. Attribution is often skipped because "many journalists are reluctant to admit that they do not originate all their own material."[29]

In a 1983 essay, Clark situated plagiarism in an atmosphere of borrowing that includes copying materials from the paper's archives, wire services, magazines, other newspapers ("they feast on each other like sharks"), press releases, books, research and one's prior stories.[30] As Kurtz wrote:

> We all recycle words for a living. We lift material from wire-service reports about events that we have no time or inclination to attend – a Senate hearing, a press conference by the governor. We boil complex matters down to a couple of phrases, often based on someone else's summary. We regurgitate old interviews by reporters we've never met.[31]

In a study of network television news programs and national news magazines, Gans was struck by how often those organizations looked at the *New York Times* each morning to decide what to cover, so much so that "if the *Times* did not exist, it would probably have to be invented."[32] Wasserman described journalists "who surrender their responsibility to

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[28] Excerpts were published in the *Washington Post* on Oct. 1, 2006. I observed the other citations while working at the *Post* in 2005 and 2006.

[29] David Shaw, "Recycling the News: Just Laziness or Plagiarism?" *Los Angeles Times*, July 6, 1984.

[30] Roy Peter Clark, "The Unoriginal Sin," *Washington Journalism Review*, March 1983, 43-47.

[31] Kurtz, *Media Circus*, 124.

[32] Herbert J. Gans, *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time* (New York: Vintage, 1980), 181.

decide independently what matters most in the events they cover to news organizations deemed more authoritative," such as the *Times* or the *Post*, as a form of plagiarism.[33]

To see how newspapers borrow from each other, consider the Facebook. The social networking Web site launched in 2004 and quickly became a campus craze. According to the Nexis database, the first Facebook story in a major U.S. newspaper appeared in the *Red Eye* free-distribution newspaper published by the *Chicago Tribune* on May 25, 2004. Three days later it was in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Over the following weeks and months, the topic appeared in the *(Springfield, IL) State Journal-Register*, the *(State College, PA) Centre Daily Times*, the *Columbus Dispatch*, the *(Bridgeport) Connecticut Post*, the *Indianapolis Star*, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, the *(Minneapolis) Star-Tribune* and finally the *New York Times* on Dec. 1, 2004. Before the end of December, the story was covered by the *(Quincy, MA) Patriot Ledger*, the *Hartford Courant*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *(Fort Lauderdale, FL) Sun-Sentinel*, the *(Muncie, IN) Star Press*, the *(Portland) Oregonian*, the *Charleston (WV) Daily Mail*, the *Richmond (VA) Times Dispatch* and the *Washington Post*. Hundreds more Facebook stories were published in 2005. Although all the stories appear to be original, they followed a similar theme, that students have found a new way to communicate, and offered similar-sounding quotes. These copycat stories do not appear to be plagiarized, but neither are they original.

When a good idea surfaces, others chase it. The late John S. Knight urged editors in his chain to steal every good idea.[34] Editors tend to get less upset at a reporter making

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[33] Edward Wasserman, "Plagiarism and Precedence," *Media Ethics,* Fall 2006, 19.

[34] Former Knight editor Gene Roberts, professor at the University of Maryland Philip Merrill College of Journalism, personal communication, fall 2005.

an understandable mistake than in getting beat by a competitor, behavior that teaches journalists to imitate each other's work and engage in pack reporting.[35] In 2003, the publisher of a small Greenwich Village newspaper, John Sutter, complained to the *Washington Post* about the *New York Times* copying ideas from his publication 32 times over three years. Sutter called it "lazy reporting," but a *New York Times* senior editor, Bill Borders, said reporters often chase the same idea. "If you got to them first, I regret that, but the fact of that priority does not constitute any kind of violation," Borders wrote Sutter.[36]

As will be seen later, sports departments are particularly vulnerable to the murky attribution boundaries. It is common practice to compile "notebook" columns by taking tidbits from other newspapers without attribution – which is considered acceptable as long as the original story is paraphrased. After a game, reporters at major sporting events are handed sheets with statistics and player quotes. Although reporters privately doubt whether the point guard in danger of dropping out of college could really speak so eloquently, the quotes are used verbatim, and without attribution to the sports media specialists who provided them. Neither do sports reporters tell their readers that they did not hear the athlete or performer utter such words. These practices would not be embraced by, say, the capital bureau reporters.

The acceptability of copying ideas varies according to what's copied. Newspapers generally feel no guilt over stealing layout styles and designs, but are more stringent about adapting photographs or political cartoons, and generally prohibit copying written material word-for-word. Likewise, notions of self-plagiarism differs widely from

[35] Timothy Crouse, *The Boys on the Bus* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1974).

[36] Howard Kurtz, "The Villager, Imitated but No Longer Flattered," *Washington Post*, Aug. 4, 2003, C1.

recycling prior stories one has written for that paper, to using other reporters' background material, to copying material published by a journalist's former employer.

This atmosphere of borrowing, imitation and stealing ideas provides the backdrop for plagiarism. If there is anything truly new under the sun, it is unlikely to be found in journalism, which relies on a relatively structured definition of news such that one day's edition is much like the next, a never-ending stream of political mud-throwing, armed conflicts in remote locales and scores from last night's sporting venues. Journalism is a value-added operation in which facts and statements are recombined into fresh narratives. Journalists are passive witnesses to events or chroniclers of decisions made by others. They lack subpoena power to force recalcitrant witnesses to testify and, aside from some investigative reporting, rarely engage in original research; they depend on evidence gathered by others. Borrowing, then, is a fundamental and necessary element in journalism.

3.4 Newsroom Culture

Newsroom culture influences the behavior of individuals, creating social systems and patterns that shape the thinking of the people who work in them.[37] Culture is "a pattern of shared basic assumptions" that are "taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel."[38] Culture is enduring, as opposed to climate.[39] Culture is important because small groups within the newsroom, especially an employee's boss and

[37] Lawrence Grossberg, Ellen Wartella, D. Charles Whitney and J. Macgregor Wise, *Mediamaking: Mass Media in a Popular Culture*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006), 75.

[38] Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership,* 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 17.

[39] Daniel R. Denison, "What Is the Difference Between Organizational Culture and Organizational Climate? A Native's Point of View on a Decade of Paradigm Wars," *Academy of Management Review* 21 (1996): 619-654.

co-workers, can have a significant influence on the ethical reasoning of journalists.[40] Five elements of newsroom culture are informative in a study of plagiarism: external competition, internal competition, tolerance of deception, an insular atmosphere and a profession that is self-policing.

3.4.1 External Competition

News is news only if it is fresh; day-old newspapers have little value. Long before the Internet turned newspapers into all-day enterprises, larger newspapers published multiple editions in a day, seeking to beat rivals by a few hours or less. Journalism has always been about scoops and speed; if parts of the story turn out to be inaccurate, corrections can be made in the next edition. Speed can be a "corrosive element"[41] that hurts the quality of the journalism, but it won't go away. Gans found that "competition is endemic to the profession" and when a news organization is getting beat on stories, morale suffers.[42] The need for speed is a factor in plagiarism because it presupposes a lack of time to engage in pre-publication fact checking and reinforces the belief that trust is foundational to effective working relationships.

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[40] Paul S. Voakes, "Social Influences on Journalists' Decision Making in Ethical Situations," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 12 (1997): 18-35, 28.

[41] Howard Gardner, Mihaly Czikszentmihalyi and William Damon, *Good Work: When Excellence and Ethics Meet* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 140.

[42] Gans, *Deciding What's News,* 176, 104.

3.4.2 Internal Competition

Journalists compete against each other for story assignments, space and story play.[43] Yale management professor Argyris was struck by the intensity of the win-lose competition when he consulted for the *New York Times*, thinly disguised[44] as "The Daily Planet" in his 1974 book, *Behind the Front Page*.[45] One reporter told him, "They're competitive as the devil, they're competitive for a sandwich, they're jealous of each other. They love each other personally, but there is unexpressed jealousy."[46] Another told him, "If you have a good story, you've got to be careful someone doesn't steal it from you."[47] Argyris found that management cultivated competition to create stars who enhance the newspaper's reputation but who "may make the remaining news people feel like second-class citizens."[48] The competition-fueled inferiority also was defined by job description or department, as Gelb confirmed in his autobiography of his lengthy tenure running the *New York Times* local news-gathering staff. The city staff, he wrote, "felt like poor relations compared to their counterparts on the foreign and national staffs" and knew local news was "simply a stepping-stone" to a better assignment.[49] That hierarchy was deliberate at the *Washington Post*, which started new reporters on "lousy beats on

[43] Ibid, 90-93.

[44] Susan E. Tifft and Alex S. Jones, *The Trust: The Private and Powerful Family Behind The New York Times* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1999), 468; Edwin Diamond, *Behind the Times: Inside the New* New York Times (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 101.

[45] Chris Argyris, *Behind the Front Page: Organizational Self-Renewal in a Metropolitan Newspaper* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974).

[46] Ibid, 10.

[47] Ibid, 50.

[48] Ibid, 61.

[49] Arthur Gelb, *City Room* (New York: Marion Wood, 2003), 349.

'Metro' and the 'District weekly' section" in a Darwinian struggle, knowing "if they don't get good stories, they will never make the national staff."[50]

Although intensifying internal competition may let the cream rise, it also can encourage malfeasance. Some *New York Times* reporters were willing to engage in "shady acts" to succeed within the competitive newsroom, and "might sometimes 'magnify' certain elements of the story."[51] Janet Cooke's fabricated story about an 8-year-old heroin addict surfaced in an environment in which she was desperate to find a front-page story that would let her escape from the purgatory of the *Washington Post's* weekly sections.[52] Even when management does not encourage internal competition, the mere fact that people, especially early in their careers, are looking to get ahead explains some of the plagiarism cases examined in a 1984 *Los Angeles Times* story.[53]

3.4.3 Tolerance of Deception

The first obligation of journalists may be the truth,[54] but journalists also justify using deception to get the story. Lee, who studies journalistic deception, identifies plagiarism as a deceptive act,[55] based on definitions advanced by Elliot and Culver.[56] Although he did not find that journalists accept plagiarism, Lee learned through a survey

[50] Philip Nobile, "The Pulitzer Surprise," *New York*, April 27, 1981, 22, citing an anonymous *Washington Post* staffer.

[51] Diamond, *Behind the Times*, 242.

[52] Bill Green, "Janet's World: The Story of a Child Who Never Existed – How and Why It Came to Be Published," *Washington Post*, April 19, 1981.

[53] David Shaw, "Plagiarism: a Taint in Journalism," *Los Angeles Times,* July 5, 1984.

[54] Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect* (New York: Crown, 2001), 37.

[55] Seow Ting Lee, "Lying to Tell the Truth: Journalists and the Social Context of Deception," *Mass Communication & Society* 7 (2004): 97-120, 99.

[56] Deni Elliott and Charles Culver, "Defining and Analyzing Journalistic Deception," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 7 (1992): 69-84, 71.

and depth interviews that journalists justify practices such as withholding information from sources, using hidden microphones and cameras, and exhibiting false flattery or empathy.[57] He also found from interviews that journalists were more willing to engage in deception if they viewed a source to be a "bad" person, citing an example of a journalist who said, "When you get down and deal with pigs, you get a little mud on you."[58] Lee concluded, "Journalistic deception is an occupational construct shaped by professional demands."[59]

The significance of journalistic tolerance of deception to this study is twofold. First, Lee postulated that tolerance of some relatively minor deceptions might diminish resistance and lead to acceptance of more troublesome practices.[60] Journalists who justify withholding information or lying, or work in an atmosphere in which deceptions are accepted, may be willing to engage in more serious forms of deception, such as "lying within a story"[61] – and plagiarism can be a form of lying. Second, Lee found the most significant predictor of journalistic tolerance of deception is competition, which is present in most newsrooms.[62] This points to the importance of organizational factors as determinants of willingness to cut ethical corners and explains why journalists accused of plagiarizing often cite competitive pressure as an explanatory factor.

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[57] Seow Ting Lee, "The Ethics of Journalistic Deception," in *The Moral Media: How Journalists Reason About Ethics*, ed. Lee Wilkins and Renita Coleman (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2005), 100.

[58] Ibid, 103.

[59] Lee, "Lying to Tell the Truth," 109.

[60] Ibid, 112.

[61] Ibid, 112.

[62] Seow Ting Lee, "Predicting Tolerance of Journalistic Deception," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 20 (2005): 22-42, 29.

3.4.4 Insular Atmosphere

Although independence is a hallmark of all professions, journalists in particular expect to be protected from business realities[63] and shielded from criticism by supportive bosses.[64] Journalists are not immune to pressures to conform to organizational norms, as Breed documented in a seminal 1955 essay,[65] although they may be unaware of how endemic conformity is within the newsroom, as Gans learned.[66] They are cognizant of the influence that declining revenue streams have on newsroom resources, especially as staff sizes are reduced. Yet newsrooms embrace an ideology that argues their democracy-promoting mission is worthy of the full support of the business operations even as journalists argue they must be removed from the market pressures that define most companies, including newspapers. This ideology fosters an insular atmosphere.

The value of autonomy surfaced in a longitudinal study by Gade and Perry of change efforts by former *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* Editor Cole C. Campbell.[67] They found journalists who initially embraced the notion of switching reporters from individual beats to teams rejected the idea because "the system provided less individual autonomy."[68] The researchers concluded, "It appears an important question is whether the newsroom culture – rooted in individualism that values personal resourcefulness, skill, and creativity as

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[63] W. Davis Merritt, *Knightfall: Knight Ridder and How the Erosion of Newspaper Journalism is Putting Democracy at Risk* (New York: AMACOM, 2005), 107.

[64] For example, fired *Miami Herald* reporter Jim DeFede said, "The role of a publisher should be to back your reporters, to be supportive of the people you're in the trenches with." Transcript from the Oct. 6, 2006, *On the Media* broadcast on WNYC, http://www.onthemedia.org/transcripts/transcripts_100606_d.html.

[65] Warren Breed, "Social Control in the Newsroom: A Functional Analysis," *Social Forces* 33 (1955): 326-335.

[66] Gans, *Deciding What's News,* 98.

[67] Peter J. Gade and Earnest L. Perry, "Changing the Newsroom Culture: A Four-Year Case Study of Organizational Development at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 80 (2003): 327-347.

[68] Ibid, 339.

measures of professionalism – lends itself to the collaborative demands of a team-based structure."[69] Gade subsequently took a broader look at change efforts at the *Post-Dispatch* and 17 other newsrooms in a study that revealed employees tend to find less to cheer in such initiatives than management does.[70] Both studies reinforced the value journalists place on autonomy. Kovach and Rosenstiel, in defining journalism's nine core principles, cite independence twice: separation from all outside influences and allowing each practitioner to follow his or her conscience.[71] Individual autonomy trumps organizational definitions of ethical behavior. Journalists proclaim their "first loyalty is to citizens,"[72] yet reject attempts to bring audience research into the newsroom because "marketers threaten the journalists' autonomy."[73]

When autonomy is privileged, lone wolves flourish in an atmosphere that encourages an environment of trust without demanding verification. Most newspapers lack the staff, time or desire to engage in pre-publication fact checking. Even as he argued that a spate of ethical miscues suggest a need for "prosecutorial editing" of reporters' copy before publication, Clark acknowledged that respected journalists contend such intrusive measures violate the mutual trust that allows reporters and editors to do their best work.[74] Tuchman found the collegiality norm so strong that front-page space was apportioned evenly among various departments of the "Seaboard City Daily" she

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[69] Ibid, 339.

[70] Peter J. Gade, "Newspapers and Organizational Development: Management and Journalist Perceptions of Newsroom Cultural Change," *Journalism & Communication Monographs* 6 (2004) 3-55.

[71] Kovach and Rosenstiel, *Elements of Journalism*, chapters five and 10.

[72] Ibid, 51.

[73] Jack Fuller, *News Values: Ideas For an Information Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 115.

[74] Roy Peter Clark, "Pee in the Cup," *Poynter Institute*, http://poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=64685.

studied.[75] To preserve collegiality, editors don't make reporters produce their notes and copy editors don't routinely call people cited in news stories to see if they were quoted correctly. Trust without verification reduces the chances of potential plagiarists getting caught. Moreover, plagiarists benefit from the fact that newspapers are notorious about acknowledging error. Newspapers "take days to admit error"[76] and are reluctant to admit blame even when a story goes dreadfully awry. After the *New York Times* in 1991 uncharacteristically published the victim's name when a Kennedy family member was charged with rape – and reported she "had a little wild streak" – the chastised paper's management concluded that although the reporting was bad, no one had done anything wrong.[77] Newspapers are loath to admit mistakes because "no journalist ever got a raise for saying, 'I got it wrong.' The whole incentive structure encourages journalists to deny or otherwise obfuscate the mistakes and miscues they and their publications commit."[78] By trusting, rather than inspecting, and by defaulting to denial when errors are alleged, newsroom culture can conceal plagiarism behavior.

Adding to the insular atmosphere is the tendency to treat journalists as monastic keepers of the flame. "The establishment of journalists as a kind of priesthood has introduced an element of insufferable self-righteousness in newsrooms that has aggravated the journalists' natural inclination to see themselves as living in a world apart from ordinary, mercenary concerns," Fuller wrote.[79] Times Mirror brought in outsider Mark Willes in 1995 to run the *Los Angeles Times* because the industry was seen as

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[75] Gaye Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1978), 37.

[76] Kurtz, *Media Circus*, 121.

[77] Diamond, *Behind the Times*, 8.

[78] Jack Shafer, "Having Climbed Out Onto a Limb that Cracks …" *Slate*, http://www.slate.com/id/2151507.

[79] Fuller, *News Values*, 200.

"hogtied with ancient liturgy" and beset by "sanctimony."[80] The press is the only business mentioned in the U.S. Constitution, which gives it a unique obligation to enable democracy.[81] Although newspapers serve an important role in society, the quasi-religious terminology and tone can reflect a sense of entitlement and a dangerous separation from worldly concerns.

3.4.5 Self-Policing Profession

Unlike professions such as law, medicine and accounting, U.S. journalism lacks licensing requirements for practitioners, an explicit and universally accepted ethics code, or a standards board to sanction offenders. That is not to say that newspapers avoid accountability or public inspection. In the aftermath of the Jayson Blair and Jack Kelley cases, their employers invited outsiders to help evaluate the episodes and recommend changes, and each made portions of their reports public. One of the recommendations the *New York Times* followed was to hire a public editor who is given uncensored space in the paper to critique it,[82] and 29 U.S. newspapers have an ombudsman who fills a similar role.[83] Yet a study of newspapers with ombudsmen found they had little influence over the attitudes of practitioners.[84] Meyers argued that ombudsmen cannot be effective unless

[80] William Prochnau, "Down and Out in L.A.," in *Leaving Readers Behind: The Age of Corporate Newspapering*, ed. Gene Roberts, Thomas Kunkel and Charles Layton (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2001), 200.

[81] Kovach and Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism*, 17.

[82] Columns are archived at http://www.nytimes.com/top/opinion/thepubliceditor/index.html.

[83] Organization of News Ombudsmen, http://www.newsombudsmen.org.

[84] David Pritchard, "The Impact of Newspaper Ombudsmen on Journalists' Attitudes, *Journalism Quarterly* 70 (1993): 77-86, 85.

they are outsiders with "real authority to reward and discipline,"[85] a level of authority that does not seem to exist at any American newspaper. Zelizer said the notion that journalists are "capable of self-correction" is dangerous because "journalism presents itself as one of the few institutions in our society that have both a right to self-correct and no obligation to engage other institutional voices in shaping that corrective."[86] Even when outsiders are brought in, they may serve to reinforce the status quo. The *Times's* internal report after the Blair case noted how external evaluators marveled that Blair could "get past one of the most able and sophisticated newspaper editing networks in the world."[87] Resistance to scrutiny is partly a matter of principle: allowing external control of journalism could harm its watchdog role.[88] Still, a self-policing system not exposed to the sanitizing sunlight of external scrutiny can allow mildew to grow. It is not unlike police agencies that investigate complaints against themselves, an inherently flawed process that impedes outside scrutiny and reifies the status quo.

In summary, newsroom culture can be a pivotal influence on individual behavior. The environment is defined by competitive pressure, intensified by up-or-out hierarchies, that tolerates and facilitates a measure of deception in normative practice. Newsrooms encourage not just task autonomy but a priestly separation that, when coupled with the self-policing nature of the profession and the norm of collegiality, creates a parochial defensiveness that thwarts plagiarism detection. This culture may encourage journalists to

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[85] Christopher Meyers, "Creating an Effective Newspaper Ombudsman Position," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 15 (2000): 248-256, 249.

[86] Barbie Zelizer, "Journalism in the Mirror: Public Self-Evaluation in Journalism," *The Nation*, Feb. 17, 1967, 10.

[87] "Report of the Committee on Safeguarding the Integrity of Our Journalism ('The Siegal Committee')," *New York Times* document July 28, 2003, 5, www.nytco.com/pdf/committeereport.pdf.

[88] Meyers, "Newspaper Ombudsman Position," 251.

either blur already murky distinctions between borrowing and plagiarism, or hurdle those boundaries knowing editors would rather get the story wrong than get it last.

3.5 Workplace Deviance

Journalism studies of workplace ethics generally explore the ramifications of newsgathering decisions and do not explore individual motivations or situational determinants involved in unethical behavior. However, organizational behavior researchers have studied what is broadly called workplace deviance. Robinson and Bennett define deviance "as voluntary behavior that violates significant organizational norms and in so doing threatens the well-being of an organization, its members, or both."[89] The core elements of the definition are that the behavior is voluntary, that it violates standards that are understood if not explicit, and that the violation has consequences. In creating a typology of deviance, Robinson and Bennett described a continuum of behaviors such as leaving work early, gossiping, accepting kickbacks and stealing from co-workers along two axes: importance (major or minor) and the target (organizational or interpersonal).[90] In a subsequent essay, the pair concluded that individual decisions to commit deviance are stimulated in some way. "We posit that any given specific deviant act can be traced back to a provoking incident, as perceived by the deviant actor; be it a perceived unfair decision, a financial crisis, a policy dispute or other events(s)."[91] Not all employees respond to provoking incidents equally; a study of four

[89] Sandra L. Robinson and Rebecca J. Bennett, "A Typology of Deviance Workplace Behaviors: A Multidimensional Scaling Study," *Academy of Management Journal* 38 (1995): 555-572, 556.

[90] Ibid, 565.

[91] Sandra L. Robinson and Rebecca J. Bennett, "Workplace Deviance: Its Definitions, Its Manifestations, and Its Causes," in *Research on Negotiation in Organizations*, Vol. 6, ed. Roy J. Lewicki, Robert J. Bies and Blair H. Sheppard (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1997), 14.

groups of employees showed that "employees with certain personality traits are less likely to exhibit deviant behavior, even when provoked."[92] Yet it is also clear that an analysis of deviant behavior cannot focus on individual factors alone. A study asking respondents whether they would accept kickbacks or withhold information from a customer revealed that employee decisions are influenced by the interplay between individual and organizational factors such as rewards and sanctions.[93] Another study showed that situational variables such as competitive pressure are stronger predictors than individual factors such as personality when testing for attitudes toward deviant behavior.[94] The ethical climate of the organization also can influence deviant behavior.[95]

Milgram famously illustrated the power of outside influences on individual choices to engage in deviant behavior when he tested the willingness of ordinary people to follow orders to "shock" a victim-actor who cried out in "pain." He recruited volunteers from New Haven, Connecticut, from a variety of backgrounds. He found that individuals were willing, as often as 65 percent of the time, to administer increasing levels of electricity, showing that the propensity to engage in deviant behavior crosses gender and occupational boundaries. But subjects were less willing to administer the shocks when they could see the person, or when the individual was physically close to

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[92] Amy E. Colbert, Michael K. Mount, James K. Harter, L.A. Witt and Murray R. Barrick, "Interactive Effects of Personality and Perceptions of the Work Situation on Workplace Deviance," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 89 (2004): 599-609, 606.

[93] Linda Klebe Treviño and Stuart A. Youngblood, "Bad Apples in Bad Barrels: A Causal Analysis of Ethical Decision-Making Behavior," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 75 (1990): 378-385, 384.

[94] Michael D. Mumford, Mary Shane Connelly, Whitney B. Helton, Jill M. Strange and Holly K. Osburn, "On the Construct Validity of Integrity Tests: Individual and Situational Factors as Predictors of Test Performance," *International Journal of Selection and Assessment* 9 (2001): 240-257.

[95] Dane K. Peterson, "Deviant Workplace Behavior and the Organization's Ethical Climate," *Journal of Business and Psychology* 17 (2002): 47-61, 57.

them, affirming the power of circumstances to influence behavior.[96] Another study showed how deceptive sales practices became ingrained in a life insurance company when the firm created intense pressure to boost sales and promoted agents who broke the rules.[97] The influence of external determinants on workplace deviance permeates the experience of an agricultural economist who turned his hobby of buying bagels for the office into a business, as described in *Freakonomics*. The economist found theft from the kitty progressively declined when he switched from an open basket, to a coffee can with a money slot in the plastic lid, to plywood boxes. He also found that bagel theft varied inversely with the size of the office and was worse when the weather was bad. Theft dropped after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, but increased each Christmas week.[98] A more formal study documented that organizational policies, the sense of pride instilled in employees and the overall culture significantly influenced the willingness of people to engage in workplace deviance.[99] Perceived injustice, especially over pay, also can stimulate deviance behaviors.[100] So can a short-term focus, particularly in cases in which an employee is close to meeting a deadline.[101]

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[96] Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).

[97] Tammy L. MacLean, "Thick as Thieves: A Social Embeddedness Model of Rule Breaking in Organizations," *Business & Society* 40 (2001): 167-196.

[98] Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner, *Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 45-49.

[99] Roy J. Lewicki, Timothy Poland, John W. Minton and Blair H. Sheppard, "Dishonesty as Deviance: A Typology of Workplace Dishonesty and Contributing Factors," in *Research on Negotiation in Organizations*, Vol. 6, ed. Roy J. Lewicki, Robert J. Bies and Blair H. Sheppard (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1997) 53-86.

[100] Kibeom Lee and Natalie J. Allen, "Organizational Citizenship Behavior and Workplace Deviance: The Role of Affect and Cognitions," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 87 (2002): 131-142, 139.

[101] Jennifer Dunn and Maurice E. Schweitzer, "When Good Employees Make Unethical Decisions," in *Managing Organizational Deviance*, ed. Roland E. Kidwell Jr. and Christopher L. Martin (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005), 39-60, 55.

Situational influences can overpower individual desires to do the right thing. Batson, who studies what he calls "moral hypocrisy," used experiments involving privately flipping a coin and a mirror to learn that people were especially willing to engage in deception when the moral standards were unclear. Rather than change their behavior when confronted with a mirror, subjects changed the standards to fit their behavior so they could continue to appear moral, at least to themselves.[102] Gioia reflected on his involvement in Ford Motor Co.'s decision to produce Pinto automobiles without protecting their gasoline tanks from rear-end collisions that could cause ruptures and fires. The tanks could have been protected with a relatively inexpensive fix, and Gioia was the recall coordinator. But the original design complied with the law and standard automotive operating procedures at the time. Under time and workload pressures, Gioia stuck to established schemes and automatically rejected warning signs without thinking. Though emotionally affected by seeing a burned Pinto, he dropped his concerns when confronted by the so-what responses of co-workers. "Although we might hope that people in charge of important decisions like vehicle safety recalls might engage in active, logical analysis and consider the subtleties in the many different situations they face, the context of the decisions and their necessary reliance on schematic processing tends to preclude such consideration."[103]

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[102] C. Daniel Batson, Elizabeth R. Thompson, Greg Seuferling, Heather Whitney, and Jon A. Strongman, "Moral Hypocrisy: Appearing Moral to Oneself Without Being So," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 77 (1999): 525-537.

[103] Dennis A. Gioia, "Pinto Fires and Personal Ethics: A Script Analysis of Missed Opportunities," *Journal of Business Ethics* 11 (1992): 379-389, 388.

CHAPTER 4: PLAGIARISM CASES

4.1 Research Questions

The best way to analyze newspaper plagiarism is to evaluate behavior. Opinion surveys have been conducted among editors and the public[1] regarding plagiarism, but such surveys can only measure perceptions. An analysis of actual events can provide a clearer picture of newspaper plagiarism. To allow such an analysis, information about all known plagiarism cases at U.S. daily newspapers during a 10-year period, from 1997 to 2006, was collected, evaluated and coded using content analysis techniques described below. The data were collected to address questions professionals have raised for years, and with greater urgency in the wake of Jayson Blair.

RQ1: Is there anything about accused plagiarists that distinguishes them from other journalists, either by experience level or job held or some other characteristic?

RQ2: Is there anything about the newspapers that employ accused plagiarists that distinguishes them from the rest of the industry?

RQ3: How do newspapers tend to respond to plagiarism behavior?

RQ4: Has the Jayson Blair case affected the frequency of plagiarism or how it is treated?

[1] Journalists and the public disagree about the prevalence of plagiarism. A 1998 Freedom Forum Media Studies Center survey revealed that 76 percent of adults believe journalists use plagiarized material "sometimes" or "often." (Michael White, "Survey: Public Thinks Journalists Often Guilty of Ethical Lapses," *Associated Press*, Oct. 16, 1998.) However, a 2004 Pew Research Center survey showed journalists believe plagiarism is an infrequent event. ("Bottom-Line Pressures Now Hurting Coverage, Say Journalists," *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press*, May 23, 2004, http://people-press.org/reports.)

4.2 Methodology and Limitations

Every plagiarism case that could be found for a 10-year period, from 1997 through 2006, involving full-time professional journalists at U.S. daily newspapers was captured, for a total of 76 cases. This is an attempt at a census, rather than a representative sample, because a census provides a more accurate picture of behavior. A census also offers a data set rarely found in studies of unethical behavior or workplace deviance, which usually rely on surveys to estimate relative frequency based on perceptions of behavior as opposed to documentation of actual cases.[2] Because of the breadth of the population from which a census is drawn – some 1,450 daily newspapers[3] employing about 55,000 journalists[4] – electronic databases are critical. Such databases were not widely employed until the late 1990s, inhibiting efforts to extend the census beyond 10 years.

Other limitations were necessitated by the purpose of the research, to evaluate plagiarism by professional newspaper journalists. The study was limited to full-time employees because newspapers are most heavily invested in those workers, and an evaluation of full-timers would more accurately reflect how newspapers respond to plagiarism cases. Therefore, cases involving part-timers, stringers, correspondents, free-lancers or college interns were excluded. Similarly, the study was limited to cases arising

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[2] For example: Kibeom Lee and Natalie J. Allen, "Organizational Citizenship Behavior and Workplace Deviance: The Role of Affect and Cognitions," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87 (2002): 131-142 asked nurses to pick a co-worker who could observe behavior. Rebecca J. Bennett and Sandra L. Robinson, "Development of a Measure of Workplace Deviance," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 85 (2000): 349-360 asked MBA students to self-report frequency of deviant behavior. Linda Klebe Treviño and Gary R. Weaver, "Organizational Justice and Ethics Program 'Follow-Through': Influences on Employees' Harmful and Helpful Behavior," *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 11 (2001): 651-671 relies on an employee survey measuring relative frequency ("never," "rarely," etc.) of observed unethical behavior.

[3] Newspaper Association of America, www.naa.org/info/facts04/dailynewspapers.html.

[4] American Society of Newspaper Editors, www.asne.org.

at daily (published at least five days a week) newspapers because those are most likely to employ professionals who adhere to ethical norms that prohibit plagiarism. While many weekly newspapers employ serious and dedicated professionals, there is greater variance in this category in adopting ethical norms such as those promulgated by the Society of Professional Journalists, given size limitations that may require the editor to also serve as the advertising manager. College newspapers were excluded because they often serve as learning laboratories. The study only scrutinized cases at U.S. dailies; it did not includes instances in which Canadian newspapers took from U.S. newspapers or episodes in which U.S. newspaper journalists were accused of plagiarizing in a non-newspaper venue such as a book or magazine.

The evaluation was limited to plagiarism and excluded fabrication. That means prominent cases such as Patricia Smith of the *Boston Globe* in 1998[5] and Pulitzer-Prize winner Diana Griego Erwin at the *Sacramento Bee* in 2005[6] are excluded from this analysis because those involved only fabrication. However, cases that involved both fabrication and plagiarism, such as Blair and *USA Today's* Jack Kelley, were included, though analysis was limited to plagiarism. The distinction between fabrication and plagiarism also means that cases such as Smith's are separated from fellow *Boston Globe* columnist Mike Barnicle, even though the newspaper's quick firing of Smith and initial embrace of Barnicle resulted in a national discussion of an appearance of a double standard and the two tend to get linked together in journalistic lore. For this study, Smith and Barnicle are distinct cases, and only Barnicle's involves plagiarism.

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[5] J.M. Lawrence, "Globe Columnist Resigns for Fabricating People, Quotes," *Boston Herald*, June 19, 1998.

[6] Rick Rodriguez, "Griego Erwin Resigns Amid Internal Inquiry Into Her Columns," *Sacramento Bee*, May 12, 2005.

Several databases were searched to find plagiarism cases. Among the more consistent sources of plagiarism information since Blair is the Web site compiled by Jim Romenesko.[7] Romenesko created his site as a hobby in May 1999 and became part of the Poynter Institute in October 1999.[8] Other Web sites have joined in the fray in the past couple of years, with one deciphering some newspaper corrections[9] and two listing some plagiarism cases.[10] Archives of industry trade magazines *Editor & Publisher*, *American Journalism Review, Quill* and *Columbia Journalism Review* were mined for all articles published about plagiarism during the 10-year period studied. The online magazine *Slate*, which sometimes writes about newspaper plagiarism, also was searched. Only two media writers have written much about plagiarism cases during that period: Howard Kurtz of the *Washington Post* and David Shaw of the *Los Angeles Times*,[11] and Nexis archives of their published work were searched for cases. Associated Press stories about plagiarism from 1997 through 2006 also were searched.

Despite the detailed search, three limitations preclude any assertion that the list compiled is complete. The first is that capturing all newspaper stories involving variations of the word "plagiarism"[12] in Nexis would produce an impractically large amount of material, several hundred thousand stories.[13] The second limitation is that the

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[7] www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=45

[8] Lori Robertson, "The Romenesko Factor," *American Journalism Review*, September 2000, 28-31.

[9] http://www.regrettheerror.com.

[10] http://famousplagiarists.com; http://catalog.freedomforum.org/FFlib/JournalistScandals.htm

[11] Shaw died Aug. 1, 2005. Jon Thurber, "David Shaw, 62; Prize-Winning Times Writer Forged New Standards for Media Criticism," *Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 2, 2005.

[12] In Nexis, the exclamation point on the search term "plagiary!" captures related words such as plagiarism, plagiarizing and plagiarizer.

[13] A Nexis search of "plagiary!" in 2006 for five sample papers, the *Baltimore Sun*, *Sacramento Bee*, *Denver Post*, *Los Angeles Times* and *Chicago Tribune*, netted 168 stories, or an average of 33.6. If that average were to hold for 10 years across 1,450 daily newspapers, the result would be 487,200 stories.

term "plagiarism" is not exhaustive because many stories use synonyms such as "copy," "pinch" and "borrow." Adding those synonyms to the search terms would exponentially increase the material to be sifted. The third is that the cases had to have become public in some way. This excludes most cases in which the plagiarism was caught internally before publication, because newspapers usually do not disclose errors caught during the editing process.[14] It also may exclude cases from newspapers that choose not to disclose plagiarism for reasons ranging from embarrassment to lawyer-imposed prohibitions on revealing personnel actions – although some reticent newspapers have been "outed" by competitors, bloggers, city magazines and alternative newspapers. Yet while no search of plagiarism cases can be considered a complete census, the database created for this study is far more comprehensive than any available.

The unit of analysis was the individual. Each "case" involves one person, regardless of the number of stories that were plagiarized. In two instances, the name of the individual was not revealed. A list of all cases is in Appendix A.

Content analysis techniques were used to analyze the cases. A content analysis examines what is being communicated by the content under consideration[15] – in this case, information about plagiarism and how newspapers respond. Content analysis is a

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Further complicating such a search is that not all daily newspapers are in the Nexis or Factiva (Dow Jones) databases.

[14] Only one of the 76 cases compiled for this study involved an unpublished story: in 1999 at the *Indianapolis Star and News*. The newspaper published a story Aug. 21, 1999, announcing it was suspending television writer Steve Hall for submitting a plagiarized story that was caught before publication. Two weeks later, after finding plagiarism in previously published stories, the paper fired Hall. "Indianapolis Star Columnist Accused of Plagiarism and Fired," *Associated Press*, Sept. 8, 1999.

[15] Guido H. Stempel III, "Content Analysis," in *Mass Communication Research and Theory*, ed. Guido H. Stempel III, David H. Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit (Boston: Pearson, 2003), 209.

systematic approach to quantifying communication.[16] Variables were identified, such as the department in which the journalist worked: features, news, opinion, sports, etc. Those identifiers were labeled (features = 1, news = 2, etc.) and entered into Version 13 of the industry-standard computer program SPSS for statistical analysis. Identifying variables for a codebook is an evolutionary process. For example, midway through the research, gender unexpectedly emerged as a potential distinguishing factor and a gender variable was added to the codebook. Later, after it became apparent that corrections seem to avoid using the word "plagiarism," cases were coded for the terminology used in corrections. The data were evaluated in terms of the research questions posed, as well as examined inductively, to "find a general pattern from the empirical particulars."[17] The final codebook is listed in Appendix B. Intercoder reliability, a measure of how closely content coders agree in their evaluation of data, is not an issue in this study because only one person, the researcher, coded the data, and the only content open to interpretation involved a measure of relative severity.[18] The level of significance for statistical analyses was $p = 0.05$.

Because the research involves cases that were made public in some manner, the study measures both plagiarism behavior and, for lack of a better term, transparency. In other words, the variables are confounded. This point will become critical later in evaluating the data.

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[16] Roger D. Wimmer and Joseph R. Dominick, *Mass Media Research: An Introduction,* 6th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2000), 136.

[17] Paula M. Poindexter and Maxwell E. McCombs, *Research in Mass Communication: A Practical Guide* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000), 341.

[18] Stempel, "Content Analysis," 216.

4.3 Unconventional Plagiarism

The 76 cases revealed that plagiarism is more than words; it can include images, as occurred in two cases. Another two cases dealt with reusing the author's own words, or what some consider self-plagiarism. Together, the four unconventional cases not only provide a more expansive conception of plagiarism, but also provide insight into the sometimes baffling and contradictory ways that newspapers respond to plagiarism.

The two cases of writers reusing their own words occurred within three months of each other, in 2004, at two large newspapers. The first case involved Mickey Herskowitz, a noted sports columnist at the *Houston Chronicle* and a prolific author.[19] Herskowitz had worked for more than 30 years at the *Houston Post* before coming to the *Houston Chronicle* in 1995 when the *Post* ceased publication.[20] In March 2004, Herskowitz took a column he had written in 1990 about basketball coach John Wooden for the *Houston Post* and republished it as a *Houston Chronicle* column. The *Chronicle* said the recycled column "contained little new information and many duplicative phrases." The newspaper also told its readers that it found additional examples of Herskowitz columns in the *Chronicle* that repeated "short passages" from his previous *Post* columns. The paper said this was not plagiarism, but was "bad form," and it suspended him for a month.[21]

The second case involved Octavio Roca, an arts and culture critic hired by the *Miami Herald* in 2003. Roca has written or co-authored three books[22] and reported for

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[19] According to publisher HarperCollins, he has co-authored autobiographies of President George W. Bush, longtime CBS anchor Dan Rather, sports broadcaster Howard Cosell, former baseball player Nolan Ryan and many others. http://www.harpercollins.com/authors/15448/Mickey_Herskowitz/index.aspx.

[20] "Editor's Note," *Houston Chronicle*, April 4, 2004, A2.

[21] "Sports Reporter Fired After Rerunning Work," *Quill*, June/July 2004, 63. (The headline is erroneous; the journalist was suspended, not fired.)

[22] Library of Congress catalog; Amazon.com.

the *Washington Times*, the *Washington Post* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*.[23] On July 4, 2004, the *Herald* announced it had fired Roca for copying from articles he had written for previous employers.[24] The *Herald* was scooped by a Miami alternative weekly, *New Times*, which reported about Roca's departure on July 1 and cited two paragraphs Roca had reused from the *San Francisco Chronicle*.[25] According to *Herald* editor Tom Fiedler, Roca said he had not committed plagiarism because he had used his own words and was like a college professor delivering the same lecture to the next semester's class. Fiedler rejected that argument and flipped Roca's analogy:

> A reporter is less akin to a professor than to a student who is assigned to research a subject and to return with a report. The lazy student who submits the same term paper to satisfy the requirements of different courses would certainly be flunked in both classes. Such "self plagiarism" violates the fundamental expectation that, in a learning environment, all work must be original.[26]

The offenses in the Herskowitz and Roca cases are identical: journalists reusing words they had written for a prior employer. But the editors defined it differently: one said it was plagiarism, and the other said it was not. The contradictory assessments of the editors in these two cases illustrate the lack of journalistic consensus in defining plagiarism. Unaddressed in either case is the fundamental issue of whether a writer is entitled to reuse his or her words. Fiedler's analogy of a student turning in the same paper to two different teachers would be appropriate only if Roca was trying to simultaneously submit the same story to two publications without informing the other, which was not the case here. Moreover, the newspaper is not a classroom. It is a business that asserts some degree of ownership over the words its employees produce. The *Herald* hired Roca

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[23] Nexis search.

[24] Tom Fiedler, "The Herald's Most Valuable Asset: Your Trust in Us," *Miami Herald*, July 4, 2004, 1L.

[25] "The Xerox Man," Miami *New Times*, July 1, 2004,

[26] Fiedler, "Herald's Most Valuable Asset."

because of his expertise in covering ballet and the arts, and Roca brought that expertise to writing about Mikhail Baryshnikov in similar ways for two newspapers. Presumably, the *Herald* would have had no beef with Roca if he had paraphrased himself, even though changing word order would be a fig leaf for self-copying and imply that a reporter is entitled to use his or her words only once for life. It is no wonder that Posner concluded that self-plagiarism is distinct from the usual forms of plagiarism and is seldom objectionable.[27]

Telling is Fiedler's use of the word "lazy," which may get to the root of what both editors found objectionable. Posner noted that historians and journalists denounce plagiarism "to reassure the public that their practitioners are serious diggers after truth whose efforts, a form of 'sweat equity,' deserve protection against copycats."[28] In the Herskowitz and Roca cases, the concern may not have been with the product, but with the degree of effort expended. Journalists writing the first draft of history have a hard time discerning what Watergate reporters Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward described as the "best obtainable version of the truth"[29] and therefore tend to exchange exertion for veracity. Journalists who reuse their own words are not so much guilty of plagiarism as they are of violating the professional ideology that hard work covers a multitude of sins.

The two cases of visual plagiarism captured by this study both occurred in 2005. The first involved a political cartoon drawn by David Simpson, a member of the Oklahoma Cartoonists Hall of Fame, and published by the *Tulsa World* on June 7.[30]

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[27] Richard A. Posner, *The Little Book of Plagiarism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007), 108.

[28] Ibid, 76.

[29] Alicia G. Shepard, *Woodward and Bernstein: Life in the Shadow of Watergate* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2007), 85.

[30] "World Cartoonist Loses Job After Plagiarism Investigation," *Tulsa World*, Nov. 11, 2005, A1.

Hartford Courant cartoonist Bob Englehart thought the Simpson cartoon similar to one he had published in the *Courant* 24 years earlier, and alerted his editors,[31] who did not inform a *Tulsa World* editor until two months later, in August.[32] Simpson's defense was, in essence, self-plagiarism: he said he found an unsigned copy of the cartoon in his files, from when he would have worked at a different newspaper,[33] and redrew it for the *World*.[34] He was told to write to Englehart and explain the error.[35] Englehart either did not receive such a letter or considered it inadequate, for in August he posted the two cartoons on a Web site for editorial cartoonists,[36] www.editorialcartoonists.com. Three months later, on Nov. 7, 2005, a *Tulsa World* reporter saw the cartoons on the Web site and the paper's publisher, Robert E. Lorton III, was notified. Lorton, who said he was not informed about the incident earlier, acted swiftly, suspending Simpson for a week and then firing him on Nov. 10.[37] The following day, *Editor & Publisher* reported on the incident and republished the two cartoons, shown below.[38]

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[31] Matt Eagan, "Tulsa Paper Fires Cartoonist; Says He Plagiarized 1981 Englehart Work," *Hartford Courant*, Nov. 12, 2005, B5.

[32] "World Cartoonist Loses Job," *Tulsa World*.

[33] He started at the *Tulsa Tribune* in 1977 and moved to the *Tulsa World* in 1992. "Simpson Cartoons in B'ville Exhibit," *Tulsa World*, Oct. 3, 1998.

[34] "World Cartoonist Loses Job," *Tulsa World*.

[35] Editorial, "No choice," *Tulsa World*, Nov. 12, 2005.

[36] Eagan, "Tulsa Paper Fires Cartoonist."

[37] "World Cartoonist Loses Job," *Tulsa World*.

[38] Dave Astor, "'Tulsa World' Fires Cartoonist for Plagiarism," *Editor & Publisher*, Nov. 11, 2005.

Illustration 1: 1981 Englehart Cartoon (top) and 2005 Simpson Cartoon

Although a comparison of the two cartoons shows clear copying, the incident raises questions about the nature of the offense and how newspapers respond to plagiarism accusations. For reasons not explained by the *Hartford Courant*, its editors waited two months to inform the *Tulsa World*, despite the fact that Englehart's "When Does Life Begin?" cartoon "hung in the hallways outside the editorial department at the *Courant* for years."[39] Perhaps the *Courant* editors were not as bothered by the plagiarism

[39] Eagan, "Tulsa Paper Fires Cartoonist."

as was Englehart, who later said if Simpson had been a reporter, "he would have been fired the next day."[40] The response of the *World* is equally puzzling; someone in authority decided that the offense merited nothing more than a letter of explanation to Englehart, only to have the publisher fire Simpson three months later. Finally, although Simpson does not use the word "plagiarism," he does not deny copying the cartoon. Instead, he thought the 24-year-old cartoon, which carried no signature, was something he had drawn previously – a defense management initially accepted. That another manager at the same newspaper would reach a different conclusion and fire him illustrates two important facets of plagiarism. First, newspapers differ widely on how they define and respond to plagiarism, and so do leaders at the same newspaper. Sanctions for similar offenses vary, reinforcing that plagiarism is a relative concept. Second, the case shows that victims help define plagiarism. When a *Courant* editor contacted a *World* editor two months after the duplication occurred, a letter was deemed sufficient. When the *Courant* cartoonist pushed the issue and aired his grievance online, the sanction became more severe.

The other case of visual plagiarism involves a cover of a newspaper section that looks like a cover produced by a weekly publication on the same story, about a local candy-making company. The original cover was from the Dec. 22, 2004, edition of *Style Weekly* of Richmond, Virginia. The reproduction appeared in the Metro Business section of the *Richmond (VA) Times-Dispatch* on Aug. 22, 2005. The *Times-Dispatch* published the two covers in its Aug. 28, 2005, edition, as seen below, along with an explanation by Managing Editor Louise Seals.

[40] Ibid.

Illustration 2: Style Weekly (left) and Richmond Times-Dispatch

Seals began her column by focusing on the photograph. "You can see for yourself that our Metro Business cover photo Monday about a Richmond-area candy company copied the *Style Weekly* cover of December 22." She said the unnamed photographer (Cindy Blanchard) "had seen the Style photo while at the candy company, and was told of the similarity, but submitted the picture anyway as original work. That is visual plagiarism and that is why we have dismissed the photographer."[41]

Seals also said the unnamed summer intern who wrote the story (Tyra M. Vaughn) "should have received more guidance and editing on this story – a journalistic version of tough love, if you will – than she got." However, Seals does not reveal what the intern, who had since returned to college, had done wrong. She wrote only that she had spoken with the intern, who "said she learned a lot from this experience." Seals wrote, "the editing was cursory throughout, from the photo editing to the copy editing," but did not elaborate. Seals tipped her hand by saying the paper was "reassessing the practice of handing out a clipping of an entire article as background for an assignment." Evidently an editor at the *Times-Dispatch* handed a copy of the *Style Weekly* piece to the

[41] Louise Seals, "Ethics Case: We Erred, and Now We Are Taking Action," *Richmond (VA) Times-Dispatch*, Aug. 28, 2005, E4.

intern when assigning the story, and the intern borrowed so heavily from the article that "historical background was unusually detailed for this type of article." Seals also wrote that during a newsroom discussion about the incident, a staffer questioned, "Is there such a thing as visual plagiarism?"[42]

What Seals did not discuss in her column was the editing process that led to the cover design or why the photographer was singled out for disciplinary action. Photographers at the *Times-Dispatch* do not choose the photos that appear on the covers; section editors, copy editors and designers make those decisions. Other pictures of the candy company accompanied the story inside the section, and any of those photographs could have been used on the cover. Part of what makes the covers similar is the headline – "Sweet Return" for one and "A Sweet Return" for the other. But copy editors and designers, not photographers, write headlines. Further, a photographer who takes a close-up picture of candy has a limited range of options. A seamless white background is commonly used for taking pictures of products or food in newspaper photo studios. The white background also provides a backdrop for designers to overlay headlines or other graphic elements. It is not surprising that a designer would choose such a photo to use for a cover illustration. But Seals made no reference to who selected the photograph or who designed the cover to look like the one in *Style Weekly*. Her objection is to cover designs that look similar, yet the photographer is only one of several people involved in creating the elements that compose a cover design. A designer using the same photograph could have changed the dimensions or scale to give it a different look. Even a different headline would have reduced the similarities. Yet Seals focused her attention on the photographer

[42] Ibid.

who submitted pictures that someone else chose to use. In her column, Seals justified the firing by saying the photographer had seen the *Style Weekly* cover. However, she also admitted that an assigning editor saw the same cover and gave it to the intern to use as background. So at least three people saw the *Style Weekly* cover and acted to "copy" the story. The fact that only the photographer was disciplined, while others who saw the cover and the designers who made them look the same escaped sanctions, implies that undisclosed factors beyond "visual plagiarism" were at work in this case. At a minimum, the response reflects paradigm repair theory: to fix an embarrassing situation, find a scapegoat, and ignore the process.

Even if the photographer had been solely responsible for the similar covers, the incident raises definitional questions about visual plagiarism. Seals noted that a newsroom staffer asked whether visual plagiarism even exists. The staffer's question again demonstrates that plagiarism is nebulous. An I'll-know-it-when-I-see-it standard leaves staffers uncertain of when a violation would occur, and its elastic meaning hints that a visual plagiarism standard may be applied differently to photographers than to others involved in the editing and design process. Indeed, most page designers reject the claim that copying layouts is plagiarism. As one designer said about the copying displayed in the following comparison posted on a Web site for newspaper designers, "I've borrowed ideas and made them my own and I've had my ideas borrowed. It's a reality of this business."[43] In addition to the same Statue of Liberty graphic, the following pages both highlight the headline word "legally" in red ink and display the text in a similar graphical format.

[43] Comment by Dick Dork April 15, 2006, www.newsdesigner.com/archives/002516.php.

Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Atlanta, Ga., 4-2-06

Daily Breeze, Torrance, Calif., 4-14-06

Illustration 3: Two Similar Front Pages, From NewsDesigner.com

The fundamental question raised by the Richmond case is whether what's being plagiarized is an image – or an idea. The cover photographs are comparable but not identical. They do, however, reflect a similar idea: a close-up of food on a white background. If it's an image that's being copied, the photographer could assert that the candies in the two pictures were moved around in the same way that writers move words around to avoid plagiarism. If it's an idea that's being copied, the newspaper could admit the entire story was poached. Newspapers, however, have been historically reluctant to credit the sources of ideas, at least for stories, and certainly not for cover designs. Further, idea plagiarism is so endemic among designers and assignment editors that it is considered acceptable while apparently so rare among photographers and reporters that it merits dismissal. In other words, it's not a crime if everybody does it.

4.4 About Individuals

Research question one asks: "Is there anything about accused plagiarists that distinguishes them from other journalists, either by experience level or job held or some other characteristic?" From what could be learned about the individuals, the only distinguishing characteristic may be gender, which could be explained by the high levels of experience among the journalists in the study. If so, that would mean people accused of plagiarism do not differ from journalists as a whole.

The fundamental problem in trying to compare the characteristics of the 76 journalists captured by this study to the roughly 55,000 newspaper journalists is that population data are unknown. Industry and professional organizations do not gather data on how many newspaper journalists are reporters or work on editorial pages, for example. The most reliable academic poll of journalists, the *American Journalist* survey, most recently conducted in 2002 and published in 2007, does not ask respondents for variables measured in this study, such as job type, department worked, circulation size or experience levels, but looks more broadly at attitudes and workplace satisfaction.[44] Without that data, the 76 cases in the sample cannot be evaluated for whether the journalists in the study are statistically similar to or different from those of the larger population on the measured variables.

Nevertheless, the attributes of the people accused of plagiarism do not appear to be distinctive from the typical journalists encountered in a quarter-century of experience in U.S. daily newspapers. The portion of the study sample composed of reporters, about

[44] David H. Weaver, Randal A. Beam, Bonnie J. Brownlee, Paul S. Voakes and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, *The American Journalist in the 21st Century: U.S. News People at the Dawn of a New Millennium* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2007).

62 percent, is clearly larger than their allotment in the newsroom population, but that's a reflection of the nature of plagiarism, which usually involves words and therefore tends to exclude blocks of newsrooms such as copy editors. The 76 cases include one photograph and one editorial cartoon; the other 74 involved writing. About 16 percent of the 76 cases involve columnists, a portion that is probably a little higher than their allocation in the newsroom, but not dramatically so, given the multiple hats that journalists wear at many newspapers.

The ethnicity of those accused of plagiarism, at least to the extent race could be determined, is comparable to the newsroom as a whole. Eleven of the 76 cases, or 14.5 percent, involved journalists who were African American, Asian American or Native American. During the 10-year period covered by this study, 12.3 percent of U.S. daily newsrooms were non-white, according to an annual census,[45] and the percentage tends to be higher for larger newspaper, which produced a disproportionate share of plagiarism cases, as will be seen shortly. Race is a volatile issue for newspapers, which have struggled for years to raise minority employment proportionate to the U.S. workforce, and in the Blair episode, because of perceptions that affirmative action played a role in the *New York Times* hiring a reporter fresh out of college and in overlooking early accuracy concerns. Race, however, is not a factor in plagiarism, as the numbers show.

Journalists accused of plagiarism are generally experienced, and in some cases, quite decorated. Two won Pulitzer Prizes[46] shared with others at their newspaper: Alex Storozynski[47] for editorial writing at the *New York Daily News* in 1999 and Charlie

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[45] American Society of Newspaper Editors annual census, http://www.asne.org/index.cfm?id=5646.

[46] Search of names at http://www.pulitzer.org.

[47] James T. Madore, "Editor Quits Over Story Attributions," *Newsday*, June 18, 2005.

LeDuff[48] for a *New York Times* series on "How Race is Lived in America" in 2001. Mitch Albom of the *Detroit Free Press* writes a syndicated column and hosts a nationally distributed radio show, appears on ESPN and has written two best sellers, including *Tuesdays With Morrie*, which also became a television movie.[49] *Boston Globe* columnist Mike Barnicle was a local celebrity.[50] A majority of the journalists in this study have at least 10 years of experience and offer the expertise associated with such longevity. In short, those accused of plagiarism generally are not ignorant rookies or journalistic deadwood.

	Number	**Percent**
Features	18	23.7
News	35	46.1
Opinion	8	10.5
Photo	1	1.3
Sports	14	18.4
Total	76	100.0

Table 1: Distribution of Accused Plagiarists According to Department Worked

[48] "Corrections," *New York Times*, Dec. 15, 2003; Bruce Kelley, "Charlie LeDuff's Bay Area Secret," *San Francisco*, February 2004.

[49] David Zeman, Jeff Seidel, Jennifer Dixon and Tamara Audi, "Albom Probe Shows No Pattern of Deception," *Detroit Free Press*, May 16, 2005, A1.

[50] Herbert N. Foerstel, *From Watergate to Monicagate: Ten Controversies in Modern Journalism and Media* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2001), 165.

	Number	Percent
Cartoonist	1	1.3
Columnist	12	15.8
Critic	3	3.9
Editorialist	4	5.3
Manager	8	10.5
Photographer	1	1.3
Reporter	47	61.8
Total	76	100.0

Percents do not add up to 100 due to rounding

Table 2: Distribution of Accused Plagiarists According to Position

	Number	Percent
0-2 years	7	9.2
3-10 years	22	28.9
More than 10 years	44	57.9
Unknown	3	3.9
Total	76	100.0

Percents do not add up to 100 due to rounding

Table 3: Distribution of Accused Plagiarists According to Career Experience

The one variable that seems to distinguish the journalist accused of plagiarism is gender. Of the 75 journalists in this study whose gender could be determined – in one case, no name or gendered pronoun was used – 61 were men, or 81.3 percent. The American Society of Newspaper Editors, which tracks the gender of U.S. daily newsrooms, reported that during most of the period covered by this study, men held 62.8

percent of newsroom positions.[51] The difference, 18.5 percentage points, seems to be an important finding, perhaps indicating that men may be more willing than women to push the ethical envelope.

That conclusion, however, is challenged by an examination of how women are distributed within newsrooms. First, while women constitute about 37 percent of newsrooms, they are not equally dispersed among newsroom positions or departments. Women may be less likely to work as writers, who accounted for 74 of the 76 cases in this study. They also are relatively rare in sports departments, which contributed 14 cases to this study, and only one of those 14 was a female. Conversely, women are more likely to be working as copy editors, who did not contribute any cases to this study. Second, women are not equally distributed in newsrooms according to longevity. A majority of the journalists accused of plagiarism have more than 10 years of experience, and the 2002 *American Journalist* study shows a precipitous drop-off in the percentage of female journalists who are 35 or older. Although the *American Journalist* study does not segregate the numbers according to the medium, it is nevertheless significant that the portion of journalists who are women peak at 61 percent for those under 25, drop to 45 percent for those 25 to 34 years old, and sink to 25 percent for those 35 to 44. Not until age 55 does the percentage rise again into the low 30s.[52] Therefore, the gender difference identified in this study may actually be a proxy for experience. If so, the distinction fades away, as there is little difference between the 75 percent of middle-aged journalists (age 35-44) who are male and the 81 percent of accused plagiarists who are men.

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[51] From 1999 through 2006, men averaged 62.8 percent of newsroom employment at U.S. daily newspapers, ranging during that period from 62.3 to 63.1 percent. http://www.asne.org/index.cfm?id=5660.

[52] Weaver, et al, *American Journalist*, 11.

Attitude surveys affirm the absence of a distinction between the genders. Two studies of journalistic perceptions about ethical reporting issues concluded that gender is not a distinguishing characteristic among individuals. The *American Journalist* study asks respondents whether they approve of 10 questionable reporting practices such as posing as an employee or providing a false identity to gain access to inside information. Men and women responded similarly to each question, and any differences are statistically non-significant.[53] In a 2002 survey of Investigative Reporters and Editors members responding to a similar list of questionable reporting tactics, Lee found gender to be non-significant when examining individual characteristics.[54] If the sexes do not differ in how they view other ethical reporting practices, it seems likely they hold similar convictions about plagiarism.

Organizational behavior research does not offer much support for a gender-based differentiation toward ethics. Author Carol Gilligan stimulated considerable debate on the matter in 1982 when she published *In a Different Voice*, arguing that men view ethics from a justice orientation while women take an approach based on caring for other people.[55] A 2000 meta-analysis of 113 studies spawned in part by Gillgan's perspective found the effect sizes of the gender differences she postulated were too small to be significant – and, important for this discussion, showed that age moderates gender

[53] Ibid, 173, 192.

[54] Seow Ting Lee, "Predicting Tolerance of Journalistic Deception," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 20 (2005): 22-42, 29. Lee found that gender reached significance in a "mixed model" that eliminated several of the personal variables such as years of experience – and as noted earlier, gender may serve as a proxy for experience. Thus, only the results of the full personal model are reported here.

[55] Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1982).

differences in ethical orientation.[56] Age also mattered in a meta-analysis of 20,000 respondents to questionable business practices. Although women were more likely than men to see some business practices as unethical, the genders agreed 84 percent of the time, and remaining differences tended to moderate as researchers moved away from surveying college students and used more experienced workers, who agreed 91 percent of the time.[57] A study of 423 insurance agents found gender to be significant in responses to only one of four ethical scenarios, one involving discrimination – not a surprising finding given workplace discrimination that women historically have faced.[58] A study of 860 employees in the financial industry found no statistically significant difference between genders in weighing a wide range of dishonest behavior.[59]

Given the absence of data supporting a gender difference toward ethical issues among experienced workers, and the affirmation for the conceptualization that gender serves as a proxy for age, the numerical distinction found in this study may not be significant. What appears to be more likely is that journalists accused of plagiarism are not substantially different from the rest of the newsroom. Such a conclusion deflates conventional wisdom about plagiarism as a phenomenon that only involves individuals and corroborates the premise that a study of newspaper plagiarism should evaluate systemic influences.

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[56] Sara Jaffee and Janet Shibley Hyde, "Gender Differences in Moral Orientation: A Meta-Analysis," *Psychological Bulletin* 126 (2000): 703-726.

[57] George R. Franke, Deborah F. Crown, and Deborah F. Spake, "Gender Differences in Ethical Perceptions of Business Practices: A Social Role Theory Perspective," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 82 (1997): 920-934.

[58] Paul J. Serwinek, "Demographic & Related Differences in Ethical Views Among Small Businesses," *Journal of Business Ethics* 11 (1992): 555-566.

[59] Roy J. Lewicki, Timothy Poland, John W. Minton and Blair H. Sheppard, "Dishonesty as Deviance: A Typology of Workplace Dishonesty and Contributing Factors," in *Research on Negotiation in Organizations*, Vol. 6, ed. Roy J. Lewicki, Robert J. Bies and Blair H. Sheppard (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1997), 53-86, 70.

4.5 About Newspapers

Research question two asks: "Is there anything about the newspapers that employ accused plagiarists that distinguishes them from the rest of the industry?" The data reveal that larger newspapers have a disproportionate amount of plagiarism cases, a finding that may point to organizational influences.

The 76 cases captured in the study reflect a cross-section of American newspapers. They involve 56 different newspapers in 26 states and the District of Columbia. The papers range in circulation from about 6,000 to 2.2 million, the nation's largest, *USA Today*. Chains own most of the newspapers in the study, which is to be expected as three-fourths of total Sunday circulation is from chain-owned papers.[60] The mean circulation of the 56 different papers is about 301,000, which is considerably larger than the mean circulation of all U.S. dailies, about 38,000,[61] although larger newspapers have more journalists, and thus have a greater likelihood of being captured by a plagiarism study.

The most valid comparison involves controlling for the fact that larger newspapers have larger staffs, which can be done by sorting cases into circulation categories and contrasting cases with the number of journalists in those categories, as shown below. The four circulation categories are those used by the Newspaper Association of America. Circulation figures were based on fall 2006 numbers supplied by the Audit Bureau of Circulations for average daily circulation. The American Society of

[60] Concentrated in the 22 chains with combined daily circulation of at least 500,000, Project for Excellence in Journalism, http://www.journalism.org/node/918.

[61] Calculated from Newspaper Association of America 2004 statistics of total daily circulation of 55,185,351 divided by 1,456 newspapers. http://www.naa.org/info/facts04/circulation-daily.html.

Newspaper Editors, which conducts an annual survey of newsroom employment as part of its regular audit of diversity, uses comparable categories.[62] The data are displayed below in a table, then in a stacked column.

Circulation	Newsroom Employment	Column Pct	Plagiarism Cases	Column Pct
Under 50,000	20,534	37.5%	7	9.2%
50,000-100,000	7,884	14.4%	10	13.2%
100,001-250,000	11,414	20.8%	24	31.6%
Over 250,000	14,974	27.3%	35	46.1%
Total	54,809	100%	76	100%

Newsroom Employment: American Society of Newspaper Editors, 2005 Census.
Percentages in the plagiarism cases column do not add to 100 due to rounding.

Table 4: Distribution of Plagiarism Cases Compared to Newsroom Employment, By Circulation Category

[62] The ASNE splits the under-50,000 category into smaller divisions. To maintain comparability with the NAA circulation categories, the smaller divisions were added together to constitute the under-50,000 figure.

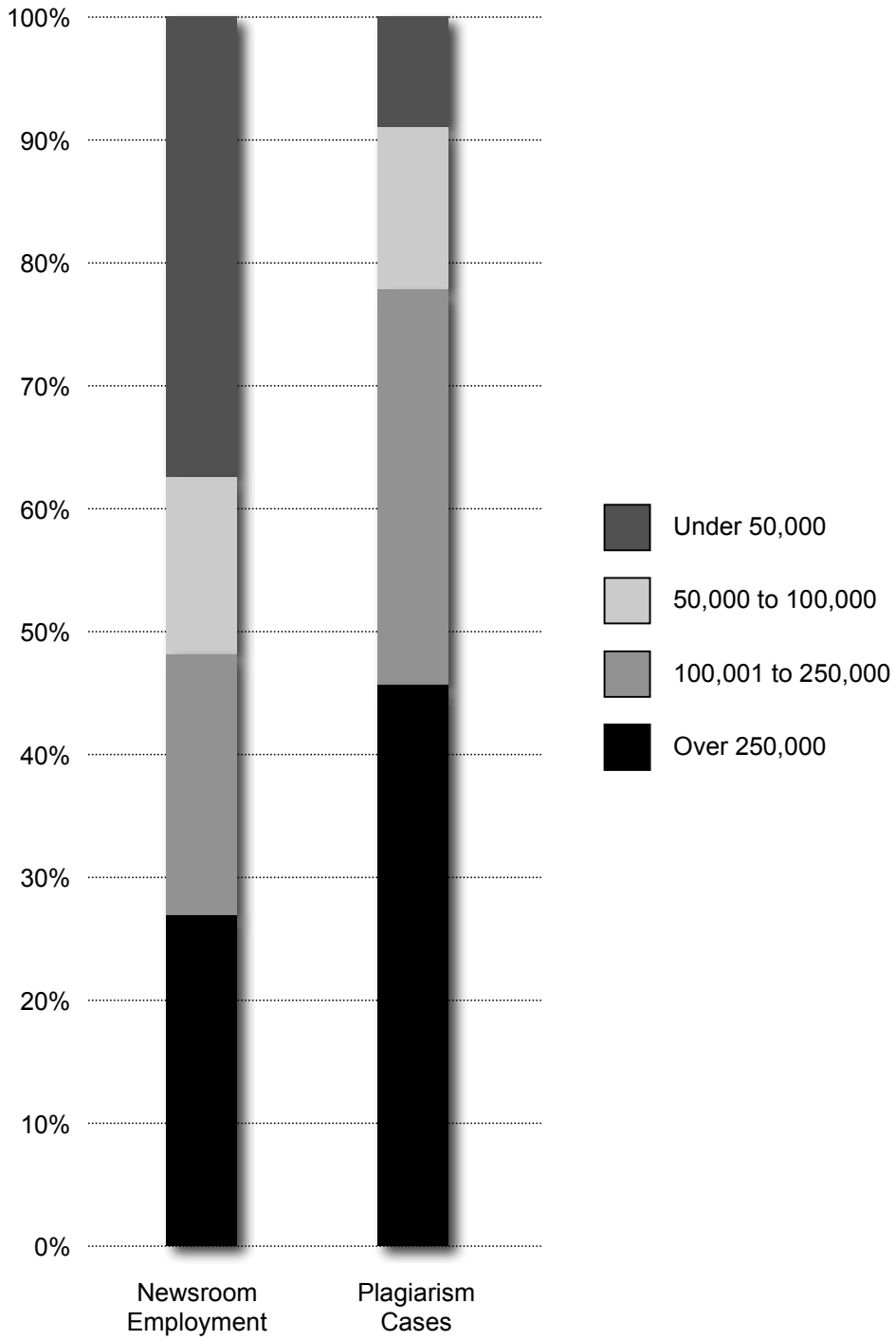

Figure 1: Stacked Column, Comparing Plagiarism Cases to Newsroom Employment

The data reveal that, even when controlling for the fact that larger newspapers have larger staffs, plagiarism cases occur disproportionately more often at the newspapers with circulations greater than 250,000, and disproportionately less often at newspapers

with circulations less than 50,000. Nearly half of the plagiarism cases occurred at the nation's largest newspapers, even though those papers have only about a quarter of U.S. newspaper journalists. Because of the enormous difference in range between the two data sets – nearly 55,000 versus 76 – the chi-square statistic doesn't apply. Nevertheless, as the stacked column visually represents, there appears to be a positive association between plagiarism behavior and newspaper size.

One explanation for why larger newspapers are associated with more plagiarism cases is because they are under more scrutiny by self-appointed external inspectors. The distribution of cases offers a clue. Of the 56 different newspapers, 13 have two cases each,[63] and the *Salt Lake Tribune* has three. The newspaper with the most cases, seven, is the *New York Times*, considered "the pinnacle of its field."[64] Although the Blair case demonstrates the *Times* is not immune to serial plagiarism and the intensely competitive atmosphere[65] it fosters can unwittingly encourage shortcuts, it is also likely that the *Times* is more closely watched than any other newspaper in America. On the Internet, a *Times Watch* Web site[66] is dedicated to scrutinizing the paper, *Regret the Error*[67] combs through *Times* corrections daily, *Romenesko*[68] examines it carefully and *Slate* media writer Jack Shafer writes about it more often than he does any other newspaper. It made news even

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[63] *Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Baltimore Sun, Boston Globe, Columbus Dispatch, Houston Chronicle, Macon (GA) Telegraph, New York Post, (Denver) Rocky Mountain News, Salt Lake Tribune, San Antonio Express-News, San Francisco Chronicle, St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and *USA Today*.

[64] Seth Mnookin, *Hard News: The Scandals at* The New York Times *and Their Meaning for American Media* (New York: Random House, 2004), xiii.

[65] Ibid, 3.

[66] www.timeswatch.org.

[67] www.regrettheerror.com.

[68] www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=45.

when its family owners switched personal investment advisers.[69] The unparalleled external scrutiny given the *Times* makes it more likely that plagiarism will be discovered and publicized.

Given the place of the *Times* atop the industry hierarchy, newspapers that believe the *Times* has ripped off their stories are more likely to complain than if a newspaper at the bottom of the food chain had been guilty. For example, when the *Chicago Tribune* believed two of its sentences appeared without attribution in the *Times* in 2003, its managers alerted the *Times* and received a correction, albeit about 10 weeks later.[70] Not long thereafter, the *San Antonio Express-News* noticed that its story on the mother of the last soldier missing in Iraq appeared to have been copied by the *Times*, prompting editor Robert Rivard to cry foul, which caught the attention of the *Washington Post's* Howard Kurtz – and, in turn, led to the unmasking of Jayson Blair.[71] That the *Times* has the most plagiarism cases in this study is not a reflection of the integrity of its journalists, but a manifestation of the inspection it receives.

Although no other newspaper may be examined like the *Times*, other larger papers find their plagiarism more likely to be aired publicly because they operate in larger cities that tend to have alternative weeklies or city magazines that often delight in exposing the foibles of the local media giant. In 1998, a media reporter at the *Riverfront Times* of St. Louis exposed a plagiarism case involving an editorial in the *St. Louis Post-*

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[69] Frank Ahrens, "N.Y. Times Family Leaves Morgan Stanley," *Washington Post*, Feb. 3, 2007, D2.

[70] Correction, *New York Times*, April 27, 2003, and appended in Nexis to the original story published Feb. 12, 2003.

[71] Howard Kurtz, "New York Times Story Gives Texas Paper Sense of Déjà Vu; San Antonio Editor Cites 'Damning' Similarity," *Washington Post*, April 30, 2003.

Dispatch, which "went into a defensive mode."[72] *Post-Dispatch* Editor Cole Campbell refused to call it plagiarism, although he did eventually acknowledge the episode in a column, without crediting the *Riverfront Times*.[73] Another alternative weekly, *Metro Times Detroit*, exposed a plagiarism case in 2000 at the *Detroit News*. The newspaper had been copying stories from a smaller newspaper.[74] Ten days after the *Metro Times Detroit* printed its story about the plagiarism, *Detroit News* Editor Mark Silverman finally owned up to the heist.[75] Another case of an alternative weekly outing plagiarism came at the *Kansas City Star*. In a concert review published May 13, 2002, *Star* reporter Glenn Rice had plagiarized from the *(Fort Lauderdale, FL) Sun-Sentinel.* The *Star* apparently addressed the plagiarism at the time, but did not correct the story or tell its readers, though it did remove the story from its archives. A year later, in the aftermath of the Blair case, *Star* Editor Mark Zieman wrote that the paper was posting its ethics policy on its Web site and welcomed complaints about violations.[76] That prompted alternative weekly writer C.J. Janovy at the Kansas City *Pitch* to write on July 3, 2003, about the plagiarism case the *Star* had chosen not to reveal.[77] As a result of the story in the *Pitch*, Rice resigned as treasurer of the National Association of Black Journalists, which formed the basis of an Associated Press story on July 8.[78] The next day, the *Star* finally divulged the

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[72] David Noack, "St. Louis Post-Dispatch Denies Plagiarism Charge," *Editor & Publisher*, Oct. 24, 1998, 8.

[73] Cole Campbell, "When Our Work Too Closely Tracks Another's," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Oct. 21, 1998, B6.

[74] Jack Lessenberry, "Crimes Low and High," *Metro Times Detroit*, Dec. 12, 2000,

[75] Mark Silverman, "Accuracy, Trust are Paramount," *Detroit News*, Dec. 22, 2000, 2A.

[76] Mark Zieman, "Readers Can Help Newspapers Stay on Ethical Path," *Kansas City Star*, June 22, 2003, B5.

[77] C.J. Janovy, "Copy Cat," *Pitch*, July 3, 2003.

[78] Margaret Stafford, "Kansas City Star Reporter Resigns as NABJ Treasurer After Being Disciplined for Plagiarism," *Associated Press*, July 8, 2003.

year-old plagiarism to its readers.[79] When asked why the paper did not disclose the plagiarism when it occurred, Zieman said simply, "Times change."[80] What he didn't say was that the alternative weekly had forced his hand.

Because they establish industry trends, larger newspapers also are carefully critiqued by industry watchdog magazines *American Journalism Review* and *Columbia Journalism Review*. Both magazines reported on apparent plagiarism committed in 1997 by one of New York's best-known gossip columnists, Cindy Adams of the *New York Post*, in taking material from a story posted on the *Playboy* Web site about the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing.[81] In 1998, *CJR* called attention to the "Curious Coincidences" of a piece by then-*Wall Street Journal* writer Daniel Costello with a book published the prior year. The *CJR* "dart" quoted from a letter by a *Wall Street Journal* lawyer denying that Costello had taken from the book.[82] It's doubtful the magazines would have written about the Adams or Costello cases if they had involved small newspapers.

Smaller newspapers receive less scrutiny than their big-city cousins, which may result in a relative dearth of publicly revealed episodes. It is possible that smaller newspapers encounter plagiarism at the same rate as do larger papers, but are either less likely to notice because fewer external watchdogs are conducting their own investigations or more willing to refrain from public admission. The reluctance of the *Kansas City Star* to divulge the Rice plagiarism is not confined to larger newspapers; unwillingness to admit error is firmly implanted in newsroom culture at all levels.

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[79] Eric Palmer, "Star Staffer Resigns Post as Association's Treasurer," *Kansas City Star*, July 9, 2003, B2.

[80] Howard Kurtz, "TV Wary of Problems That Keep Popping Up in Print," *Washington Post*, July 14, 2003, C1.

[81] Susan Revah, "Is There an Echo in Here?" *American Journalism Review*, May 1997, 9; Gloria Cooper, "Darts & Laurels," *Columbia Journalism Review*, July/August 1997.

[82] Gloria Cooper, "Darts & Laurels," *Columbia Journalism Review*, November/December 1998.

In addition to external scrutiny, story selection may account for some of the disproportionate number of plagiarism cases. Larger newspapers are more likely to cover the same stories than are smaller newspapers. For example, when the Facebook craze mentioned in Chapter 3 swept campuses, larger newspapers watching their peers and competitors felt compelled to produce "me-too" stories. Newspapers at the opposite end of the spectrum, those below 50,000 circulation, generally cover a story only if it impacts the local audience and sense no compulsion to "match" the Facebook story if there isn't a strong local angle. The stories covered by the smaller newspapers tend to be more exclusive and not easily copied, while larger newspapers are more likely to draw story ideas from a common well.

Further, larger newspapers have greater incentives to shun attribution, and thus be more vulnerable to plagiarism episodes. The hypercompetitive nature of larger newspapers fosters an environment in which journalists are reluctant to acknowledge their work was not entirely original. Some of that reluctance stems from professional pride among journalists cognizant of their newspaper's place in the industrial hierarchy and who would consider admission that a less prestigious news organization had the story first to be a personal failing. This is why, for example, the *Washington Post* does not acknowledge when it is scooped by the *Washington Times* or the *Washington Examiner*, or why the *New York Times* usually mentions *Newsday*, the *Daily News* or the *New York Post* only when writing about their internal operations. In addition, larger newspapers that operate in more competitive environments in either print or online have economic motivations to attribute less. If the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal* and *Washington Post* were to attribute all the times they followed each other's lead, they would fear

readers might cancel their print or online subscriptions.[83] Such economic incentives are not as acute at a smaller newspaper, whose audience is far more compact geographically and whose greatest competition may be a local radio or television station that freeloads on the newspaper's reporting.

Regardless of the cause, the statistical association between newspaper size and plagiarism behavior offers evidence of a systemic influence on newspaper plagiarism. The connection becomes more significant in the next section, which reveals that newspaper size may be a factor in how newspapers respond to plagiarism allegations.

4.6 Responding to Plagiarism

Research question three asks, "How do newspapers tend to respond to plagiarism behavior?" The short answer is: they tend to get rid of the person accused. But the data also show that sanctions vary according to circulation size. The data show that newspapers tend to call plagiarism by another name if the sanction is less than dismissal, suggesting a potential link between outcome and definition.

4.6.1 Severity and Sanctions Defined

In terms of severity, plagiarism varies in frequency and intensity. It can range in intensity from a few words to most of an article, and in frequency from a single occasion to repeated offenses. Within those boundaries, the 76 plagiarism cases seem to fall broadly into three categories of relative severity: limited, substantial and serial. Those three categories are defined below.

[83] Online, the *Wall Street Journal* is accessible only to fee-paying subscribers, the *Washington Post* is free and the *New York Times* is a hybrid. In print, only the *Journal* and the *Times* are available to New York residents while all three are available for home delivery in Washington, D.C.

Category	Definition
Limited	Roughly two paragraphs or less in a single story
Substantial	Two paragraphs or so in more than one story, or half or more of a single story
Serial	More than two paragraphs in three or more stories

Table 5: Tripartite Plagiarism Severity Categories

The following figure shows how those categories fit in a graphic representation of plagiarism along the axes of frequency and intensity.

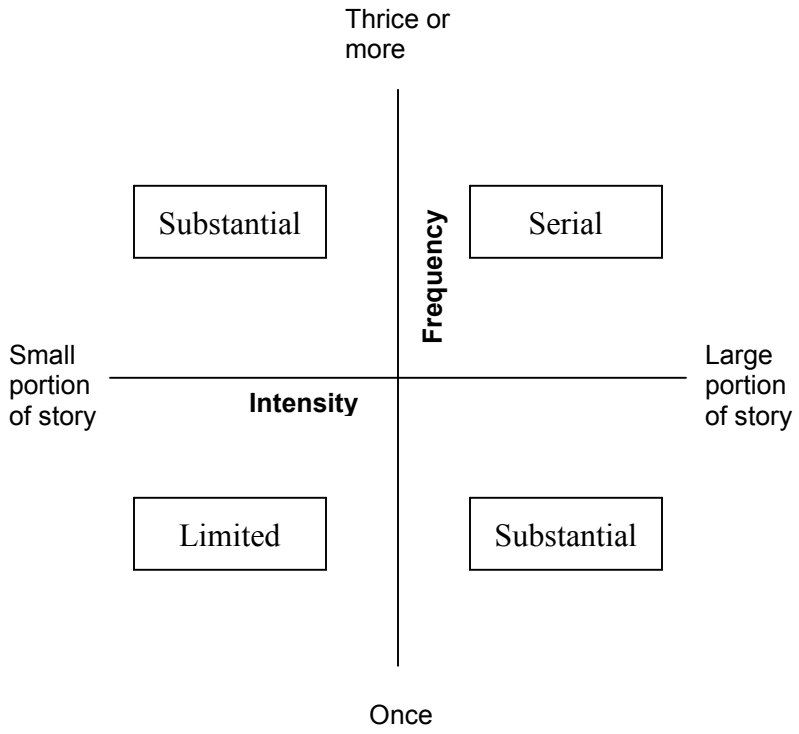

Figure 2: Plagiarism Severity Mapped Along Two Axes

Although sanctions applied varied greatly, they are nominal measurements best approached by creating a dichotomous variable: kept job or lost job. In many cases, no sanctions were applied. In cases in which a sanction was reported, they included reprimands, unpaid suspensions ranging from three days to four months, paid suspensions, loss of a byline, beat change, forced resignations and firings. Parsing

sanctions according to discrete units created a number of categories with only a single case, which thwarts statistical analysis. In addition, the sanctions could not be rank-ordered, for it is also difficult to assess the relative severity of a beat change or even whether it is a punishment. Even when sanctions fell along a quantifiable continuum, such as suspensions, the person still kept his or her job. On the other end of the spectrum, there is no practical difference between being fired and resigning under threat of dismissal. Therefore, the sanctions were grouped into two categories based on whether the person kept or lost the job.

The data show that in 43 of the 76 cases, or 56.6 percent, the individual involved lost his or her job. This figure only includes the cases in which the person left the job immediately. In a 2003 case, the sports editor at the 16,000-circulation daily in Bozeman, Montana, cribbed an entire column. He was given a three-day suspension because, the publisher wrote, the sports editor lacked "formal training."[84] But according to individuals in the newsroom, his peers rejected that excuse and shunned him.[85] Within two months, Tim Haas stopped writing for the *Bozeman (MT) Chronicle*.[86] In another instance, the newspaper's lawyer cautioned against firing a reporter for plagiarism because the newspaper lacked a formal ethics code and the union contract was silent on the matter. The editor told the reporter to find another job, which the reporter did months later.[87] Both of these departures resulted from plagiarism, but because they were not immediate, they are counted in the "kept job" category.

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[84] Rick Weaver, "An Open Letter to Chronicle Readers," *Bozeman (MT) Chronicle*, Oct. 25, 2003.

[85] Confidential conversations held before researcher began doctoral work.

[86] His last *Bozeman (MT) Chronicle* byline appeared Dec. 16, 2003.

[87] Confidential conversation with editor, Feb. 1, 2007.

The next table shows how severity correlates with sanctions. The statistically significant results reveal that newspapers overall are not trigger-happy about plagiarism, generally reserving termination for the more sizable cases. The data show that the majority of cases are in the middle range, "substantial." Only 10 of the 76 cases are of a relatively minor severity, meaning that roughly 87 percent of plagiarism cases are more than a couple of paragraphs copied one time.

	Kept Job (row pct)	**Lost Job (row pct)**	**Total**
Limited	7 (70.0%)	3 (30.0%)	10
Substantial	23 (53.5%)	20 (46.5%)	43
Multiple	3 (13.0%)	20 (87.0%)	23
Total	33 (43.4%)	43 (56.5%)	76

$n = 76$, $df = 2$, $\chi^2 = 13.289$, $p = .001$

Note: Two cells have a count < 5

Percents do not total 100 due to rounding

Table 6: Comparing Plagiarism Severity With Sanctions

Another way to look at the data is to view a line chart comparing severity and the percentage of individuals who kept their jobs, as shown below. The chart shows an inverse relationship between the severity of plagiarism accusations and the portion of journalists who keep their jobs.

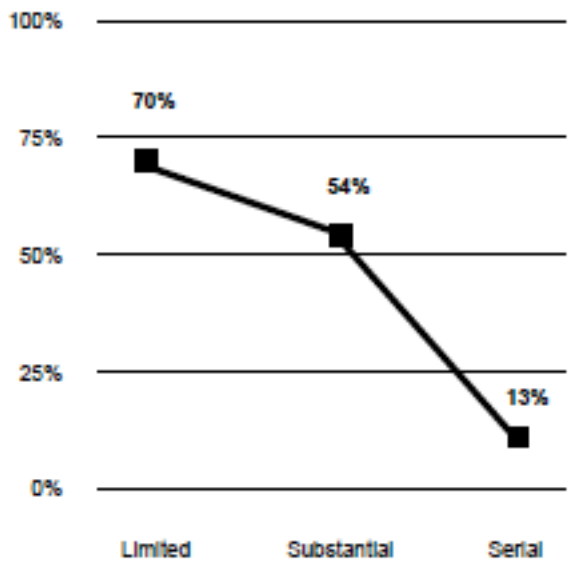

Figure 3: Percentage of Journalists Who Kept Their Jobs, According to Plagiarism Severity Categories

4.6.2 Circulation Size and Sanctions

Although most journalists accused of plagiarism in the 76 cases studied lost their jobs, a pattern develops when the sanctions are crossed with circulation data. To avoid having four cells with an $n < 5$, the four circulation categories were compressed into two, splitting at the 250,000-circulation level. A dummy variable was created reflecting those two categories. The data are shown in the following table.

	Kept job (row pct)	**Lost job (row pct)**	**Total**
Under 250,000	12 (29.3%)	29 (70.7%)	41
Over 250,000	21 (60.0%)	14 (40.0%)	35
Total	33 (43.4%)	43 (56.6)	76

$n = 76$, $df = 1$, $\chi^2 = 7.259$, $p = .007$

Table 7: Sanctions in Plagiarism Cases According to Newspaper Circulation Size

The table reveals that sanctions are associated with circulation size. Journalists accused of plagiarism and who work at the nation's 36 largest newspapers[88] are likely to keep their job. Those accused of plagiarism while working at the remaining 1,420 daily newspapers are likely to lose their job. The trend is even more pronounced when evaluating cases at four elite newspapers: the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Washington Post*. Those four newspapers accounted for 10 cases captured by this study. Only two resulted in an employee's dismissal, and both were at the *New York Times*: Kenneth N. Gilpin,[89] whose work was largely relegated to the paper's Web site, and Jayson Blair. Three of the remaining eight cases had limited amounts of unattributed material; the other five involved a substantial portion of a single story.

The statistically significant association between circulation size and sanctions may disclose that larger newspapers are more invested in their employees and less willing to part with them. Those papers in the top 2 percent of all dailies, when ranked by size, have the luxury of choosing from a large pool supplied by smaller newspapers. Those involved in the selection process may feel that dismissal of an individual they hired creates skepticism about their managerial judgment. Too, some larger newspapers choose not to fire journalists except for offenses more grievous than plagiarism, either by union contract or by tradition. The *New York Times*, for example, rarely dismisses anyone, and

[88] Newspaper Association of America, 2003 figures, crediting *Editor & Publisher* figures, http://www.naa.org/info/facts04/circulation-category.html.

[89] Jack Shafer, "Something Borrowed," *Slate*, July 2, 2004, http://www.slate.com/id/2103317.

"has an institutional tendency to exile undesirable staffers to unpopular beats or bureaus rather than fire them outright."[90]

However, the association between sanctions and circulation size does not necessarily mean that the biggest newspapers are "soft" on plagiarism. Larger newspapers tend to have more experienced managers who may parse plagiarism more finely than harried managers at smaller newspapers. Further, the aforementioned scrutiny that larger newspapers undergo means that more cases are revealed, and that includes less serious cases. Although a cross-tabulation of severity with circulation size was statistically non-significant, the data are nonetheless revealing. While 7.3 percent of the cases (3 of 41) for the under-250,000 newspapers were of the least-serious variety, 20.0 percent of the cases (7 of 35) for the over-250,000 newspapers fit that category.

To put it another way, the finding of a statistically significant association between sanctions and circulation size may reflect a complex decision process involving severity, perceived intent, extenuating circumstances and the track record of the individual involved. On the other hand, the examination of the four elite newspapers suggests the default position for some larger newspapers is not to treat even substantial cases of plagiarism as offenses worthy of dismissal. Whatever the reason(s) behind the association between circulation size and outcome, it offers evidence of a systemic influence on how newspapers respond to plagiarism allegations.

[90] Mnookin, *Hard News*, 115, footnote.

4.6.3 Terminology

A review of the terms used by newspapers to communicate plagiarism episodes to readers affirms the lack of consensus regarding definitions as described in Chapter 1. When newspapers describe the offense to readers, the forum usually involves a correction, a news story or a notice from the editor via a column or editor's note. Those initial communications with readers were examined to determine if a variation of the word "plagiarism" was used. If the word was never used, the communication was coded as "synonym." As the next table shows, synonyms were used in a plurality of the cases.

Terminology	Number	Percent
Synonyms	35	46.1%
Plagiarism	30	39.5%
No correction	7	9.2%
Unavailable	4	5.3%
Total	76	100.0%

Percents do not add to 100 due to rounding

Table 8: Terminology Newspapers Used to Describe Plagiarism

What is less clear is whether those synonyms reflect the newspaper's reluctance to admit to plagiarism. The synonyms used include phrases such as "paragraphs were quoted verbatim,"[91] "closely reflected the phrasing,"[92] "inappropriately duplicated wording,"[93] "lifted from another publication without putting the information in our own words,"[94] "virtually identical,"[95] "exact or close replicas,"[96] and "closely resembled the

[91] Mitchell Krugel, "A Letter From the Sports Editor," *San Antonio Express-News*, July 15, 2000, 2C.

[92] "Editor's Note," *New York Times*, July 14, 2000, A2.

[93] John Temple, "Editorial Did Not Meet Standards of the News," *(Denver) Rocky Mountain News*, Aug. 5, 2005.

[94] Silverman, "Accuracy, Trust are Paramount."

original text."[97] Such synonyms may reflect an effort to be more precise about the ethical infraction by describing it. It is also possible that using a synonym does not imply reluctance to call the offense plagiarism or alter its definition. However, an examination of when a synonym for plagiarism was used offers insight into how newspapers view the word.

The data show that the use of a synonym was associated with the severity of the plagiarism. Cases in which the plagiarism was at the low end of the spectrum were more likely to be described with a synonym. Conversely, variations of the word "plagiarism" were used more often in more severe cases of plagiarism, as the next table shows. The table has 65 cases, excluding the 11 in which the newspaper did not acknowledge the plagiarism or a correction could not be found.

Severity	**Synonym (row pct)**	**Plagiarism (row pct)**	**Total**
Limited	8 (80.0%)	2 (20.0%)	10
Substantial	21 (61.8%)	13 (38.2%)	34
Serial	6 (28.6%)	15 (71.4%)	21
Total	35 (53.8%)	30 (46.2%)	65

n =65, df = 2, $\chi^2 = 9.008$, $p = .011$

Table 9: Severity of Plagiarism Associated With Terminology

An even more pronounced association surfaces when the terminology used is compared with the sanctions applied. In two-thirds of the cases in which a synonym was used, the journalist kept his or her job. In almost all of the cases in which variations of the word "plagiarism" was used, the journalist lost his or her job. The data are listed below.

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[95] "Editor's Note," *New York Times*, Dec. 2, 2005.

[96] Julia Wallace, "To Our Readers," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, April 28, 2006, 2A.

[97] "Clarification/Attribution," *(Fort Lauderdale, FL) Sun-Sentinel*, March 3, 2005, 22A.

Severity	Kept Job	Lost Job	Total
Synonym (row pct)	24 (68.6%)	11 (31.4%)	35
Plagiarism (row pct)	4 (13.3%)	26 (86.7%)	30
Total	28 (43.1%)	37 (56.9%)	65

n 65, df = 1, $\chi^2 = 20.101$, $p < .001$

Table 10: Sanctions Associated With Terminology Used to Describe Plagiarism

The use of terminology to describe plagiarism produces one other statistically significant correlation, involving the size of the newspaper. Although this is not surprising, given the associations described previously between circulation size and sanctions, the relationship between terminology and newspaper size is nonetheless revealing.

	Synonym (row pct)	Plagiarism (row pct)	Total
Circulation over 250,000	21 (70.0%)	9 (30.0%)	30
Circulation under 250,000	14 (40.0%)	21 (60.0%)	35
Total	35 (53.8%)	30 (46.2%)	65

n = 65, df = 1, $\chi^2 = 5.850$, $p = .016$

Table 11: Circulation Size Associated With Terminology to Describe Plagiarism

The data show a clear association with the terminology used to describe plagiarism and the outcome. It seems that newspapers call the offense "plagiarism" when the individual involved leaves employment, and use a synonym when they want to keep the employee. The terminology used may result less from an effort to convey precision than an unacknowledged connection between the word "plagiarism" and the outcome. Newspapers often claim to have zero tolerance for plagiarism and may consider it a career-ending offense. As a result, newspapers that want to keep the employee involved

may wish to call the offense something other than plagiarism. If so, the data suggest an organizational approach to plagiarism that regards the concept as malleable depending on other factors. The use of terminology also may explain some of the difficulty newspapers have with defining plagiarism beyond a "don't do it" exhortation. Managers wish to retain maximum flexibility regarding their personnel, and thus have a motive to leave a definition of plagiarism squishy to accommodate circumstances. Such definitional elasticity, however, has the side effect of sending unclear messages to other employees about what is plagiarism and how seriously it will be treated.

Using synonyms also carries the side effect of promulgating euphemisms that can be seen as excusing behavior. A study of how corruption can become normalized in an organization cited language as a rationalizing tool. From using a passive-verb "mistakes were made" approach, to referring to payoffs as "auditioning fees," to Nazi doctors selecting prisoners for "transport back to camp" rather than a gas chamber, the use of synonyms can allow individuals to engage in self-denial and justify their behavior.[98] Psychologist Bandura has observed that euphemisms can excuse and even sanitize unethical action. The use of dismissive synonyms removes a regulative barrier to transgressive behavior, recasts the action in palliative terms and relieves individuals of personal responsibility.[99] Even when synonyms flow from an attempt to define the offense more precisely, their use risks invoking the corrosive power of euphemisms.

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[98] Blake E. Ashforth and Vikas Anand, "The Normalization of Corruption in Organizations," in *Research in Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 25, ed. Roderick M. Kramer and Barry M. Staw (Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2003), 22-23.

[99] Albert Bandura, "Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication," in *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research*, 2nd ed., ed. Jennings Bryant and Dolf Zillmann (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), 132-133.

4.7 The Blair Influence

Research question four asked, "Has the Jayson Blair case affected the frequency of plagiarism or how it is treated?" The frequency question is asked often among journalists. Kurtz noted in 2005 that the "drip-drip-drip of disclosures about sloppiness, fabrication and plagiarism" has prompted professionals to ask whether ethical infractions happen more often than they used to or are simply reported more often.[100] This study cannot resolve Kurtz's question because, as noted previously, the frequency of plagiarism behavior is confounded with the public nature of the cases.

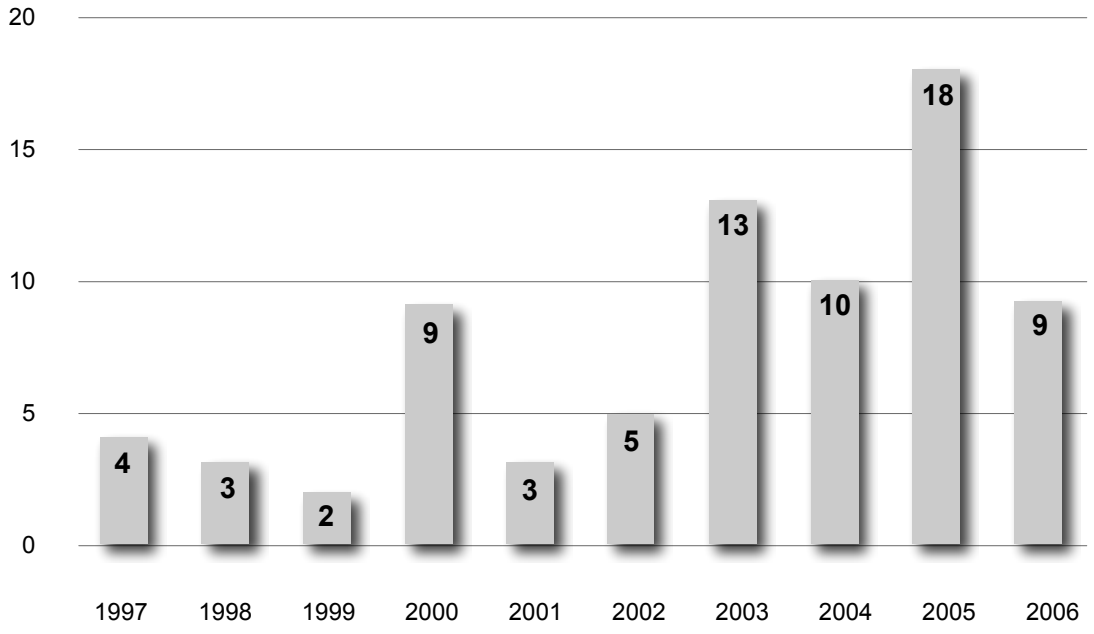

Figure 4: Plagiarism Cases According to Year

As the bar chart above shows, there has been a marked increase in the number of reported plagiarism cases since Blair in 2003. Including Blair, 48 of the 76 cases occurred in the final 45 months covered by this study. The remaining 28 cases occurred in the

[100] Howard Kurtz, "Ethics Pressure Squeezes a Few Out the Door," *Washington Post*, May 2, 2005, C1.

preceding 75 months. In other words, a plagiarism case was reported about once every three months before Blair; after him, a new case has been reported monthly, on average. That's a three-fold increase in reported plagiarism cases since Blair. Whether this measures an increase in actual behavior, or an increase in reported behavior, cannot be determined from the data. However, the latter is a more logical explanation than the former. It is more sensible to conclude that the unprecedented attention given the Blair case, the increased scrutiny of journalists and the proliferation of Web sites tracking journalistic miscues have resulted in increased openness about plagiarism than to conclude the notoriety accompanying the Blair case stimulated copycat behavior.

One comparison in which the data are more definitive involves sanctions. The next table compares sanctions in the 28 cases before Blair with the outcome of the other 48 cases, which include Blair.

	Kept Job	Lost Job	Total
Pre-Blair (row pct)	16 (57.1%)	12 (42.9%)	28
Blair and after (row pct)	17 (35.4%)	31 (64.6%)	48
Total	33 (43.4%)	43 (56.6%)	76

$n = 75$; $df = 1$, $\chi^2 = 3.398$, $p = 0.065$

Table 12: Sanctions in Plagiarism Cases Before and After Jayson Blair

The chi-square is approaching statistical significance, and the data are illuminating. Whereas journalists lost their jobs in 42.9 percent of plagiarism cases that occurred before Blair resigned on May 1, 2003, they were dismissed 64.6 percent of the time after Blair, an increase of about 21.7 percentage points. The trend does not reflect any change in the severity of plagiarism; the distribution of cases by severity (limited, substantial, serial) is largely the same in the pre-Blair and post-Blair cases ($\chi^2 = 2.341$, p

= .310). Therefore, the greater likelihood that a plagiarism accusation will end in a dismissal after Blair results not from more serious offenses taking place, but a change in how newspapers respond to plagiarism behavior.

The greater likelihood of dismissal may demonstrate the impact of the *Romenesko* Web site[101] in this decade. The Web site wields influence because professionals follow it religiously, feed Webmaster Jim Romenesko tips on ethical violations and post internal memos. As a result of its audience and emphasis on ethical issues, the Web site has become a de facto enforcer of journalistic standards and an influence on sanctions. Newspaper editors who once could quietly resolve their ethical offenses in relative obscurity know now that an insider may leak a plagiarism case to *Romenesko* for thousands of journalists to see. *Romenesko* serves a deterrent function for journalists, just as newspapers themselves fulfill a fourth estate role for business and government. One college teacher, in urging students to never plagiarize, wrote in *Slate*, "the last thing I want is for one of my students to end up on Romenesko for all the wrong reasons."[102] *New York Times* Public Editor Daniel Okrent told the *Washington Post* that *Romenesko* has put pressure on editors to impose more serious sanctions. Some offenders, he wrote, "wouldn't have gotten fired five years ago, pre-Romenesko."[103]

4.8 Inconsistent Sanctions

Consistently applied sanctions establish boundaries for ethical behavior. Professions such as medicine, finance and the law employ standards boards not only to

[101] www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=45.

[102] Adam L. Penenberg, "Me Against My Students," *Slate*, Oct. 3, 2005, www.slate.com/id/2127365.

[103] Kurtz, "Ethics Pressure Squeezes."

provide an independent adjudication of ethics violations but also to advance predictable sanctions to guide practitioners in their behavior. A doctor who engages in a romantic relationship with a patient can expect to be disciplined within a fairly narrow range of sentencing options; a lawyer who swindles a client or falsifies legal documents can expect to lose his or her license to practice law. Sanctions put clothes on a skeleton of rules and regulations; they provide definition and serve as deterrents. Because journalism has no standards board, it lacks an impartial body that can evaluate ethical infractions and guide behavior through predictable sanctions. Instead, the newspaper profession relies on informal consensus and word of mouth to establish ethical limits. If those mechanisms result in relatively consistent definitions and sanctions, the profession helps its practitioners stay within acceptable boundaries. If those sanctions are inconsistent, they offer less deterrence or may foster ethical confusion. An evaluation of whether the newspaper profession is consistent in handling plagiarism cases can be made at two levels: between newspapers and within the same paper.

4.8.1 Between Newspapers

Sanctions between newspapers can be compared three ways: similar quantities of material copied, similar offenses, and similar genres. In terms of quantity, two pairs of cases involve identical amounts copied: one set with seven paragraphs and one set with 12, all taken from other newspapers. In each comparable set, one journalist was dismissed and one was retained.

	(Spokane, WA) Spokesman-Review	*(Greensboro, NC) News & Record*
Journalist	Kevin Blocker	Carla Bagley
Year	2003	2006
Accusation	Copied from *Seattle Times*	Copied from *Triad Business Journal*
Quantity	7 paragraphs	7 paragraphs
Outcome	Kept job	Lost job

Table 13: Comparing Two Cases Involving Seven Paragraphs

There is no indication of substantial differences between the Blocker and Bagley cases, both of which occurred after Blair, to explain the differences in sanctions. In each case, the copying is almost verbatim, with just a few words changed. The plagiarism in Blocker's case was at the end of a story that included original reporting.[104] No original reporting is evident in the Bagley copying, which appeared as part of a business column.[105]

The second pair, involving 12 paragraphs, is complicated by a successful union grievance, the only one of its kind in the 76 cases studied.

	(Norristown, PA) Times Herald	*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*
Journalist	Gary Puleo	Don Plummer
Year	2003	2006
Accusation	Copied from *Philadelphia Inquirer*	Copied from *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*
Quantity	12 paragraphs	12 paragraphs
Outcome	Regained job	Lost job

Table 14: Comparing Two Cases Involving 12 Paragraphs

[104] Kevin Blocker, "Guard Activation Hits Home," *(Spokane, WA) Spokesman-Review*, Nov. 1, 2003. The original story: Hal Bernton and Ray Rivera, "National Guard Units Ordered to Serve in Iraq," *Seattle Times*, Oct. 31, 2003.

[105] "To Our Readers," *(Greensboro, NC) News & Record*, March 30, 2006; Jordan Green, "News & Record Reporter Rips Off The Business Journal," *(Greensboro, NC) YES! Weekly*, April 4, 2006.

The 12 copied paragraphs in Plummer's story were mixed with original reporting on a chiropractor formerly of Pittsburgh convicted in Georgia.[106] The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reported that Plummer "has expressed regret and resigned from the staff,"[107] although his comments to the Associated Press suggest he resigned under pressure. Plummer said he was still working on the story, planning to update the dozen paragraphs, when an editor took the story prematurely; the newspaper's managing editor said that wasn't true.[108] In the other case, the suburban Philadelphia newspaper fired Puleo for taking 12 paragraphs from the *Philadelphia Inquirer* Web site, also mixed with original reporting. But Puleo's union, the Newspaper Guild, challenged his dismissal and won at arbitration. The arbitrator concluded after a two-day hearing that reporters at the newspaper often copied verbatim from Web sites and press releases, and restored Puleo to his job, less a three-month suspension.[109] The union, which described Puleo as "a popular reporter,"[110] issued a statement praising its current and former members for "long hours of preparation" for the arbitration.[111]

Another set of comparisons can be made by evaluating similar offenses. In 2000, one day apart, columnists Jeff Jacoby of the *Boston Globe* and Warren Epstein of the *Colorado Springs Gazette* each said they were updating information from online sources. Jacoby, inspired by an online tribute to the signers of the Declaration of Independence,

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[106] Don Plummer, "Sweet No-Jail Deal Keeps Going Flat," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, March 3, 2006, 1D. Original story: Torsten Ove, "Jailed Ex-Chiropractor Targeted," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Jan. 24, 2006, A1.

[107] Julia Wallace, "To Our Readers," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, April 28, 2006, 2A.

[108] "Atlanta Reporter Resigns After Allegations," *Associated Press*, April 28, 2006.

[109] Caroline Zaayer, "Caught 'Accidentally' Stealing," *American Journalism Review*, December 2004/January 2005, 17-18.

[110] "Back on the Job, He Suffers Stroke," *Guild Reporter*, Oct. 22, 2004, 2.

[111] Melissa M. Nelson, "Letters Sent to Romenesko," *Poynter Institute*, Sept. 16, 2004, www.poynter.org/forum/view_post.asp?id=7989.

wrote a column in advance of the Fourth of July based on additional research to correct mistakes.[112] Epstein wrote what he considered to be a "follow-up on a report by salon.com."[113] Confirmation is limited by the fact that Epstein's column and subsequent clarification do not appear in the newspaper's archives and the Nexis archive. The author of the *Salon* piece, Kerry Lauerman, said Epstein "totally ripped me off without any credit. Outrageous."[114] Another writer defended Epstein, saying his "column comes across as a similar but separate take on the issue."[115]

	Boston Globe	*Colorado Springs Gazette*
Journalist	Jeff Jacoby	Warren Epstein
Year	2000	2000
Accusation	Correction, July 6: "While facts about the signers are part of the historical record and do not require attribution, Jacoby should have alerted readers that the concept and structure for his column were not entirely original."	Author's clarification, July 6: "My recent story about Focus on the Family's meeting with Proctor & Gamble that led to the corporate giant pulling its ads from two MTV shows actually was a follow-up on a report by salon.com."
Sanction	Four-month suspension	No action taken

Table 15: Comparing Two Columnists Adapting Online Stories

The different outcomes in these two cases can be attributed to the black eye the *Boston Globe* received two years earlier involving columnists Patricia Smith and Mike Barnicle. Smith was asked to resign after acknowledging fabrication, a move that prompted prominent Boston lawyer Alan Dershowitz[116] to immediately fax statements accusing the *Globe* of discrimination in dismissing a black woman for the same offense

[112] Mark Jurkowitz, "Op-ed Columnist Jacoby Suspended for 'Misconduct,'" *Boston Globe*, July 8, 2000, F3.

[113] Cara DeGette, "Public Eye," *Colorado Springs Independent*, July 13, 2000.

[114] Ibid.

[115] Michael Roberts, "Credit Check," *Denver Westword*, Sept. 28, 2000.

[116] Dershowitz sued Barnicle over a 1990 column the lawyer said misquoted him and they settled for $75,000. Dan Kennedy, "Barnicle's Game," *Boston Phoenix*, Aug. 13-20, 1998.

leveled previously by *Boston* magazine against Barnicle, a white male.[117] The *Globe* launched an investigation into Barnicle's work and found no evidence of fabrication.[118] About six weeks later, on Aug. 5, the *Boston Herald* reported that a Barnicle column was "remarkably similar" to a book by George Carlin.[119] Barnicle said he was unaware of the book and escaped with a month's suspension.[120] Within hours, a television station aired footage showing Barnicle had recommended the Carlin book for summer reading, prompting *Globe* Editor Matthew V. Storin to demand Barnicle's resignation.[121] Barnicle refused and was supported by the president of the Staples office supply chain, who predicted advertising revenue could be at risk if Barnicle was dismissed.[122] After Barnicle met with the *Globe's* top executive, Publisher Benjamin B. Taylor, Storin rescinded his demand for Barnicle's resignation and suspended him for two months.[123] A week later, the former editor of *Reader's Digest* said he could not confirm the people in a Barnicle column, and this time the columnist agreed to resign.[124] Two months later, Barnicle was allowed to publish a column confirming the identity of the people in the suspect column.[125] The allegations of racial disparity and perceptions that the *Globe* was pulling its punches in the face of external pressure undoubtedly had an affect on the Jacoby

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[117] Foerstel, *From Watergate to Monicagate*, 168.

[118] Kate Zernike, "Dershowitz Hits Barnicle Columns," *Boston Globe*, June 20, 1998, B1

[119] Mark A. Perigard, "Globe Piece Sounds Familiar," *Boston Herald*, Aug. 5, 1998, 5

[120] Foerstel, *From Watergate to Monicagate*, 168.

[121] Joe Heaney, "Barnicle Clinging to Story," *Boston Herald*, Aug. 6, 1998, 7.

[122] Cosmo Macero Jr., "Globe Advertiser Threatens to Walk Over Barnicle Flap," *Boston Herald*, Aug. 8, 1998, 9.

[123] Felicity Barringer, "Lobbying Blitz Saves Job Of Globe Newspaperman," *New York Times*, Aug. 12, 1998, A10; Mark Jurkowitz, "Citing 'Haste,' Globe Backs Off on Barnicle," *Boston Globe*, Aug. 12, 1998, A1.

[124] Mark Jurkowitz, "Barnicle Resigns After New Questions on Reporting," *Boston Globe*, Aug. 20, 1998, A1.

[125] Mike Barnicle, "My Way," *Boston Globe*, Oct. 29, 1998, A27.

sanction. "Jacoby got screwed," wrote *Boston Phoenix* media writer Dan Kennedy. "Given the nature of his transgression, it would indeed seem that a lesser sanction would have sufficed – anything from an explanation in his column and a royal chewing-out to maybe, at most, a two-week suspension. But this, after all, is the *Boston Globe*, still recovering from its 1998 summer from hell."[126] Barnicle also said Jacoby's punishment was too harsh. "I think it's an overreaction," he said.[127]

Two journalists accused of taking material from books a year apart received differing sanctions, as the following table shows.

	Wall Street Journal	*Baltimore Sun*
Journalist	Daniel Costello	Stephen Wigler
Year	1998	1999
Accusation	Compilation of national food festivals borrowed from a book, *Eating Your Way from Coast to Coast.*	Review of an opera borrowed from a book, *The Metropolitan Opera Guide to Recorded Opera*
Sanction	None	Fired

Table 16: Comparing Two Authors Accused of Borrowing From Books

For his story on food festivals, *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Costello contacted the author of *Eating Your Way From Coast to Coast*, Barbara Carlson, and she sent him a copy of her book. When the story appeared without crediting her book, despite including several items that were similar to what she had written, her publisher wrote the *Wall Street Journal*. A lawyer responded, asserting the reporter had not plagiarized, although he had intended to mention the book. The lawyer also said no correction would be printed because "the book would be of little value to Journal readers in the summer of 1998 as it

[126] Dan Kennedy, "Cruel and Unusual," *Boston Phoenix*, July 13, 2000.

[127] Doug Hanchett, "Barnicle Blasts Globe's Suspension of Columnist," *Boston Herald*, July 12, 2000, 12.

was published in the Spring of 1997."[128] In the *Baltimore Sun* case, after a reader pointed out similarities between a review and a 1993 book, the newspaper brass confronted critic Stephen Wigler, who "acknowledged having committed plagiarism," wrote the *Sun's* editor, John S. Carroll.[129]

Another between-newspaper comparison can be made by looking at four cases involving the same genre: editorials, as the following chart shows.

	St. Louis Post-Dispatch	*(Jacksonville) Florida Times-Union*	*(Denver) Rocky Mountain News*	*(Minneapolis) Star-Tribune*
Journalist	Mubarak Dahir	Lloyd Brown	Thom Beal	Steve Berg
Year	1998	2004	2005	2006
Accusation	Took most of an editorial from a *New York Times* story	Three instances of plagiarism in editorials over two months	A paragraph taken from a *Washington Post* story and two phrases from a Web site	Phrases from the *New Yorker* were used in two editorials
Sanction	None	Resigned	Resigned	None

Table 17: Comparing Four Editorial Writing Cases

In this comparison, the forced resignation of *(Denver) Rocky Mountain News* Deputy Editorial Page Editor Thom Beal[130] stands out as a little harsh, especially in comparison to the Berg case the following year. Or, perhaps the absence of any consequence in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* case is the most dissimilar of the four.[131] The outcome of the Lloyd Brown case may have been affected by an allegation published in an alternative weekly the preceding month that, in addition to plagiarism, Brown downloaded pornography and

[128] Gloria Cooper, "Darts & Laurels," *Columbia Journalism Review*, November/December 1998.

[129] "Baltimore Sun Music Critic Dismissed for Alleged Plagiarism," *Associated Press*, Nov. 26, 1999.

[130] John Temple, "Editorial Did Not Meet Standards of the News," *(Denver) Rocky Mountain News*, Aug. 5, 2005; "Plagiarism at the Rocky Mountain News," *5280*, http://www.5280.com/5280_2005/rmn_plag.php.

[131] Cole Campbell, "When Our Work Too Closely Tracks Another's," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Oct. 21, 1998, B6.

held sexually explicit telephone conversations on the job.[132] After leaving the paper,[133] Brown got a job writing speeches for Florida Governor Jeb Bush,[134] then quit weeks later.[135] The Berg case, which will be addressed in more detail in Chapter 6, came after the newspaper reviewed a year's worth of editorials in the wake of plagiarism accusations from a blogger[136] and a retired lawyer who said, "It was plagiarized, let's face it."[137] However, the language used by Berg's editor, Susan Albright, and *Star Tribune* reader representative, Kate Parry, indicate the Minneapolis newspaper sets a high bar for what qualifies as plagiarism.[138] The variability in sanctions in these four cases may reflect different definitions and aggravating circumstances.

4.8.2 Within Newspaper

The *New York Times* contributed the most cases to this study, seven, but the newspaper was relatively consistent in dispensing sanctions. Only two of the seven lost their jobs: Jayson Blair[139] and the aforementioned Kenneth N. Gilpin,[140] who had been

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[132] Billee Bussard, "Porn, Hypocrisy, Plagiarism: The Dark Side of Jacksonville's Daily," *(Jacksonville, FL) Folio Weekly*, Oct. 12, 2004.

[133] Carl Cannon, "Editorial Page Editor Resigns; Publisher Pledges Highest Standards," *(Jacksonville) Florida Times-Union*, Nov. 2, 2004.

[134] Joe Follick, "Gov. Bush Hires Writer Accused of Plagiarism," *Sarasota (FL) Herald-Tribune*, Jan. 7, 2005, A1.

[135] Lucy Morgan, "Speech Writer for Bush Quits Under Shadow of Accusations," *St. Petersburg Times*, Jan. 19, 2005.

[136] "Star Tribune Plagiarism Probe Clears Minn. Editorial Page Writer's Work," *Associated Press*, Dec. 17, 2006.

[137] Kate Parry, "Can a Writer Unintentionally Plagiarize?" *(Minneapolis) Star Tribune*, Nov. 19, 2006, 2AA.

[138] Kate Parry, "A Crucial Need for Care with Words," *(Minneapolis) Star Tribune*, Dec. 3, 2006, 2AA.

[139] Jacques Steinberg, "Times Reporter Resigns After Questions on Article," *New York Times*, May 2, 2003, A5.

[140] Shafer, "Something Borrowed."

banished to the newspaper's Web site. Five kept their jobs: Douglas Martin,[141] Ira Berkow,[142] Bernard Weinraub,[143] Charlie LeDuff[144] and Steven Erlanger.[145]

	Douglas Martin	Ira Berkow	Jayson Blair	Bernard Weinraub	Charlie LeDuff	Kenneth N. Gilpin	Steven Erlanger
Year	2000	2003	2003	2003	2003	2004	2005
Story	Obituary	Sports column	Six news stories	News story	Feature story	News story	News story
Original source	2 London papers	Book, *Chicago Tribune*	Various papers	Web site	Book, as source of ideas	*Wall Street Journal*	*Travel + Leisure* Magazine
Quantity	More than half of story	Three graphs	Up to an entire story	One graph	12 passages	Three graphs	Two graphs
Sanction	None	None	Resigned	None	None	Fired	None

Table 18: New York Times Cases 1997-2006

The *Salt Lake Tribune*, with the next-highest number of cases in the study, three, showed more variability in responding to plagiarism.

	Martin Renzhofer	Skip Knowles	Shinika A. Sykes
Year	2002	2003	2006
Quantity	180 words	Two items	94 words
Sanction	Kept job	Lost job	Lost job

Table 19: Salt Lake Tribune cases 1997-2006

"I wasn't even thinking," observed Martin Renzhofer, who said he forgot to attribute information taken from an online encyclopedia. "It was a bonehead move. I'd never done it before and I definitely won't do it again."[146] Renzhofer lost his television column and

[141] "Editor's Note," *New York Times*, July 14, 2000, A2.

[142] "Correction," *New York Times*, April 27, 2003.

[143] "Editor's Note," *New York Times*, Nov. 14, 2003, A2.

[144] "Editor's Note," *New York Times*, Dec. 15, 2003, A2.

[145] Editor's Note," *New York Times*, Dec. 2, 2005, A2.

[146] C.G. Wallace, "Reporter Who Admitted Plagiarism Takes Demotion," *Associated Press*, July 3, 2002.

did not receive a byline for a year, but Editor James E. Shelledy allowed him to keep his job.[147] The next two offenders at the paper were not so fortunate, perhaps because Shelledy left unceremoniously in 2003 after it was revealed that two of his top reporters each accepted $10,000 from the *National Enquirer* for information about a highly publicized child abduction case,[148] an offense Shelledy initially dismissed as "akin to drinking water out of the toilet bowl."[149] Shelledy's successor, Nancy Conway, fired fishing columnist Skip Knowles in her second month on the job. "Our policy on attribution has been breached," she said.[150] The fishing guide whose two tips were copied disagreed with that assessment. As the Associated Press reported, the guide "said one fishing tip was 'graciously' attributed and didn't feel any attribution was necessary for the other."[151] In 2006, reporter Shinika A. Sykes was accused of copying 94 words from the University of Utah student newspaper. Although it was half the amount that Renzhofer had copied, Conway fired Sykes.[152] While it is possible that other, unreported circumstances were at work, the fact that tougher sanctions were applied for lesser amounts of plagiarism suggest the change in editor accounts for the variation in outcomes.

The *Houston Chronicle* had two cases only a month apart and each was a longtime columnist: Mickey Herskowitz, whose qualifications and case were discussed

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[147] James E. Shelledy, "Letter From the Editor," *Salt Lake Tribune*, June 30, 2002, A2.

[148] "Shelledy Candidly Chronicles His Saga in Salt Lake," *American Press Institute*, June 26, 2003, http://www.americanpressinstitute.org/pages/resources/2003/06/shelledy_candidly_chronicles_h/.

[149] James E. Shelledy, "Letter From the Editor," *Salt Lake Tribune*, April 27, 2002, A2.

[150] "Note From the Editor," *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 22, 2003, B1.

[151] "Salt Lake City Paper Fires Writer After Questioning Material in Fishing Column," *Associated Press*, July 22, 2003.

[152] Paul Beebe, "Tribune Reporter Dismissed Following Plagiarism Complaint," *Salt Lake Tribune*, Aug. 29, 2006.

earlier in this chapter, and Rick Casey. Casey joined the *Chronicle* in August 2003 from the *San Antonio Express-News*, where he also was a columnist. On its front page, the *Chronicle* touted Casey, who had covered Texas political figures since the 1970s, as "a nationally recognized columnist known for digging up the truth."[153]

	Mickey Herskowitz	Rick Casey
Accusation	Copied material from columns he previously wrote for a now defunct newspaper	Relied on a *Washington Post* story for a column; only two paragraphs were original
How handled	Newspaper correction: "While this is not plagiarism, it is bad form"	Author allowed to tack a clarification at the end of the next column
Outcome	One-month suspension	No action taken

Table 20: Comparing Houston Chronicle Cases a Month Apart

As noted earlier, Herskowitz took a column he had written in 1990 for a previous employer, the *Houston Post*, and used some of the same language in a column he wrote in March 2004 for the *Houston Chronicle*. The *Chronicle* said it found other examples of instances of Herskowitz reusing parts of earlier columns. The editor's note in the *Chronicle* said, "While this is not plagiarism, it is bad form,"[154] and Herskowitz was suspended for a month.[155] Just five days after the editor's note about Herskowitz appeared, Casey published a column about a member of Congress from Texas, Henry Bonilla. In the fifth paragraph of his column, Casey wrote that Bonilla's political action committee had been "detailed this week on the front page of The Washington Post."[156] What Casey did not say was that 15 of his 25 paragraphs came from that *Washington Post* story, including three paragraphs copied nearly verbatim. Only two of Casey's 25

[153] "Hard-Hitting Columnist Begins Today," *Houston Chronicle*, Aug. 10, 2003, A1.

[154] Ibid.

[155] "Sports Reporter Fired After Rerunning Work," *Quill*, June/July 2004, 63. (The headline is erroneous; the journalist was suspended, not fired.)

[156] Rick Casey, "Bonilla's Vanilla 'Dream' PAC, *Houston Chronicle*, April 9, 2004.

paragraphs included information not found in the *Washington Post* story.[157] After a blogger alerted the *Chronicle* to the situation, the newspaper did not publish an editor's note as it did in the Herskowitz situation – although it did withdraw Casey's column from its online archives. Instead, the newspaper allowed Casey to tack the following "clarification" onto his April 14, 2004, column:

> I should have been clearer in attributing the facts in this column about U.S. Rep. Henry Bonilla's administration of a political action committee. Although the column said the story was "detailed this week on the front page of The Washington Post," an e-mail from a reader felt I was presenting the work as my own. Another reader was so enthusiastic about the facts in the story that he praised my "investigative reporting." The column was almost entirely based on The Washington Post story. I could have been more precise and apologize for any confusion. The column contained two errors. One was to attribute to the PAC's founder, Dallas businessman Marcos Rodriguez, a quote that was actually given to the Post by Bonilla. The other was that the PAC, intended to support minority Republican candidates, gave $ 90,000 to the Republican parties of Maine, Delaware, Florida and Arkansas, not $ 10,000.[158]

Casey's column continued without interruption. The comparison between the two cases is compelling: Herskowitz copied from previous columns he had written, which the newspaper declared was not plagiarism but nonetheless worthy of a month's suspension, while Casey was allowed to write his own clarification and received no sanction. Any *Chronicle* newsroom employee trying to discern how management views plagiarism would have to conclude that taking from another author is no big deal, and certainly isn't as serious as recycling your own material.

Not all newspapers with two cases varied in their treatment of plagiarism. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* administered no sanctions to either of their journalists accused of plagiarism while the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* fired both of theirs. The *San Antonio*

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[157] PubliusTX (a blogger), "Rick Casey: Plagiarist, Poor Journalist, Or What?" www.publiustx.net/index.php?itemid=1115.

[158] Rick Casey, "School Finance in Nottingham," *Houston Chronicle*, April 14, 2004, A13.

Express-News kept one and dismissed the other, but under the same editor, Robert Rivard, who argued the cases were different.[159] However, the two cases involving the *Columbus Dispatch*, under the same editor, are so similar it is difficult to discern why one person was fired and the other kept his job.

	Joe Hallett	Phil Porter
Year	2002	2005
Quantity	111 words	123 words
Sanction	None	Fired

Table 21: Comparing Columbus Dispatch Cases

Perhaps the difference is that the Hallett case involved material taken from the far-away *Washington Post* while the Porter episode involved a local competitor, a weekly business publication. Or, perhaps the Blair effect was an issue: Hallett's case was before Blair and Porter's was after. Then again, perhaps another factor was at work. Porter lost a kidney to stage IV cancer in 2001, and wrote several times for the paper about his grueling battle with the disease.[160] After he was fired, Porter sued the *Columbus Dispatch*, alleging the paper used the plagiarism charge as a cover story to get rid of a costly employee.[161] Ironically, in one of his essays on fighting the disease, Porter wrote in 2004 about cancer victims who lost their jobs, "if anecdotes are true, targeted by mean-spirited employers who might not want to deal with decreased production or contributions to rising insurance costs."[162] To support his discrimination claim, Porter cited Hallett's case, which had not been previously reported, saying the two plagiarism episodes were

[159] Robert Rivard, "A Commitment and a Confession," *San Antonio Express-News*, July 16, 2000, 3B

[160] Phil Porter, "Cancer's Psychological Aftermath Almost as Bad as the Disease," *Columbus Dispatch*, April 23, 2001, 7A.

[161] Doug Buchanan, "OSU Medical Center May Move Ad Pact," *Columbus Business First*, Dec. 23, 2005.

[162] Phil Porter, "Positive Approach Makes Living with Disease More Tolerable," *Columbus Dispatch*, March 28, 2004, 5C.

comparable. *Columbus Dispatch* Associate Publisher Mike Curtin disagreed. "We're confident they're not comparable."[163] The similarities are evident in Appendix C.

Overall, the within-newspaper comparisons are only marginally more consistent than the between-newspaper comparisons, and together provide evidence that newspapers are unpredictable in responding to plagiarism cases. The comparisons demonstrate that sanctions are not based upon generally accepted professional norms, but are applied relatively and influenced by external circumstances. A union can mitigate sanctions by advancing an "everybody does it" defense, as in the *(Norristown, PA) Times Herald*, while newspapers that have suffered ethical black eyes, such as the *Boston Globe* and *Salt Lake Tribune*, may impose harsher penalties to restore their image before the rest of the profession. Some newspapers, such as the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and the *(Minneapolis) Star Tribune* set the plagiarism bar high enough that relatively few will be caught. Others, such as the *Houston Chronicle* and the *Columbus Dispatch*, treat cases so differently in the same newspaper that employees are left with little ethical guidance. An offense that at one newspaper, the *Wall Street Journal*, resulted in a lawyer sending a defensive response to an aggrieved book author ended in a dismissal at the *Baltimore Sun*. The wide variations in sanctions affirms the exalted status that autonomy is given in ethical infractions, challenges the contention that professionals can impartially pass judgment on offenses, verifies the role that circumstances play in adjudicating plagiarism and shatters the zero-tolerance claims of editors.

[163] Buchanan, "OSU Medical Center."

4.9 Cases Summarized

The analysis of the 76 reported plagiarism cases in 10 years affirms the premise that newspaper plagiarism is not merely an individual-level problem. Although population data is limited, the characteristics of the journalists in the study appear to be similar to other journalists in terms of department worked, position held, geographic location and career experience. Gender was the only variable that stood out; while men held 62.8 percent of newsroom positions, they made up 81.3 percent of accused plagiarists. However, it seems likely that gender is a proxy for age, for the bulk of journalists in this study have more than 10 years of experience and the percentage of journalists who are women drops to 25 percent after they turn 35. Other studies about journalistic ethics and two meta-analyses about gender differences in ethical attitudes in the other workplaces have failed to find meaningful gender differences in ethical attitudes among experienced workers. Therefore, journalists accused of plagiarism appear to be no different than the larger population of journalists.

Conversely, the 76 cases provide support for considering systemic influences on plagiarism. First, the data show that the nation's largest newspapers have a disproportionate number of plagiarism cases. The finding may reflect the greater external scrutiny aimed at larger papers, point to the tendency of larger newspapers to choose stories that offer more opportunities for plagiarism or reflect financial incentives to minimize attribution. Second, the study reveals that sanctions, terminology and newspaper size seem to be intercorrelated such that larger newspapers are statistically more likely to keep journalists accused of plagiarism and refer to the offense with a synonym. Although a majority of journalists accused of plagiarism lose their jobs, the outcome is associated with the size of the newspaper. Newspapers of more than 250,000

circulation tend to retain journalists accused of plagiarism, while newspapers of less than 250,000 circulation generally dismiss theirs. The same differentiation shows in the terminology used: termination cases are usually associated with the word “plagiarism” while synonyms are offered when the newspaper wishes to keep the employee. The association between terminology and outcome suggests that plagiarism is a pliable concept that gives the newspaper license to rid itself of an unwanted employee. Third, the study shows the Jayson Blair case influenced the severity of sanctions applied to plagiarism cases. While a majority of journalists accused of plagiarism kept their jobs before the Blair case became public, nearly two-thirds have lost their jobs since then. Because the distribution of cases according to severity has not changed, it is fair to conclude that the Blair case resulted in a stiffening of penalties. Fourth, those penalties are inconsistently applied both within and between newspapers, further evidence that newspapers do not apply absolute standards to plagiarism but allow circumstances to dictate the sanctions.

CHAPTER 5: PLAGIARISM INTERVIEWS

5.1 Research Questions, Methodology and Limitations

Because the primary goal of this research is to advance academic understanding into why plagiarism occurs, the perspective of people accused of plagiarism is important. It is a little-examined viewpoint. As noted in Chapter 3, academic study into plagiarism has been scarce, and no studies have been published that asked the people involved why they did it. Even in the trade press, articles quoting individuals accused of plagiarism have resulted in only denials or professions of surprise that notes were mixed up, save for one article in which a reporter fired for plagiarism and fabrication, Dennis Love, suggested he had "a character weakness."[1] To help fill that gap in academic knowledge, this research project interviewed eight people accused of plagiarism in search of answers to two basic questions:

RQ5: Why did the plagiarism happen?

RQ6: Did those involved consider what happened to be plagiarism?

Depth interviews are an appropriate method to answer those questions. Depth interviews enable researchers to gain insights into motives.[2] They are "unique in allowing researchers to get inside the minds of people and to gain access to material of considerable importance."[3] Depth interviews "glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world"[4] and allow researchers "to enter into the other person's

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[1] Lori Robertson, "Ethically Challenged," *American Journalism Review*, March 2001, 21-29, 21.

[2] Arthur Asa Berger, *Media and Communication Research Methods: An Introduction to Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 113.

[3] Ibid, 125.

[4] Grant McCracken, *The Long Interview* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1998), 9.

perspective."[5] Interviewing is a powerful instrument to "understand our fellow human beings."[6] Depth interviews are a form of qualitative inquiry appropriate to studies in which the researcher is seeking answers to open-ended questions instead of conducting surveys with a limited answer set. As Marshall and Rossman wrote, "Typically, qualitative in-depth interviews are much more like conversations than formal events with predetermined response categories."[7]

Unlike quantitative surveys that seek a representative sampling, qualitative interviews derive more information from a smaller number of people. The researcher is advised to seek individuals who are "perfect strangers" and who are unlike one another, pursuing a "sample of representatives."[8] This study followed McCracken's advice that "no more than eight" should be interviewed,[9] although the relatively small pool from which to draw interview subjects was a limiting factor. Interviews were confined to journalists accused of plagiarism during the same 10-year interval for the census of cases described in the preceding chapter to eliminate any concern that ethical standards might have been different in an earlier period. Those 76 potential subjects were reduced further by a combination of (1) attempts to obtain variation in the subjects, (2) a preference for cases that offered promise for illuminating the research topic, and (3) whether the subjects, often long removed from their former employers, could be located through real

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[5] Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Safe, 2002), 341.

[6] Andrea Fontana and James H. Frey, "Interviewing: The Art of Science," in *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998), 47.

[7] Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999), 108.

[8] Robert S. Weiss, *Learning From Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 17.

[9] McCracken, *The Long Interview*, 37.

estate records, phone directories and online search engines. Those three factors reduced the list to 14 people, four of whom declined to be interviewed.

The eight people interviewed varied according to several factors. Five were men and three were women. They reflected all four circulation categories mentioned in Chapter 4: one came from a paper of less than 50,000 circulation, two came from a paper of between 50,001 and 100,000, three came from a paper of 100,001 to 250,000, and one came from a paper greater than 250,000 circulation. They represented a variety of positions in their newsrooms, including managerial. They ranged in professional experience from 11 to 27 years, with a mean of 21.6 years. All were college educated. In addition to winning journalism awards, all eight could claim some professional distinctions such as starting sections, national and international reporting, statehouse reporting, editorial writing and authoring books. The eight were accused of plagiarism that varied in type and in degree. Six lost their jobs because of the plagiarism accusation while two received suspensions. When interviewed, none of the subjects were still working for a newspaper. All were unfamiliar to the researcher, who made "cold calls" to potential participants.

All interviews were conducted in person, requiring about 10,000 miles of travel to eight states during February and March 2007. The Institutional Review Board at the University of Maryland, College Park, allowed these interviews to be conducted by approving application 06-0594 on Jan. 18, 2007. A copy of the consent form is in Appendix D. The research was self-funded, which eliminated any concern about fulfilling donor objectives. A set of questions in a semi-structured[10] setting (see Appendix E) was

[10] Berger, *Research Methods*, 112.

used to manufacture distance[11] while allowing for follow-up questions and an ear attuned to unexpected revelations.[12] The researcher sought to display both sensitivity and objectivity,[13] using "a blend of detachment and of interest."[14] Interviews were recorded using an Apple iPod and a microphone. A third party transcribed six of the eight interviews. After transcription, the eight interviews were removed from the iPod and associated computers and saved to a CD to be kept in a locked file drawer for 10 years[15] to accommodate any challenges to the study. Transcriptions of the eight recordings totaled 120,751 words.

The transcripts were analyzed according to the conventions of grounded theory, which arose out of the groundbreaking fieldwork at the University of Chicago School of Sociology.[16] Grounded theory is appropriate for this research because it "is well suited to capture the complexity that may be involved," "links well to practice," and "is useful in the development of dynamic process-oriented theories that explain how outcomes come about."[17] Transcripts were evaluated at the sentence level[18] to allow motifs to emerge. One hundred and eleven variables or themes were identified and categorized. The most salient appear in the following sections.

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[11] McCracken, *Long Interview*, 24.

[12] Robert K. Merton, Marjorie Fiske and Patricia L. Kendall, *The Focused Interview: A Manual of Problems and Procedures*, 2nd ed. (New York: Free Press, 1990), 64.

[13] Strauss and Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research*, 53.

[14] Merton, Fiske and Kendall, *Focused Interview*, 178.

[15] Following the example of Cindy Joyce Elmer in her unpublished dissertation, *A Qualitative Analysis of the Turnover of Women Newspaper Journalists*, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2003.

[16] Karen Locke, "The Grounded Theory Approach to Qualitative Research," in *Measuring and Analyzing Behavior in Organizations: Advances in Measurement and Data Analysis*, ed. Fritz Drasgow and Neal Schmitt (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 18.

[17] Ibid, 39-40.

[18] Ibid, 29.

Although depth interviews offer the best method to arrive at the "feelings, thoughts and intentions"[19] of the people involved in plagiarism cases, they offer no guarantee of truth. This is not an issue involving method – people who complete quantitative surveys can distort reality, too – but the stigma associated with plagiarism and the indignity of losing a job or a career. People accused of malfeasance may wish to explain their behavior through a selective retelling of events. The interviews were conducted in person to foster a higher degree of truthfulness and subjects were granted anonymity to encourage candor.[20] The need to preserve anonymity also precluded verifying the subjects' statements with editors or other people involved, although some of their statements could be compared with the historical record. For the eight interviewees, even the two who did not lose their jobs, the plagiarism incidents were traumatic; two cried during the interviews. In the face of such trauma, memories can be unreliable.

Yet there are reasons to trust the subjects' veracity. Several were skeptical about the research project, wanted to know the researcher's "agenda" and asked to review the researcher's curriculum vitae before taking the risk of discussing a painful event with a complete stranger. Most took days and a couple took weeks before agreeing to talk. Several referred to records in an attempt to be precise. Two brought thick binders stuffed with documents and two had smaller folders. Others consulted their personnel files just before the interview. Three asked to see transcripts after the interview for accuracy; none of the three sought any changes. Although they were informed in writing and orally that they could refuse to answer any question, none did. Because extended interviews of an hour or more may help "to penetrate the defenses people put up to prevent their hidden

[19] Patton, *Qualitative Research*, 341.

[20] Berger, *Research Methods*, 114.

beliefs from coming to light,"[21] each discussion took about two hours; one took four hours. The recorded portion of the interviews (often sandwiched by informal conversation before and after) ranged from 1:18 to 2:32, with a mean length of 1:37. Subjects were asked to switch roles with their bosses and imagine what they would have done with their cases as a way to get them to see their situations from a different perspective and allow the researcher to check for inconsistent responses. Finally, the selection process assisted in the search for truth by avoiding the extreme cases and seeking individuals who had achieved some measure of distinction and whose backgrounds appeared to be free of prior blemish. The overall impression of the eight interviews is that while information may have been omitted in some cases, their statements are in the whole trustworthy.

Another limitation to the research is the potential bias of the researcher. In any situation, a researcher may hear more clearly the statements and emotions that affirm the research objectives – in this case, whether systemic influences are at play – and overlook disconfirmatory statements. Given the sensitive nature of this research and the plight of the research subjects, who in some cases appeared to have legitimate concerns about wrongful discharge, a variation of the Stockholm syndrome could be in play. The best defenses against such biases are rigorous adherence to the analytical principles of the grounded theory methodology, a careful reading of the transcripts and a concerted effort at detachment mentioned above.

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[21] Ibid, 55.

5.2 Why Did They Do It?

Research question five asks, "Why did the plagiarism happen?" Behind that question are two others: What was the initiating event, and how did it happen? Both the "what" and "how" questions are important in arriving at the "why" question, which otherwise may get buried in I-didn't-mean-to defenses or shopworn narratives of malevolent bosses, cost-cutting executives and unfair expectations.

In three cases, the initiating event was catching up with a story that a competitor had and the newspaper missed. Editors assigned the stories in two of the cases while the reporter found the third in the normal course of checking competitors. Three other cases stemmed from information the journalist needed to complete a news story. In one case, the reporter had seen similar information elsewhere and checked to see if those statements were still valid or whether updates were warranted. In another case, the writer had forgotten some background information and consulted a press release. In the third, the reporter supplemented a story with quotes from another publication, quotes that were presumed to be from a press conference. The final two cases involved good ideas: stories that someone else had done and looked attractive to the writer. All eight cases occurred during the normal course of gathering and reporting news.

In terms of how it happened, five of the eight cases involved faulty journalistic techniques or forgetfulness, depending on the interpretation. One case occurred because the journalist thought the newspaper's attribution policy did not require crediting a prior publication after the accuracy of the information had been confirmed with the original source. Another occurred because of rushing too fast to make a medical appointment over a serious personal health issue. The eighth occurred because the journalist was suffering from depression, but didn't know it at the time. All of these warrant elaboration.

The faulty-technique cases generally involved a failure to paraphrase. That is, it was not the newspaper's preferred practice in any of the cases to credit a competing publication or press release, but instead to camouflage the source by rewriting. Each newspaper's reluctance to credit another publication was so embedded in newsroom thinking that only one of the journalists interviewed mentioned attribution as a solution. In the other seven cases, the interviewees described their failing as inadequate paraphrasing. When asked what they would have done differently, they said they would have paraphrased better. Only one said she would have credited the originating publication – and even in that case, the reporter felt attribution was unnecessary because the comments quoted were said at a public press conference. This newsroom aversion to attribution establishes implicit ground rules that contribute to plagiarism behavior, as will be discussed later. If the newspapers of these eight journalists had fostered an atmosphere that encouraged generous attribution, at least six of these plagiarism cases might have turned out differently.

The technique Bernice[22] used involved tracking competitors through their really simple syndication (RSS) feeds on Web sites, then copying-and-pasting the story in a computer file as source material to confirm, update and revise.

> I read the other publications. I had them RSS'd on my Yahoo so that I could see whenever something popped up dealing with the county I was covering. Through the week I tended to pick up pieces of stuff from other places, toss it into a story, you know, as a document, just as collecting string.

[22] Pseudonyms are used for interview subjects, alternating between male and female names in alphabetical order in which the interviews were conducted: Andrew, Bernice, Claude, Diane, Emmett, Fanny, Gunnar and Hazel. The gender and presumed ethnicity associated with the names may not be representative of the actual subject. The pseudonyms are derived from noteworthy figures, journalistic and otherwise, from the U.S. civil rights movement of the 20th century.

This practice had served Bernice well for a couple of years, through about 800 such items, until she forgot that one collection of briefs contained an item that was largely unchanged from the competing publication from which it was drawn. Only a few words had been changed because Bernice had only started to work on the story; she was seeking a fresh angle to leap ahead of the competitor. However, none of her phone calls had been returned, and in the press of other duties, she had forgotten about the item in the middle of the briefs compilation. Moreover, Bernice's practice was to proofread each item as it was being rewritten, and not to give the briefs collection a last look before submitting it. When the end of the day came, she submitted the briefs package thinking it was finished, not remembering the largely raw item in the middle that had not been updated. When the briefs package was published, and the competing publication saw the duplicated item and complained, Bernice was aghast, but defenseless, and knew the punishment was dismissal. She acknowledged the risk the newsgathering technique posed, saying: "I think that one of the things you may end up finding in your research is that copy and paste has been the downfall of many people." Yet Bernice said that, given the chance to do it all over again, she still would use the copy-and-paste approach because it had worked the other 800 times.

Another subject who relied on copy-and-paste, Fanny, saw the error of the technique and "would advise journalists not to do it." In this case, Fanny had forgotten some of the details about a book read months earlier and copied information from online book publicity notes to jog the memory, but forgot to paraphrase the material while working in a hurry on a day off. That, too, netted dismissal.

Two other journalists copied and pasted the old-fashioned way: by writing the words into the computer file from printouts or clips. In Emmett's case, the editor handed him a competitor's story fairly late on a Friday and directed him to get the same story for the paper. It was a straightforward news story without much room for originality. Emmett started typing the story based on the competitor's version, reviewed the paper's files, looked up documents on file with federal regulators and sought a fresh angle without luck at the end of the work week.

> By five o'clock, you know, the other editor's ready to go home, and, my memory is he took it from my computer even before I was ready to give it. And I was, you know, still trying to make changes from the, from the document that, uh, that I worked off. I started working off – and this was, you know, a mistake, too, because I was working off a draft of their story as I kept changing it.

The end result was the story Emmett wrote had original material, but was too similar to the original story. When the story was published and the competitor complained, Emmett was dismissed for incomplete paraphrasing, or following too closely to the original when typing it into the computer. In the other copying case, Gunnar was handed a day-old press release from a military base and told to get ahead of the story. Gunnar did not cover the military, so he printed out a competitor's version of the story to use as a guide. While updating and localizing the story with fresh information, Gunnar typed in background paragraphs from what he thought was a press release, but which turned out to be the competitor's news story. Gunnar was suspended.

The fifth case of questionable newsgathering techniques involved remembering how a competing publication had once described a situation captured in a news story and then publishing that same story in a similar manner – due, in part, to the way the source wanted the story handled. In this case, the sources wanted the story told in a particular

way and Andrew went along, without fully grasping that it would look like the story was copied from another publication. Andrew was fired.

Another journalist who was dismissed was accused of violating the newspaper's policies on attribution. Claude had affirmed the accuracy of the information with the sources and thought that confirmation rendered unnecessary any crediting of a prior publication that had the same information. Newspaper editors disagreed. Yet editors had earlier removed attribution from another paragraph of information in the same story, saying it was in the public domain and did not require credit. Earlier, the newspaper had urged its reporters to call back sources that talked to other media and asked those sources to repeat the same words to them, so the newspaper would not have to credit the media. Claude thought he was following this directive to confirm information to avoid attribution. Also, when Claude asked a public relations representative for fresh information, the representative said the information had not been updated and told the reporter to use the older version that competitors had used. Perhaps there is more to this case than Claude described, but there is ample reason to believe the newspaper's attribution policies were inconsistent if not confusing.

Hazel had written a brief story based on watching a weekend sporting event on television – her newspaper did not want to pay her to attend in person – and thought she needed quotes to spice up the story. She found what she needed in a newspaper that covered the event in person, and copied some of the quotations into her story. But while saying she should have attributed the information, Hazel also knew the quoted coach well enough to know that he limits his statements to a post-game press conference attended by many reporters; the information would not have been unique to the newspaper from

which the quotations were taken. Moreover, Hazel was in a hurry. She had to turn in her story early so she could meet with a health professional about a serious illness.

The final case is unusual in that Diane can neither dispute nor explain the plagiarism. As she described it:

> I was doing a story, and I was as I recall it, we were about to go on vacation. And I was trying to get the story done. I'd gotten the idea out of the [competition], which happens all the time. You look at various places and you get ideas for stories and go do them, that's perfectly fine…. I'm writing the story, I'm thinking – I don't know what I'm thinking, basically. And I took a couple of quotes out of the [competition] story and stuck them in the story without attribution. I knew at the time, I remember thinking at the time, this is stupid. I remember literally thinking that and then kind of thinking, yeah, but I don't care, kind of.
>
> The weird deal about it is, it's not like I'm under any kind of great pressure … to do this story. I could have [told the boss], look I can't get to this and they would have said – they might not have been happy about it, whatever, but they would have said, fine. There was no great compelling reason. It was not even an important story, you know, it was just some little, you know, throwaway story, the kind of stuff that you might do on a short week or a slow week.

Later, after resigning and getting help, Diane was diagnosed with depression. Looking back, Diane can identify clues: feeling weary, tired of interviewing strangers, avoiding travel, a hyperactive sense of competition, self-induced worries about whether other reporters on staff were doing better, a sense of isolation and a fear of being trapped by the next career move.

> I didn't see it and, you know, I don't know how well you can self-diagnose. I came out of a culture where you fix your problems. You don't take medication. And you fix your problems, you pull up your bootstraps and you soldier on to get through this. I came out of this kind of stoic, blue-collar southern culture, Scotch-Irish. So, I didn't see that. I always thought of myself as being stronger than that, or whatever. But I came down here after it all happened and I go to a psychiatrist and I'm talking about it. It's obvious to him in 30 seconds that I'm depressed. (laughs) I'm great now, so is my [spouse]. We've worked through all this stuff and it's great. But at the time, you look back on it, you think, why was I not smart enough to see that?

Diane does not use depression as a defense for the plagiarism, but cites the illness as an explanation for doing something she knew at the time was wrong. “I don’t have a real explanation for it,” Diane said. “And I don’t have an excuse for it.”

At the time, Diane also was dealing with a spouse’s illness, which is one of several personal issues affecting some of the eight individuals interviewed. Both Emmett and Hazel were dealing with illnesses. Hazel, Bernice and Fanny had parents or in-laws with cancer. Fanny cited a self-imposed workload: “I did keep writing, and that’s what got me in trouble … it was just too much.” Andrew had allowed a negative atmosphere to reduce effort: “I didn’t push myself, I just kind of maintained.” Hazel acknowledged some lingering resentment from having been ordered a week before her incident to write a story while she was on vacation leave, attending to a sick relative.

Distractions aside, one of the recurring themes in these eight cases is the role of unclear attribution policies blurring the line between ignoring and crediting a competitor. The ambiguity is made more acute by shrinking workplaces in which fewer reporters are available to get the stories in the first place, and more time has to be spent chasing after competitors. After being dismissed, Emmett reviewed three months of newspapers to determine how often reporters had to chase stories from a single competitor. Each time, his former employer ended up with stories that essentially copied those by the competitor, if more elegantly paraphrased.

> Between the briefs and original stories there were like, I’m trying to remember, something like 12 or 13 stories that were on the exact same subject, with, there was no difference in focus of any kind. It was keep trying to keep up with the Joneses, what they had done…. To me, that was a sign that this whole idea of, you know, the need for survival, and the competition that we’re in, where circulation is spiraling downward.

Attribution lines are also fuzzy in sports, as Hazel's case illustrates. In the pre-Internet era, her newspaper paid for her to participate in weekly two-hour conference calls in which sports reporters shared information and quotations about the teams they covered so they could use each other's material in notebook columns. When e-mail became widespread, but before newspapers had full-fledged Web sites, she and a group of her peers paid someone to compile a weekly synopsis of information that could be used for notebooks.

> I would get this massive file of like 300 inches of copy each week and I could just pluck anything out of there…. A lot of times there was no attribution. Like I said, if I ran something really verbatim or something like that I would definitely put it in, but most of the time we all just used things and maybe sometimes you'd write "told reporters after the game," or "he said on a conference call."

Sometimes reporters would develop sharing agreements in which they could use each other's material without attribution. Hazel had such a relationship with a reporter in another state. "I felt like between him and I if he had something in the paper, if I had something in the paper, he was free to use mine and vice versa." Such sharing was necessary to fill several weekly notebook columns, but also was accepted in regular beat coverage. Hazel said in covering professional football, she found writers depend on team publicists to get daily quotes from players and coaches who may speak to reporters only once a week. These "quote packages" are e-mailed to reporters and sprinkled in stories.

> Now is that plagiarism? I don't think so, because that's the way most of these beat writers do their job all week long. Some of them … they'll go down [to team headquarters] once or twice a week, but not every day, and they'll still have these quotes shipped to them and they make feature stories out of them.

She said editors encouraged the borrowing of quotations, so long as a "from wire services" disclaimer was tacked onto the end of the story. Once, a reporter was told to write a feature story from his desk on a baseball star he had never met. "The editor said,

it's OK, you'll be able to get enough quotes off the wire and the Internet." Another time, Hazel was asked to write an obituary story on a legendary basketball player. The newspaper knew no original reporting was done, that the story was simply an adept rewriting of wire services, yet it put her byline on the story and published it on the front page. Her newspaper encouraged borrowing because it wanted to convey an impression that its authors were writing national stories without having to spend the time and pay the expense for original reporting, and did not want to admit to having to rely on generic wire services.

> I liked giving my readers a national picture, but keeping up with the Joneses and writing about something that happened, just so our local paper could have a byline on it – it's just wrong to me. If it fits, if it's really, really important, or in the case of an obituary, I guess, like I said, the Wilt Chamberlain thing, I didn't have any problem with that, I was kind of honored to be able to do that. But if it's a story that happened in [large city] and a guy at the [large city newspaper] can write it better, then let that story run. If we're subscribing to the [wire] service, let that run. Don't be jealous of them.

The interviewees objected to insinuations commonly hurled at people accused of plagiarism, that they were taking self-serving shortcuts. Bernice noted that the only reason she copied-and-pasted her story was because her newspaper had so few stories from a neighboring city that she felt obligated to find everything she could. Claude was working on an original story that proved to have national ramifications. Fanny came in on her day off to fill a gap in her newspaper's coverage. Hazel thought readers would appreciate a story updating a situation the newspaper had previously covered, then dropped. Andrew, Emmett and Gunnar were endeavoring to not just match a competitor's story, but to improve upon it. When answering the "why" question, several of the interviewees expressed resentment for being treated as journalistic outcasts when their motive was to help their employer.

5.3 Was It Plagiarism?

Research question six asks, "Did those involved consider what happened to be plagiarism?" Four of the interviewees said yes. As noted earlier, Diane knew at the time she would be committing plagiarism when she copied quotations from a competitor. Hazel knew she was using quotations she did not hear, but thought the fact that they were in the public domain allowed the practice. She had intended to paraphrase another paragraph, but forgot in the rush to complete the project. "Did I just, click, copy-and-paste them in there? No. I thought I had done a rewrite," Hazel said. Neither Bernice nor Gunnar realized at the time that they were committing plagiarism, but each agreed later with that assessment. "If plagiarism is defined as copying something from another publication where the wording is the same and it is not attributed to the other publication, then, yes, it was plagiarism," Bernice said. "I mean, that's the definition of what it is, and it doesn't come with an explanation of what the circumstances were." Gunnar agreed. "There's no doubt about that. I mean, it's plagiarism."

The other four interviewees disagreed with the accusation. "I've never thought it was plagiarism," said Claude, who crossed out the word on the interview consent form and replaced it with "attribution." "A true accounting of what happened would have shown that I didn't do anything with malice or cheating or anything like that. I was reporting a story the way other stories have often been reported," he said. Fanny said that when she was accused of copying material, she agreed but cited intent. "I said, well, I guess I did. I didn't really think that's what I was doing but I intended to rewrite it. But I didn't have much defense, because I had done what they accused me of doing." However, when asked directly if what she did was plagiarism, she said, "I don't think it's

plagiarism," because the publicity material she used was meant to be copied. Emmett agreed that the words in his story too closely resembled those from a competitor, but believed a lack of intent to deceive meant his copying was not plagiarism.

> I don't think it was plagiarism in that sense of, if you define as intentional…. No, I don't think I committed plagiarism. But what I would say is still that, I probably handled that story not as completely and as fully as I would have liked to. If I'd had a little bit more time and in the retrospect of seeing the issues raised, there's no doubt that there are probably too many words repeated. I think some of that is using, you know, too many press releases that were all coming from the same place, but, I would have gone out of my way … I would have changed some words here and there just to be absolutely certain that that didn't become an issue.

Andrew also believes a lack of intent, combined with the preferences of the sources, disqualified his case as plagiarism.

> I didn't sit there … and make sure that we got the same thing. Because if you're going to plagiarize, you kind of look at it and say, Oh, that looks good, let's do that, and let's just tweak it up. It wasn't like that. And I think they did say something like, "oh, you know, this is really similar to the other one." But I think, you know, we're in our own flow. And I think, I'm like, oh, it's OK because we're in our own flow, and it's ours now.

Intent, then, plays a role in defining plagiarism, as Chapter 1 noted. Some of the influence of intent can be predicted by attribution theory: people evaluate their own behavior in terms of their intentions, which they generally see as honorable. However, attribution theory also predicts that people will ascribe negative intentions to the behavior of others. In this study, that's the boss. Five of the eight people interviewed believe what they did was defined as plagiarism because management had targeted them for dismissal. Not surprisingly, then, the interviews for these individuals became forums to air grievances about their bosses or how they had been treated. It is not uncommon for employees disciplined for workplace behavior to accuse the boss of having less than honorable motives or of ignoring mitigating evidence, yet the narratives provided by the interviewees were, at times, harrowing. Andrew and Emmett supplied copious evidence

they were singled out by clueless, if not unkind, superiors. In two cases, editors did not speak to the accused in person, but asked questions and administered sanctions by phone. However, these versions of events are but one side to the story, and evaluating the validity of wrongful discharge claims is beyond the scope of this evaluation. More applicable are patterns that provide insight into how plagiarism is defined.

Several of the journalists cited instances in which they had been outspoken at work. Emmett's first negative performance review came after he completed a self-evaluation, as part of a training seminar, that was critical of how management was treating employees. "I thought I wrote something very carefully worded, but I think it pissed everybody off, big time," he said. Claude was so vocal about an unrelated ethical situation at work that it forced management to address the problem. What Claude didn't know at the time was that management had planned to handle the situation quietly, and later came to resent him for his frankness. Bernice had been unhappy about a demotion associated with a cost-cutting move. She believes her complaints were valid, but airing them soured her boss on her. Andrew blew the whistle on grotesque mismanagement by a boss, who was promptly replaced. Andrew's actions generated responses typical of whistleblower cases: a few accolades and the creation of several enemies who want revenge. Andrew believes that revenge came a few months later when he was accused of plagiarism and few stood up for him.

Another theme involved new bosses wanting new faces. Fanny, a middle manager, believes a new boss had eyed her as the last holdout from the prior regime. "Like most industries, new management likes to have their own people around them. And, one day, I looked around and – oops! – I was the only one left standing. So, yeah, I

think that had more to do with my case," she said. Claude believes similar thinking was at work in his situation. He was part of a work group that new management had targeted for housecleaning, which continued after he departed. "They've made their lives miserable and they left," he said.

Regardless of the justification for their viewpoints, the fact that several interviewees believed they were targeted for dismissal affirms the findings in the previous chapter about how newspapers tend to define plagiarism as an offense worthy of dismissal, and use synonyms when they want to keep the person. The two sources of data, qualitative and quantitative, affirm that plagiarism is situationally defined.

5.4 Determining Sanctions

A full examination of how newsrooms respond to plagiarism episodes requires the involvement of decision-makers, and not merely the recipients of the sanctions imposed. Nevertheless, the interviewees discussed at length their view of the process used to determine their fate, and their perspectives open a window into how plagiarism is handled. Sanctions play a critical role in how plagiarism is defined, as Chapter 4 documented.

At least three of the subjects had union representation, but the union was not a factor in their cases. Diane and Gunnar did not seek representation while Andrew found the union to be passive – because part of his defense implicated a union officer. Claude, Emmett and Fanny obtained lawyers at later stages in their disciplinary outcome, to marginal effect. Thus, individual representatives did not play a role in defining the offense or its outcome.

But one factor that did surface in three of the cases was the role played by impression management, or the effort of people to manage how other people see them, inside and outside the organization. Impression management theory predicts that bosses will want to make a good impression in front of others by showing they are tough on ethical infractions, while editors will want to create or maintain favorable impressions of their newspaper before the industry as a whole.[23]

Two of the interviewees believed managers were trying to make a favorable impression on their superiors. Andrew said one of the bosses involved in his case was in the process of trying for a promotion and used the plagiarism accusation to prove the manager's mettle to higher-ups – "trying to show that [the manager] would be a great boss and that [the manager] can really stand tough." Claude believes a newly promoted manager needed to demonstrate toughness. "For him to get a scalp, anybody's scalp, it would be good for [the manager] because it would show his bosses that he was serious about this," he said.

One subject thought managers wanted to impress outsiders. Diane believed the tough stance editors took in her case was timing: it occurred in the midst of a spurt of high-profile ethical problems in the newspaper industry, and the newspaper needed to stand firm with its peers.

> At the time it happened, it was kind of the height of the whole plagiarism thing that was going on, too. There was a kind of super-heated atmosphere about this thing. You know, I will tell you, if this had happened 10 years ago, 15 years before, that somebody would have said, "Don't do this again. This is a bad idea, why'd you do this, don't do this again," and that would have been pretty much it. But also the whole atmosphere around plagiarism at the time, Mike Barnicle and Jayson Blair and Bob, it was a real super-heated atmosphere…. Maybe it was a

[23] William L. Gardner and Mark J. Martinko, "Impression Management in Organizations," *Journal of Management* 14 (1998): 321-338.

> time when the business needed to get into a kind of self-corrective mode. Maybe things had slipped to the point in general where it was good, you know, the business needed, that issue needed to kind of be heated up and looked at and people's awareness, you know, needed to go up.

Impression management looms as an increasing factor in the post-*Romenesko* world, in which news of ethical infractions or journalistic skeletons get much wider attention. Journalists are no less susceptible to desiring peer approval than are other human beings. Without an independent standards board to evaluate ethical complaints and impose sanctions, peer approval plays a distinctive role in journalism ethics, forming the boundaries for behavior and sanctions. That some of the interviewees sensed the influence of impression management speaks to its function in plagiarism cases.

Some were painfully aware of a related factor, the role the Internet plays in ensuring their 15 minutes of ignominy lasts much longer. Bernice is bothered by the fact that a Google search of her name pulls up not a quarter-century of achievement, but the one time she forgot to paraphrase. "With it out there on the Internet, it's out there forever and, you know, it's out there with no explanation as to what happened," she said. "What I hate most about this was the way it publicly damaged my name." Said Claude: "Once it's on the Internet, it's out there. I hate that. How am I going to explain this to my kids when they grow up?" Fanny compared herself to the central character in *The Scarlet Letter*. "I felt like Hester Prynne only with a big 'P' instead of the 'A,'" she said.

In the face of public humiliation, some of the journalists questioned whether the sentence they received was disproportionate to other newsroom wrongdoing. Bernice cited an example of a story so riddled with errors that it required a lengthy page one correction, yet no sanctions were given the reporter. A reporter who was sleeping with a source on the beat, and beset by substance abuse, was sent to treatment and reassigned

beats without penalty. Fanny recalled a reporter at her newspaper who was taking drugs with sources; the newspaper spent more than $10,000 on the reporter's treatment and kept a job open. Another reporter was caught extorting money from sources but was not fired for several months. Andrew recalled the favoritism given a co-worker whose on-the-job drinking was well known, but covered up by an enabling boss.

Diane compared the ethics of plagiarism with a prevailing attitude in sports departments to accept free food from teams they are supposed to be covering and take gifts in violation of company policies.

> I didn't ever go to the NBA All-Star game because I'd rather take the week off in February … A package arrives at my front door. I open it up and it's this big athletic bag with the All-Star Weekend logo, NBA shit on it, probably 125 dollar athletic bag. And they shipped it to me because I wasn't there and I was a beat writer. Should we be taking that stuff? Nobody in newspapers [is] going to start asking those questions …
>
> I think if you went in and talked to a newspaper and said, tell us what the ethics policy were, they'd say, here's our ethics policy. I think if you go out into the newsroom and into the sports department and you take that ethics policy and you spend a couple of months in there and you watch it, that's not the ethics policy. That's the policy – it's not applied…. I mean, walk into any big-league sports department in the country and look at what these guys are wearing. Event shirts, half their wardrobe is some event they've covered.

Those accused of plagiarism compare those gaps between ethics policies and practice, mixed with the leniency granted reporters who sleep with sources or drink on the job, and question whether the pariah status given plagiarism is deserved. None of them suggested that people struggling with substance abuse should be fired, yet they questioned why some journalists who compromise the newspaper's integrity by engaging in personal relationships with sources or make serious, preventable errors should be given second chances while a reporter who forgets once to paraphrase a few paragraphs is summarily fired. Newspapers that write news stories about a reporter being dismissed for

alleged plagiarism refuse to divulge a reporter's inappropriate personal relationship. Newspaper editors who write columns proclaiming that plagiarism is an offense too grave to forgive do not write about the ethics of sports writers taking free food and wearing free clothing from the teams they are supposed to be covering with a critical eye. These comparisons by the interviewees are, of course, self-serving, but nevertheless raise valid questions about how newspapers rank plagiarism in a hierarchy of ethical infractions.

5.5 Aftermath

Three of the interviewees said their episodes triggered a greater attention to attribution issues. None of the eight journalists could recall any newsroom conversation about attribution before their episodes. Two recalled ethics policies getting distributed, sometimes annually, but they went unused because they were not the subject of staff meetings or training seminars. That changed after their plagiarism cases. "After this incident," said Fanny, "it was funny to look at the paper, because they attributed everything. I mean, it was a little ridiculous how much attribution they were doing." Gunnar, who kept his job, saw a renewed emphasis on attribution. When asked if it was newsroom policy at the time to attribute information in press releases, he said, "I know at that particular time, no. But after this incident, it became clear that there was – the new policy was, hey, we're going to attribute this information to all sources to eliminate any confusion." Hazel, who also kept her job, cited a memo her boss e-mailed immediately after her episode, providing specifics for what had been vague guidelines, although it did not alter the behavior of employees. "They didn't follow it. They didn't. There was no consistency."

Two others, both dismissed, heard from former peers who expressed fears they, too, were guilty of failing to credit information or paraphrase enough. Diane said journalists who talked with her about her plagiarism worried they could be next. "They all think, there but for the grace of God go I. If they haven't done this, they've done something similar. They've done something close. I'm telling you, I think that's out there." Emmett had a similar experience with a co-worker. "The reporter who sat across from me, he told me at lunch that next week, 'God, if they're going after you about this, you know, I'd better watch myself because I've had these same situations all the time.'" Hazel showed a folder of e-mails she received from journalists across the country, saying they were guilty of the same offense: using quotes thought to be in the public domain and not requiring attribution. "I got a note from a prominent football columnist who worked in Texas and now works at [employer] – he was, 'You were guilty of writing a notebook.' (pause) I think that was the most profound thing that was said to me."

5.6 Interviews Summarized

The experiences of the eight interviewees cannot be generalized to all journalists accused of plagiarism because they were drawn from a purposeful sample. Nevertheless, their cases appear similar to the vast majority of plagiarism episodes captured in this study, and the observations of the eight journalists are instructive. These were experienced, in some cases decorated, journalists with good track records who made a mistake. The cause of those mistakes varied: faulty techniques, going too fast, forgetfulness, depression and misunderstanding attribution policies. The details reveal widespread inconsistencies in when newspapers attribute information and an institutional proclivity for paraphrasing. The interviews also expose inconsistencies among newspaper

sections, especially in sports, where accepted reporting techniques depend on using material from other papers and publicity agents with varying levels of attribution. Not surprisingly, the interviewees generally saw their motives as virtuous and raised doubts about those of their bosses, yet in some cases the journalists had reason to believe their managers saw the offense as a pretext to part with an employee they didn't want anyway. Even in cases in which the boss was viewed less malevolently, the interviewees questioned whether the sanctions fit the offense in the view of the tacit if not explicit embrace of borrowing in other circumstances or the grace extended journalists whose ethical shortcomings had compromised the newspaper's integrity. As individuals, the interviewees challenge stereotypes of plagiarists as lazy shortcut artists with dubious motives. Collectively, they unmask systemic practices that promote borrowing and minimize attribution without defining the boundaries, pretend that rewriting disguises copying and ignore extenuating circumstances that might exonerate the perpetrators or implicate management.

CHAPTER 6: A PLAGIARISM MODEL

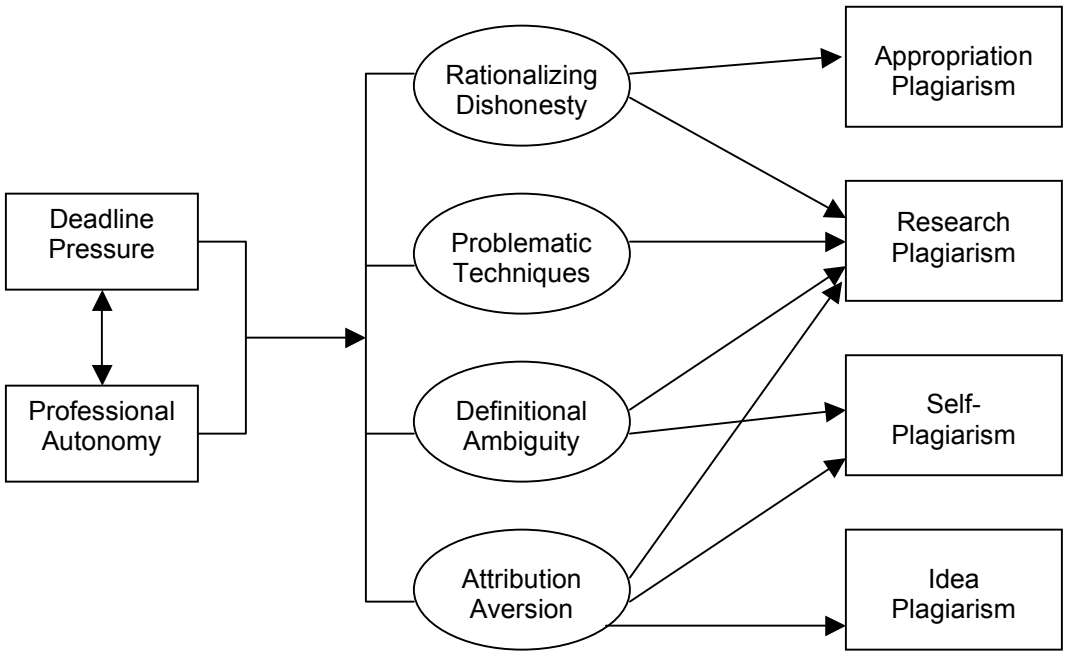

Figure 5: Model of Plagiarism Types and Antecedents

The data gleaned from chronicling plagiarism behavior over a 10-year period and depth interviews suggest a four-factor typology of plagiarism shown in the preceding figure. This typology differs from common journalistic conventions that plagiarism is a dichotomy split by perceived motivation (either intentional or inadvertent) or format (written versus visual). The 76 cases studied sift out into four types: appropriation plagiarism, research plagiarism, self-plagiarism and idea plagiarism. The model proposes four antecedents. Two of these are individual factors: rationalizing dishonesty and problematic techniques. Two are situational factors: definitional ambiguity and attribution aversion. These four antecedents are conceptualized as mediators that translate deadline pressure and professional autonomy, the two factors at the root of most

plagiarism behavior. These two stress-inducing factors initiate the chain of events that result in plagiarism behavior.

Any model seeking to explain human behavior is more effective when it is parsimonious, but that prerequisite also means the model has limits. The four plagiarism types are derived from the 76 individuals in this study, and may not include other types of plagiarism behavior that could surface in a different set of cases. The antecedents described may not capture the full set of individual and situational factors involved in plagiarism behavior, and one of the four, rationalizing dishonesty, is itself exceedingly complex. In addition, the predictive power of the model may be constrained by the evolving nature of newspaper journalism as it expands to an online, continuously updated, multimedia presentation. Yet despite those limits, the model offers a systematized approach that not only describes a more nuanced view of plagiarism than the industry normally adopts, but also provides insights into why plagiarism happens and offers practical application.

6.1 Initiating Factors

Two initiating factors, deadline pressure and professional autonomy, nourish stress and foster beliefs that contribute to plagiarism behavior. Each factor can vary according to circumstances, such as the competitive environment of the newspaper, the newsroom climate and the type of leadership practiced. Yet each is endemic to newsrooms. Additionally, the two factors have an interaction effect: because of deadline pressure, newsrooms rely on professional autonomy to draw bright lines around ethical uncertainties and variations in attribution, even as autonomy relies on deadline pressure to justify its preeminence.

Deadline pressure is composed of three influences: the perishable nature of news, external competition and perceived resource deficiency. First, old news is no news, as Chapter 3 described. The migration of newspaper readers to the Internet, which fosters an expectation of immediacy, exacerbates deadline pressure. The Gannett newspaper chain has been experimenting with mobile journalists, or "mojos," who drive around looking for fresh news that can be banged out on a laptop and uploaded immediately to newspaper Web sites.[1] Even in the relatively leisurely environment of the printed newspaper, journalists have to meet internal deadlines that often require stories to be filed within a couple of hours of an event occurring and may have no more than half an hour to write the story from an evening speech or sporting event. Speed is critical to newspaper journalism, but speed can also result in mistakes. Second, external competition drives newspapers to distinguish themselves in the marketplace, especially as the Internet replaces the printing press and eliminates a financial barrier to publication. Not only must newspapers keep pace with competitors in providing fresh news, but they also must establish a competitive advantage by offering unique information. Therefore, newspapers have a business reason to avoid acknowledging competitors. For example, if the *Chicago Tribune* were to admit in print each time it was beaten on a story by the *Chicago Sun-Times*, *Tribune* readers might see the *Sun-Times* as a superior source of news and stop reading the *Tribune*. The same incentive discourages staffers at the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* from referencing original reporting in the *Wall Street Journal*. The need to offer a unique selling proposition leads newspapers to limit attribution, which has a direct impact on plagiarism. Third, perceived resource deficiency results in trying to

[1] Frank Ahrens, "A Newspaper Chain Sees Its Future, And It's Online and Hyper-Local," *Washington Post*, Dec. 4, 2006, A1. Gannett Web site description of Fort Myers, Fla., *News-Press*, www.gannett.com/go/newswatch/2006/february/nw0210-2.htm;

keep pace with fewer employees. Newspapers across the country have been reducing employment in response to stagnant or declining revenues while expecting their remaining journalists to keep pace with the Internet by shooting video or adding supplemental material for the papers' Web sites. Having to do more with fewer resources requires journalists to spend less time gathering or writing facts and file stories to Web sites with minimal or no editing, which results in a decline in quality and an increase in newsroom stress. One of the eight interviewees in this study, Gunnar, believed staff cutbacks played a role in his plagiarism case by compressing beats and forcing him to pick up a story outside his expertise.

These factors create an environment in which a premium is placed on speed, the newspaper has financial incentives to limit attribution and the workload excuses cutting some corners – all of which have an indirect bearing on plagiarism. For example, Seattle-based reporter Blaine Harden of the *Washington Post* said he used material from newspapers in Seattle and Tacoma for a story about a murder-suicide involving a police chief because he only had a little more than three hours to research and write the story on deadline.[2] After his editorial page editor, Lloyd Brown, resigned over plagiarism allegations, the *Florida Times-Union* publisher acknowledged that his editorial staff lacked time to research and write editorials.[3] When he was accused of plagiarism, Alex Storozynski noted that he was expected to produce a daily free-distribution newspaper in New York with only himself as editor and two reporters.[4]

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[2] Erik Wemple, "Taking Names," *Washington City Paper*, June 6-12, 2003.

[3] Carl Cannon, "Editorial Page Editor Resigns; Publisher Pledges Highest Standards," *(Jacksonville) Florida Times-Union*, Nov. 2, 2004.

[4] Letter to *Romenesko* Web site, Poynter Institute, http://poynter.org/forum/view_post.asp?id=9714.

Other studies affirm the influence of pressure and stress on ethical decision-making. Studies of organizational behavior have shown that resource deficiency lowers the degree of support an employee has for an organization, called organizational support, and creates a greater sense of injustice. Organizational support, when strong, is a "stabilizing force that acts to maintain behavioral direction when expectancy/equity conditions are not met and do not function."[5] When organizational support is diminished, employees are less likely to ignore concerns over perceived inequity in workload or rewards. This sense of injustice may increase self-serving behaviors at the organization's expense and rationalize unethical behavior.[6] A decline in organizational support resulted in more stress and greater burnout among police officers.[7] College students often cite stress and pressure to succeed in explaining why they plagiarized.[8]

The second initiating factor in this model is an element of professional ideology, autonomy. As noted in Chapter 3, autonomy is a hallmark of professions in general and is a keystone for the fourth estate function of journalism. Schudson described the fact that U.S. journalists maintain autonomy within a business as the "genius of American journalism."[9] Journalism would have little value if its practitioners did not remain independent from their sources and from their profit-minded business managers, which is why autonomy is a universally embraced value. However, autonomy can create an

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[5] Richard W. Scholl, "Differentiating Organizational Commitment From Expectancy as a Motivating Force," *Academy of Management Review* 6 (1981): 589-599.

[6] Patrick D. Lynch, Robert Eisenberger and Stephen Armeli, "Perceived Organizational Support: Inferior Versus Superior Performance by Wary Employees," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 84 (1999): 467-483.

[7] Nicolien Kop, Martin Euwema and Wilmar Schaufeli, "Burnout, Job Stress and Violent Behaviour Among Dutch Police Officers," *Work & Stress* 13 (1999): 326-340.

[8] Donald L. McCabe, Linda Klebe Treviño, Kenneth D. Butterfield, "Academic Integrity in Honor Code and Non-Honor Code Environments," *Journal of Higher Education* 70 (1999): 211-234, 231.

[9] Michael Schudson, *The Sociology of News* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), 86.

environment in which trust supersedes verification and the individual takes primacy over the organization.

Three types of autonomy are salient for this model: task autonomy, personal ethics autonomy and departmental ethics autonomy. First, task autonomy speaks to the latitude given journalists to determine which stories they will cover and how to go about their duties. Journalists are not removed from organizational directions on their day; assigning editors direct coverage and photo editors determine what events photographers will shoot. Yet even when assigned work, journalists retain much authority in deciding how to go about their duties, determining which subjects to interview and how to compose the picture. Such autonomy not only allows the newspaper to function on deadline, but also creates an expectation that journalists retain some freedom to define their jobs and the procedures used. Second, task autonomy gives rise to personal ethics autonomy within broad boundaries set by newspaper policy. For instance, the newspaper ethics code may prohibit reporters from assuming a false identity, but codes do not dictate how revealing a reporter must be in approaching a sensitive interview. No newspaper would allow journalists to break into an office to steal important documents, yet most would publish a story based on a stolen report passed along by a whistleblower. Between those extremes is the latitude given each journalist to decide the settings on the ethical compass. Third, an expectation of variability in personal ethics standards extends to the newsroom department or section worked. Although sports reporters accept free tickets to cover an event, political reporters pay their way aboard a candidate's airplane. A newspaper's city desk might require reporters quoting from a police department press release to attribute the source of the information while the same newspaper's business

desk might allow a company's press release to be reused with minor paraphrasing. Newspapers sometimes try to address such variability through ethics policies, yet are rarely successful in creating uniformity across sections. In issues ranging from whether reporters should "clean up" quotes to how much attribution is necessary for a press release, department-based ethics standards are an ingrained part of newsroom culture as a reflection of the autonomy norm. These three forms of autonomy, in tasks, personal ethics and departmental ethics, help create an atmosphere in which individual decision-making is privileged and ethical standards are subjective.

The intensity of the influence of these two initiating factors, deadline pressure and professional autonomy, can vary according to the nature of each newspaper's competitive environment, newsroom climate and dominant leadership type. Newspapers that have more competition will have a greater incentive to withhold attribution that otherwise would benefit a competitor. The newsroom climate, a temporal state as opposed to the more enduring newsroom culture,[10] can influence the ethical behavior of employees.[11] A study of employees in nonprofits showed that two types of workplace climate, caring or utilitarian, influenced the organization's ethical tone for better or for worse, respectively.[12] Leadership style also can be influential in creating climates in which higher ethical standards are embraced, especially transformational leadership. Transformational leadership refers to the use of inspiration, personality and vision to

[10] Daniel R. Denison, "What *Is* the Difference Between Organizational Culture and Organizational Climate? A Native's Point of View on a Decade of Paradigm Wars," *Academy of Management Review* 21 (1996): 619-654.

[11] Roy J. Lewicki, Timothy Poland, John W. Minton and Blair H. Sheppard, "Dishonesty as Deviance: A Typology of Workplace Dishonesty and Contributing Factors," in *Research on Negotiation in Organizations*, Vol. 6, ed. Roy J. Lewicki, Robert J. Bies and Blair H. Sheppard (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1997), 63.

[12] Satish P. Deshpande, "Ethical Climate and the Link between Success and Ethical Behavior: An empirical Investigation of a Non-profit Organization," *Journal of Business Ethics* 15 (1993): 315-320, 317.

entice employees to higher level of achievement, as opposed to more traditional, quid pro quo arrangements, also known as transactional leadership.[13] While both styles have their place in the workplace, newsrooms in which transformational leadership is dominant are more likely to encourage higher ethical compliance through modeling and individual consideration.[14] By comparison, transactional leadership emphasizes outcomes over process[15] – and plagiarism is a process issue (how the information was gathered or reported), not an outcome issue (publishing the story first and accurately). The degree of competition, newsroom climate and dominant leadership type serve as moderators on the influence of the two initiating factors.

Finally, these initiating factors are influential because of the power of rewards, as predicted by expectancy theory. Journalists are rewarded for meeting deadline and not getting beat on stories. They are expected to draw from an extensive and diverse source list while delivering crisp prose in hours. They are expected to overcome obstacles, circumvent obstinate officials and unearth "original" stories without bothering their editors with complaints about the hurdles before them. The system demands a steady stream of news, collected autonomously. Journalists who meet those demands are rewarded with plum assignments and career advancement; those who cannot deliver results are shunted to unpleasant tasks or coached into other lines of work.

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[13] Craig L. Pearce and H.P. Sims Jr., "Vertical Versus Shared Leadership as Predictors of the Effectiveness of Change Management Teams: An Examination of Aversive, Directive, Transactional, Transformational, and Empowering Leader Behaviors," *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice* 6 (2002): 172-197.

[14] Michael E. Brown, Linda K. Treviño and David A. Harrison, "Ethical Leadership: A Social Learning Perspective for Construct Development and Testing," *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 79 (2005): 117-134; Dawn S. Carlson and Pamela L. Perrewe, "Institutionalization of Organizational Ethics Through Transformational Leadership," *Journal of Business Ethics*, 14 (1995): 829-838.

[15] Edward Aronson, "Integrating Leadership Styles and Ethical Perspectives," *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences* 18 (2001): 244-256.

6.2 Plagiarism Antecedents

The model suggests four mediators that translate the initiating factors of deadline pressure and professional autonomy into plagiarism behavior. Unlike moderators, which can aggravate or attenuate the influence of initiating factors, mediators address why such variables can influence behavior and "explain how external physical events take on internal psychological significance."[16] Mediators serve as enabling links in a causal chain. In a study of why plagiarism behavior occurs, mediators are critical. In this model, they also serve as antecedents of behavior. Four antecedents were identified by this study: two individual factors and two situational factors.

6.2.1 Individual Factors

The first individual factor, rationalizing dishonesty, is more complex than a two-word description implies. Dishonesty can be an admirable behavior in the proper context, such as when a parent applauds a child's off-key recital or a U.S. president wields surprise strategically. Dishonesty also exists in a continuum; there is a substantial difference between President Nixon denying consideration of inflation-fighting price controls until the moment they were adopted in 1971 to avoid companies squeezing in last-minute price increases, and lying about a White House cover-up of the Watergate break-in to save his political skin. Too, rationalization varies widely. Lee found that reporters rationalized lying according to the importance of the information to be obtained and according to the source – as one reporter said, lying to a Sunday School teacher is

[16] Reuben M. Baron and David A. Kenny, "The Moderator-Mediator Variable Distinction in Social Psychological Research: Conceptual, Strategic, and Statistical Considerations," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 51 (1986): 1173-1182, 1176.

less acceptable than lying to Osama bin Laden.[17] For this model, rationalizing dishonesty reflects the complex mix of means, motives and justifications implicit in the term.

Rationalizing dishonesty is an internal process by which individuals justify engaging in deviant behavior. Agents know the behavior would violate stated or implicit ethical norms in the workplace or profession. The justification is private and difficult to identify. Batson, whose studies on moral hypocrisy were cited in Chapter 3, could quantify that individuals in a private room somehow managed to always get the coin to land "heads" or "tails" as they wanted in obvious defiance of the odds, but could only speculate as to the justification employed for the deception.[18] Motivation theory suggests that individuals may engage in deviant behavior to balance an inequity: perhaps making up for lousy pay by working fewer hours than claimed or by using the company car for personal errands. People may also justify unethical behavior by the rewards; a study shows that people in competitive negotiations will lie freely in order to win a desirable outcome.[19] Some people in competitive jobs, such as sales representatives, may justify their dishonest behavior by telling themselves "everybody does it" and they have to cheat to keep up.[20] Individuals may employ a mix of those justifications to privately rationalize behavior they know to be wrong.

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[17] Seow Ting Lee, "Lying to Tell the Truth: Journalists and the Social Context of Deception," *Mass Communication & Society*, 7 (2004): 97-120, 108.

[18] C. Daniel Batson, Elizabeth R. Thompson, Greg Seuferling, Heather Whitney, and Jon A. Strongman, "Moral Hypocrisy: Appearing Moral to Oneself Without Being So," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 77 (1999): 525-537.

[19] Steven L. Grover, "The Difficulties of Telling the Truth at Work," in *Managing Organizational Deviance*, ed. Roland E. Kidwell Jr. and Christopher L. Martin (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005), 157-172,164.

[20] Tammy L. MacLean, "Thick as Thieves: A Social Embeddedness Model of Rule Breaking in Organizations," *Business & Society* 40 (2001): 167-196

Several factors may influence the propensity of an individual to rationalize dishonest behavior, including locus of control and competence. College students who have an external locus of control – who believe that most events or decisions are beyond their authority – are more likely to engage in unethical behavior than those who believe they hold sway over their own behavior, or an internal locus of control.[21] Competence encourages self-efficacy, which enables individuals to negate the harmful influence of competition and display greater integrity.[22] A Gallup survey of teenagers revealed that the students most likely to cheat are not those at the bottom of the competence scale, but those who considered themselves to be "near the top."[23] Competence and locus of control suggest the journalists more likely to cheat are those who fear they may not measure up to their peers or other competitors, or who feel they have little control over their lives.

Finally, a rationalization of dishonesty may result not merely from individual weaknesses, but also flow from the self-justifying morality found in journalism's cherished aphorisms. Journalists declare their solemn duty is to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable," as if they were uniquely qualified to judge who falls into which category and capable of simultaneously nurturing one and rebuking the other. Journalists also believe they are appointed, as the authors of *The Elements of Journalism* wrote, to "offer voice to the voiceless,"[24] a proverb used to justify evening the score by ignoring

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[21] Deborah F. Crown and M. Shane Spiller, "Learning from the Literature on Collegiate Cheating: A Review of Empirical Research," *Journal of Business Ethics*, 17 (1998): 683-700, 690.

[22] Michael D. Mumford, Mary Shane Connelly, and Lyle E. Leritz, "Integrity in Professional Settings: Individual and Situational Influences," in *Advances in Psychology Research*, Vol. 24, ed. Serge P. Shohov (Huntington, NY: Nova Science Publishers, 2005), 221-257, 242.

[23] Gallup Organization poll, "U.S. Schools: Whole Lotta Cheatin' Going On," May, 22, 2004, www.gallup.com/content/print.aspx?ci=11644.

[24] Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect* (New York: Crown, 2001),111.

some voices and overemphasizing others – while proclaiming to uphold the highest standards of objectivity and neutrality. Such Robin Hood-esque values reflect a degree of rationalization that may not be far removed from more problematic conduct. Journalists are not dishonest souls; a commitment to truth "may be the closest thing to a universal value in contemporary journalism," said the authors of *Good Work* after interviewing 85 practitioners.[25] Neither are journalists low in ethical reasoning skills. Drawing on the work of child psychologists such as Piaget, Kohlberg developed a scale he called cognitive moral development, in which ethical reasoning progresses developmentally until reaching the most advanced, or post-conventional form. Rest translated Kohlberg's work into a scenario-based exam that can measure the relative moral development, and his Defining Issues Test has been given to thousands of people in many occupations. Two researchers who administered the test to journalists found they ranked fourth highest in terms of advanced reasoning, in the neighborhood of doctors and nurses and well ahead of Navy enlistees, business professionals and accounting auditors.[26] Certainly some individuals will score lower and engage in less sophistical moral reasoning, and no profession is immune to bad apples. Nevertheless, the relatively advanced reasoning stage of the typical journalist affirms the profession's willingness to rationalize morally ambiguous behaviors in the name of righting societal wrongs and may facilitate rationalizing the kind of dishonesty implicit in some types of plagiarism.

The second individual factor, problematic techniques, refers to reporting or writing habits that are prone to error. Cited most often is mixing notes. Although some

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[25] Howard Gardner, Mihaly Czikszentmihalyi and William Damon, *Good Work: When Excellence and Ethics Meet* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 173.

[26] Lee Wilkins and Renita Coleman, *The Moral Media: How Journalists Reason About Ethics* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2005). 39.

guilty reporters cling to a note-mixing defense like a life raft, there are examples cited in this study when reporters tempted fate once too often by copying material from electronic sources and mixing it up with their original reporting. The widespread use of electronic archives, the abundance of official documents available online and the ease with which such material can be mixed in a word processor oblige journalists to be meticulous in identifying the source of the material in their notes. That mixing notes is facile does not excuse it, for journalists have an affirmative obligation to prevent errors by keeping track of where they got their information. Journalists share this responsibility with historians, whose association brooks no tolerance for the note-mixing alibi. "The plagiarist's standard defense – that he or she was misled by hastily taken and imperfect notes – is plausible only in the context of a wider tolerance of shoddy work," the American Historical Association says.[27] Like historians, journalists can prevent note mixing by careful documentation. However, journalists operate under much tighter time restrictions, and sometimes make attribution mistakes in a hurry through faulty techniques.

The other problematic technique involves using a competitor's story as the basis for one's own reporting. This sometimes occurs when an editor hands a clip to a reporter, or e-mails an electronic link, and directs the reporter to get a fresh version of the story. The prior story then serves as a roadmap for sources to be called and offers a structure to assemble the story. Duplication can be conscious, as in the cases of reporters asked to follow up on unfamiliar territory and who need a model, or unconscious, as when a fast reading of the initiating story focuses the reporter's gaze in a particular direction. Assigning editors don't accept culpability arising from calling a reporter's attention to a

[27] "Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct," adopted Jan. 6, 2005, American Historical Association, www.historians.org/pubs/Free/ProfessionalStandards.cfm?pv=y.

competitor's story, for editors believe the clip is merely providing background information and presume the reporter will conduct original research for the new story. However, a competitor's story can serve as a mental template for a new story, and result in two stories that read largely the same, especially if both stories are constrained by a limited set of facts.

6.2.2 Situational Factors

The first situational factor, definitional ambiguity, reflects the tendency of newspapers to substitute injunctions for definitions, if they address plagiarism at all in their ethics codes. Definitional ambiguity does not refer to the unquantifiable nature of plagiarism or that the line between permissible paraphrasing and unacceptable plagiarism cannot be reduced to a formula. Instead, this factor refers to the tendency of newspapers to allow situations to define plagiarism in a way that leaves staffers without clear boundaries.

Editors have a history of avoiding definitional clarity, as the Poynter Institute's Clark described in 1983. At the time, Clark was editor of the *Best Newspaper Writing* series arising from annual writing awards created by the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1979. After the 1982 edition was published, one of the prize-winning stories was determined to have copied from a book written by Jerry Bledsoe, at the time a Greensboro, N.C., newspaper columnist. The guilty reporter, Tom Archdeacon of the now-defunct *Miami News*, said he had mingled material from the book with his notes. After investigating, the ASNE board of directors declared the case "a mistake rather than

plagiarism" and allowed Archdeacon to keep the national writing award.[28] But what struck Clark was that the experienced and distinguished editors on the ASNE board could not agree on a definition.

> In reviewing the case, it became clear to me that there is little agreement among journalists as to how the rules against plagiarism should affect the behavior of reporters. Most newspapers have no rules. Editors seem loath to define it, especially in marginal cases. Plagiarism is the skeleton in journalism's closet.
>
> In preparing my report on Archdeacon, I found nothing – no guidelines, no warnings, not even the word plagiarism in indexes of the newspaper stylebooks and journalism textbooks on my shelf. I had to turn to English composition texts and handbooks for scholars for discussion on how much a writer can borrow.
>
> Although most of the editors and senior staff members of the Miami News thought Archdeacon had blundered badly, the verdict was not unanimous. In a memo to ASNE, publisher Kraslow described the feeling of one dissenter, "that Tom did what most journalists do routinely with research material – weave it into the body of the story without attribution."[29]

Even beyond a semantic struggle, editors contribute to definitional ambiguity because they want to maintain flexibility. When asked recently what they thought should happen to college students who committed plagiarism, ASNE members agreed only in their inability to agree. When asked to respond to a 10-point scale on whether offending students should be dismissed from their journalism programs, the distribution was almost flat across the 10 points, indicating uniform disagreement. One editor said academics should have latitude in responding to plagiarism, "just as we do in the newsroom."[30] In other words, editors don't want hard-and-fast rules because they cherish wiggle room. Ethicist Steele noted after the Jayson Blair case, "Many editors are unwilling or unable to develop sound principles, clear guidelines, and practical protocols for addressing key

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[28] Paul Alfred Pratte, *Gods Within The Machine: A History of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, 1923-1993* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995), 166.

[29] Roy Peter Clark, "The Unoriginal Sin," *Washington Journalism Review*, March 1983, 43-47.

[30] Saundra Keyes, "Editors and Educators on Ethics," *American Editor*, March 2006, 10-13, 10.

ethical issues, plagiarism and fabrication included."[31] Such reluctance reflects a motive to retain decision-making authority rather than be restricted by clearly defined codes.

Ethics codes, per se, are unlikely to reduce definitional ambiguity unless they become part of a systematic effort to integrate ethics conversations into the newsroom. Traditionally, ethics codes have performed a cosmetic purpose: to assure the public "that the industry really is concerned about ethics" and supply journalists with "framed wall hangings."[32] Some newspaper lawyers require ethics codes to be inconsequential, more warm and fuzzy than prescriptive, to avoid having plaintiffs deploying them as weapons in a lawsuit.[33] No wonder, then, that codes have little influence on journalists. A survey at two Indianapolis newspapers published in 1989 "provided no support for the assumption that ethics codes directly influence the decisions journalists make."[34] However, ethics codes can be persuasive when they are incorporated into decision-making. A business study showed that an organizational ethics policy given to MBA students during the course of an experiment deterred unethical behavior.[35] Ethics codes can be effective when employees are involved in writing them.[36] A 13-day study of three Indiana newsrooms showed that policies could be effective if they form the bases of "ethical

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[31] Bob Steele, contributing to Kelly McBride's, "What's Fit to Print," *Poynter Institute*, http://www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=53&aid=33614.

[32] Jay Black and Ralph D. Barney, "The Case Against Mass Media Codes of Ethics," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 1 (1985): 27-36, 28.

[33] Wendy Tannenbaum, "Media Ethics Debacle May Affect Lawsuit Outcomes," *News Media & The Law*, Summer 2003, 15-16, 16.

[34] David Pritchard and Madelyn Peroni Morgan, "Impact of Ethics Codes on Judgments By Journalists: A Natural Experiment," *Journalism Quarterly* 66 (1989): 934-941, 941.

[35] W. Harvey Hegarty and Henry P. Sims Jr., "Organizational Philosophy, Policies, and Objectives Related to Unethical Decision Behavior: A Laboratory Experiment," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 64 (1979): 331-338.

[36] Mark S. Schwartz, "Effective Corporate Codes of Ethics: Perceptions of Code Users," *Journal of Business Ethics* 55 (2004): 323-343, 339.

discussion and debate within the newsroom."[37] To have influence, ethics codes cannot sit on a shelf; they must be integrated into regular newsroom activity through informal conversations and formal discussion, or what might be described as "ethics talk."

Even when ethics codes are clear and the subject of newsroom discussion, however, actions speak louder than words – which, in the case of ethical infractions, would be the message conveyed by sanctions. The supremacy of the autonomy norm ingrained in professional ideology has thwarted efforts to create a national standards board to evaluate ethical infractions and impose sanctions. The National News Council created by newspaper editors died of neglect in 1983 after only a decade.[38] Perhaps the only extra-legal body to have much influence over journalists, the Minnesota News Council, merely evaluates the fairness of complaints and does not impose sanctions.[39] It is in administering sanctions that leaders communicate most clearly. Chapter 4 documented the profession's inconsistency in sanctioning plagiarism, which creates confusion about the professed seriousness of the offense. By watching which behavior is rewarded or punished, employees learn vicariously about what the organization and its leaders value.[40] The author of a study about another form of workplace deviance, substance abuse, wrote that inconsistent sanctions "are likely to generate confusion about

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[37] David E. Boeyink, "How Effective Are Codes of Ethics? A Look at Three Newsrooms," *Journalism Quarterly* 71 (1994): 893-904, 901.

[38] Pratte, *Gods Within the Machine*, 16.

[39] The Minnesota News Council was created in December 1970. Newer and less effective news councils exist in Washington state and Honolulu, and the Knight Foundation in 2006 provided seed money for two more councils, one in New England and one in Southern California (*American Journalism Review*, October/November 2006, 16), but none impose sanctions.

[40] Linda Klebe Treviño and Michael E. Brown, "The Role of Leaders in Influencing Unethical Behavior in the Workplace," in *Managing Organizational Deviance*, ed. Roland E. Kidwell Jr. and Christopher L. Martin (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005), 69-87, 73.

what behavior will be tolerated and what behavior will result in harsh punishment."[41] Inconsistent sanctions contribute to definitional ambiguity, which in turn can result in employees misreading the signals and engaging in behavior the boss later considers unethical.

The second situational factor, attribution aversion, describes an ingrained reluctance to attribute information. This aversion transcends the earlier description of financial motivations for limiting credit given to competing publications and describes a more pervasive disinclination to attribute information. This can be seen in the willingness of many newspapers to excuse the extensive reuse of wire service material in a locally bylined story with a disclaimer at the end of the story that says something like, "includes material from The Associated Press," which gives a reader no clue as to what information the reporter gathered and what information someone else contributed. A *(Fort Lauderdale, FL) Sun-Sentinel* copy editor accustomed to combing wire stories inserted a passage from a *New York Times* story into a *Los Angeles Times* story without attribution. After a journalism professor caught the mingling by chance and investigated, the *Sun-Sentinel* editor said the mistake was indicative of a greater problem. "I think over the years that newspapers have become lackadaisical about attribution," he said.[42] Newspapers require no attribution for material that is, as *USA Today's* policy declares, "information considered common knowledge," an exemption so broad it can include almost anything in a media-saturated culture, and which is contrary to the policy's assertion that "readers have a right to know the origin of information in each story, photo

[41] Brian S. Klaas and Gregory G. Dell'Omo, "The Determinants of Disciplinary Decisions: The Case of Employee Drug Abuse," *Personnel Psychology* 44 (1991): 813-835, 831.

[42] Allan Wolper, "Copycat Syndrome," *Editor & Publisher*, June 30, 2003, 34.

and graphic."[43] No less than the co-chair of the ethics committee for the Society of Professional Journalists wrote that attribution is unnecessary for "facts involving numbers" and said that if a reporter "lifts a string of facts" from a book, a small credit line in a chart is plenty.[44] Newspapers give prizes for narrative writing, which is generally devoid of attribution and offers little guidance to readers trying to determine if the reporter witnessed a scene or reconstructed it. Many newspapers use information from press releases with little or no attribution. Editorial page editors do not tell readers that "op-ed" pieces they publish under a politician's byline are probably written by a staffer or publicist. Sports writers routinely print quotations they did not hear and withhold from readers the true source of the information. An environmental preference to avoid attribution can be an antecedent to plagiarism behavior.

The four antecedents identified in this study extend the literature review showing that plagiarism exists in an atmosphere of borrowing and demonstrate that professional values play a role in plagiarism behavior. Plagiarism has its roots in an ideology that privileges autonomy at the expense of verification and allows individualistic and departmental ethical norms to trump organizational codes. Plagiarism antecedents are a mix of individual and situational factors: rationalizing dishonesty and problematic newsgathering techniques intended to save time on deadline but which can cause error, combined with definitional ambiguity that leaves employees unsure of what the rules are and a general reluctance to attribute. Plagiarism is not merely an individual-level issue, but also involves systemic factors. The plagiarism germ may be latent, but it exists in every newsroom.

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[43] "Best Practices at USA Today," internal company document.

[44] Fred Brown, "Ethics Calls Apply Widely," *Quill*, March 2004, 22.

6.3 Plagiarism Typology

The last three of the four plagiarism types involve attribution, yet are different behaviors with different antecedents. As the following table shows, most of the 76 cases in this study involve research plagiarism.

Plagiarism Type	Number	Percent
Appropriation	5	6.6%
Research	66	86.8%
Self	2	2.6%
Idea	3	3.9%

Percents do not add up to 100 due to rounding

Table 22: Distribution of 76 Cases in Study According to Plagiarism Type

6.3.1 Appropriation Plagiarism

Appropriation is defined as "taking something for one's own use, typically without the owner's permission."[45] Appropriation plagiarism is blatantly taking another's work without any pretense or uncertainty about what the rules are. This is more egregious plagiarism. It is relatively rare; only five of the 76 cases in this study fit this type. Were the term "plagiarism" to be reserved for only these most serious cases, as some journalists advocate, the offense would occur only once every two years, on average, and exclude 93 percent of the cases in this study. Appropriation plagiarism can be manifested by either the brazen nature of the heist or by the serial nature of the offense, or both.

The case in this study that fits the brazen category is that of Thelma Garza of the *San Antonio Express-News* in 1997. A feature writer for the newspaper for two years,

[45] *New Oxford American Dictionary,* 2nd ed. (computer program).

Garza was on vacation in Florida when she read a story in the *St. Petersburg Times* that caught her eye. The story described how food products could be used for other household purposes, such as polishing furniture or eliminating ants. The story originated with a reporter for the *Miami Herald*, which distributed the story through the Knight Ridder News Service. The St. Petersburg newspaper was a subscriber to that news service, which entitled it to republish the *Miami Herald* story. Garza took the entire story, added a couple of lines and changed a few words, then claimed it as her own. In her defense, she cited intent: "I never meant any harm."[46]

Two cases fit in the serial category. Editors at the *Macon (GA) Telegraph* learned in March 2004 that reporter Khalil Abdullah had, in a story published the preceding October, taken material from a July 2003 story in the *San Diego Union-Tribune*. Upon further investigation over two days, editors "found 20 stories written by Abdullah that contained passages and quotes that appeared to be copied." Abdullah also attributed some of the previously published quotations to local residents.[47] The *Telegraph* hired Abdullah in September 2002[48] knowing the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* had fired him for plagiarism in 2001.[49] The *Star-Telegram* went back over Abdullah's work and found "at least 20 instances of plagiarized copy" in the 183 stories he had written for the newspaper.[50] Said *Telegraph* Executive Editor Sherrie Marshall: "We talked about the mistakes, but we also

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[46] "Express-News Reporter Fired for Plagiarism," *San Antonio Express-News*, Sept. 5, 1997. The offending story was published in the *San Antonio Express-News* on Sept. 3, 1997. The original story was published in the *Miami Herald* on June 16, 1997.

[47] Charlie Lanter, "Telegraph Reporter Fired After Questions Raised About Stories," *Macon (GA) Telegraph*, March 7, 2004, A1.

[48] Mike Jackson, "Reporter Accused of Plagiarism Fired," *Dallas Morning News*, March 8, 2004, 6B.

[49] David House, "Yanking Up the Weeds of Journalism," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, March 28, 2004, 1E.

[50] Maria Trombly, "To Check or Not to Check?" *Quill*, May 2004, 19.

saw the talent, the potential and the promise and decided to give him a second chance." For his part, Abdullah said he "knew better."[51]

A second multi-newspaper case of repeated plagiarism involved Nada Behziz of the *Bakersfield Californian*. On Oct. 19, 2005, *Californian* Executive Editor Mike Jenner published a front-page apology for a Behziz story printed three days earlier that turned out to be plagiarized and said the newspaper would investigate other stories she wrote. Behziz claimed intent as a defense, saying she did not commit plagiarism, but instead was sloppy.[52] The following day, the *Californian* carried an unusual admission that a reader had tipped off the newspaper to an earlier case of suspected plagiarism by Behziz, but the paper had failed to follow up.[53] About a month later, the newspaper published the results of its investigation, which showed at least 29 of the 96 stories Behziz wrote for the *Californian* had plagiarized material from one or more sources, ranging from a sentence to "entire story lines." The paper also reported at least a dozen occurrences of plagiarized quotes falsely attributed to local people, and cited seven articles that quoted local doctors who could not be found. This time, Behziz accused the newspaper of conducting "a witch hunt" and had a lawyer call to demand a retraction.[54] The *Californian* shared its findings with one of Behziz's former employers, which reported finding at least two stories in which she attributed plagiarized quotations to local community college students.[55]

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[51] Lanter, "Telegraph Reporter Fired."

[52] Mike Jenner, "An Explanation, an Apology, and a Promise," *Bakersfield Californian*, Oct. 19, 2005, 1.

[53] Gretchen Wenner, "Paper Overlooked Plagiarism Warning," *Bakersfield Californian*, Oct. 20, 2005.

[54] Gretchen Wenner, "A Californian Reporter's Web of Deceit," *Bakersfield Californian*, Nov. 15, 2005.

[55] Marla J. Pugh, "DR Uncovers Plagiarism in Former Reporter's Work," *(Fairfield, CA) Daily Republic* Nov. 14, 2005.

The other two cases involve a mixture of unabashed theft and repeated offenses. One is Jayson Blair. The *New York Times* team that investigated all 73 of the stories Blair wrote while on the paper's national desk for seven months found mistakes in 38 of them. Only six of those stories were flagged with plagiarism problems, often involving a few quotes. Yet the newspaper also showed that for many of those stories, Blair was not where he claimed to be, but stayed in New York, and people quoted in the stories said they did not talk to him.[56] If Blair wasn't on the scene and did not talk to the individuals, he would have had to copy his information from other news sources, which makes his plagiarism even more extensive. The story that got him in trouble in the first place was almost entirely plagiarized from the *San Antonio Express-News*, which caught mistakes he made in trying to modify the story.[57] Given the effort Blair exerted to look through the newspaper's unpublished photos to recreate panoramas he did not see and the strain it took to convince other reporters he was on the scene when he was actually calling on his mobile phone from New York,[58] perhaps only his bipolar diagnosis[59] can explain why Blair did not apply the same energy to actual reporting. Equally puzzling is the case of small-town newspaper columnist Chris Cecil, who repeatedly and extensively claimed the work of nationally syndicated columnist Leonard Pitts Jr., then claimed a "mentor" who proofread his work introduced errors. "Everything I did was original," he said.[60]

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[56] "Correcting the Record: The Articles; Witnesses and Documents Unveil Deceptions in a Reporter's Work," *New York Times*, May 11, 2003, A26.

[57] Gigi Anders, "After the Hurricane," *American Journalism Review*, August/September 2003, 12-13.

[58] Dan Barry, David Barstow, Jonathan D. Glater, Adam Liptak and Jacques Steinberg, "Correcting the Record: Times Reporter Who Resigned Leaves Long Trail of Deception," *New York Times*, May 11, 2003, A1.

[59] Jayson Blair, *Burning Down My Masters' House: My Life at* The New York Times (Beverly Hills, CA: New Millennium Press, 2004), xi.

Pitts looked through Cecil's work for the *(Cartersville, GA) Daily Tribune News* and found eight columns in three months "that were taken in whole or in part from my work." Pitts described the "wholesale heist of an entire piece I did about Bill Cosby. In that instance, you essentially took my name off and slapped yours on." Pitts added:

> The one that really got me, though, was your theft of a personal anecdote about the moment I realized my mother was dying of cancer. "The tears surprised me," I wrote. "I pulled over, blinded by them." Seven days later, there you were: "The tears surprised me. I pulled over, blinded by them on central Kentucky's I-75."
>
> Actually, it happened at an on-ramp to the Artesia Freeway in Compton, Calif.
>
> I've been in this business 29 years, Mr. Cecil, and I've been plagiarized before. But I've never seen a plagiarist as industrious and brazen as you.[61]

Given the head-scratching nature of these five cases, the most likely antecedent is rationalizing dishonestly. Somehow the individuals involved in serial cases self-justified their behavior. Even for Garza, a single case, putting her name on someone else's story required fashioning a mental argument to justify her deceit. Severe cases of workplace deviance can be explicated only so far before reaching the impenetrability of the human psyche. What these cases do teach, however, is that they are not representative of most plagiarism. An understanding of plagiarism will have to come from its more common form: research plagiarism.

6.3.2 Research Plagiarism

Most plagiarism is not as heinous as the five extreme cases cited above, but involves blending someone else's words with original reporting or failing to sufficiently

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[60] Harry R. Weber, "Columnist Fired for Plagiarizing Pulitzer Winner's Work," *Associated Press*, June 3, 2005.

[61] Leonard Pitts Jr., "Chris Cecil, Plagiarism Gets You Fired," *Miami Herald*, June 3, 2005, 1B.

paraphrase to disguise the copying. This is garden-variety plagiarism, committed in the course of producing a story. All four antecedents can apply: rationalizing dishonestly, problematic techniques, definitional ambiguity and attribution aversion.

Typical of cases of this type are when journalists fuse their own reporting with someone else's. Usually the explanation is one of forgetfulness, although sometimes the alibi seems a bit contorted. The first complaint against *Baltimore Sun* columnist Michael Olesker, who eventually resigned when a half-dozen more cases were discovered, involved a Dec. 12, 2005, column that included information taken from a July 3, 2003, *Washington Post* story about former U.S. Sen. Max Cleland. Olesker copied information from the *Post* story to prepare for an April 2004 interview with Cleland. When he pulled out the notebook 20 months later to write a column, he "confused the research notes with notes for the interview," the *Sun* said in its correction.[62] What the *Sun* did not say is several words were changed and eliminated, so that the 50 words the *Post* printed became 40 words in the Olesker column, which raises questions about whether the notes were confused or the paraphrasing was slapdash. Sometimes the explanation seems more authentic, as in a case involving *New York Times* Middle East reporter Steven Erlanger's 2005 story about a New York film society honoring Israeli director Amos Gitai. A correction said the story included two paragraphs from *Travel + Leisure* magazine, and reported Erlanger had copied-and-pasted from an electronic version of the magazine's article and "mingled them with his own notes from an interview."[63] Because the two

[62] Corrections, *Baltimore Sun*, Dec. 24, 2005.

[63] Steven Erlanger, "Dramatizing the Mideast's Cacophony," *New York Times*, Nov. 28, 2005; Corrections, *New York Times*, Dec. 2, 2005.

paragraphs were essentially identical, it is more likely that Erlanger forgot their source or put them into the wrong computer file.

Blending the old and the new takes many forms. Most instances entail copying paragraphs from a similar story by a distant newspaper, such as when veteran sports writer Ed Glennon of the *Rockford (IL) Register Star* drew 10 paragraphs of quotations spoken by three people from a story published four months earlier in the *(Minneapolis) Star Tribune*, then claimed the quotations were in his notes.[64] *Salt Lake Tribune* reporter Shinika A. Sykes used 94 words from a newspaper in her own city, but unlikely to be seen by most readers, the college newspaper at the University of Utah.[65] "There's nothing false in that story, and I talked to everyone," she said in her defense.[66] Another *Salt Lake Tribune* reporter, Martin Renzhofer, copied a 180-word passage from a Web site, www.infoplease.com, for a story about the disputed ending of the 1972 Olympic gold medal basketball game between the United States and the Soviet Union.[67] *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* reporter Catherine Fitzpatrick did not attribute material taken from multiple Web sites, according to a correction that did not name her but listed five of her

[64] "Rockford Register Star Sports Reporter Glennon Dismissed," *Rockford (IL) Register Star*, May 26, 2001, 1C. His offending story was "Guilford Star Robinson Takes Right Path Despite Tragic Past," *Rockford (IL) Register-Star*, March 9, 2001, 1C. The original story was by Jeff Shelman, "A Shoulder to Lean On," *(Minneapolis) Star-Tribune*, Nov. 9, 2000, 1C.

[65] Shinika A. Sykes, "Student Leaders Overspent on Big U. Concerts," *Salt Lake Tribune*, Aug. 24, 2006. Original story, by Dustin Gardiner, "ASU Overspends by $66,000," *(Salt Lake City) Daily Utah Chronicle*, Aug. 23, 2006.

[66] Paul Beebe, "Tribune Reporter Dismissed Following Plagiarism Complaint," *Salt Lake Tribune*, Aug. 28, 2006.

[67] "Reporter Suspended for Plagiarism," *Salt Lake Tribune*, June 21, 2002, B1.

stories.[68] A bureau chief for the *Sarasota (FL) Herald-Tribune*, Karen Parker, used an unpublished manuscript in writing a history of a marina.[69]

Cases involving unattributed information become less straightforward as other circumstances arise, such as suppositions that the source material was in the public domain. A *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* editorial written in 1998 by Mubarak Dahir was entirely taken from a science story published six days earlier in the *New York Times*.[70] "Every medical student knows the story of one 'Mr. Wright,' a patient in Long Beach California in 1957 who had orange-sized tumors," the editorial began.[71] That sentence, like everything else in the editorial, was a rewrite of the *New York Times* story, with no original research. The editorial writer said he thought the material could be copied because "the anecdote was part of the lore of medicine and therefore part of the public domain." He said that belief was a mistake, because the anecdote "wasn't popularly known among readers"; Editor Cole Campbell suggested the copying would have been permissible if the tale had been more widely known.[72] In another case, referenced in Chapter 4, Jeff Jacoby of the *Boston Globe* wrote a July 3, 2000, column about the fate of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. He looked at several versions written previously, including an widely distributed e-mail that contained several errors. He consulted historical sources to provide a more accurate account. "Since I was relating lore

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[68] Correction, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, Aug. 3, 2003, 2A. The newspaper issued a previous correction regarding a story from the same reporter that used material "from an Internet report whose authorship is uncertain," editor's note, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, June 26, 2003.

[69] Janet Weaver, "From Grade School on, Plagiarism is Forbidden," *Sarasota (FL) Herald-Tribune*, June 23, 2002, BS3.

[70] Sandra Blakeslee, "Placebos Prove So Powerful Even Experts Are Surprised," *New York Times*, Oct. 13, 1998, F1.

[71] Editorial, "Lies that heal," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Oct. 15, 1998, B6.

[72] Cole Campbell, "When Our Work Too Closely Tracks Another's," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Oct. 21, 1998, B6.

that has been related over and over, and since all of the sources I relied on had relied in turn on even earlier recitations, I assumed that all the material in my column was in the public domain."[73] In this instance, the newspaper brass decided that although Jacoby had undertaken research to correct the record, failing to tell readers "that the concept and structure for his column were not entirely original" was unacceptable,[74] and suspended Jacoby for four months.[75] A former *Baltimore Sun* reporter writing in defense of the *Sun's* Michael Olesker noted that former First Lady Barbara Bush's provocative 2005 comment about Hurricane Katrina evacuees stuffed inside the Houston Astrodome ("And so many of the people in the arena here, you know, were underprivileged anyway, so this is working very well for them") was said in a private interview with National Public Radio,[76] yet dozens of major newspapers copied it without attribution.[77]

One of the eight journalists interviewed anonymously, Claude, cited an example of when an editor inserted a quote from a public official without attribution. The quote was uttered in a public place and repeated on television, but Claude, whose byline was on the story, did not hear it, nor did anyone else at his newspaper.

> Now I wasn't there. That quote came from over the wires or wherever. There's no attribution in that quote. Where do you start drawing a line? It's not that I put it in there. They wanted it in there. I don't have any problem with it. It works well in the story, but the editors insisted we use that quote. So, we put it back in there to frame the thing. Again, a good decision. It helps the story. I'm not quibbling with the decision but there's no attribution in that quote. We weren't there to hear that directly. We heard it, we saw it on one of the TV shows, the quote was out there,

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[73] Jeff Jacoby, "An Open Letter From Jeff Jacoby To His Friends," *Jewish World Review*, July 9, 2000, www.jewishworldreview.com

[74] "Editor's Note," *Boston Globe*, July 6, 2000.

[75] Mark Jurkowitz, "Op-Ed Columnist Jacoby Suspended for 'Misconduct,'" *Boston Globe*, July 8, 2000, F3.

[76] National Public Radio, "Barbara Bush's Comments on Evacuees Cause a Stir," Sept. 6, 2005, http://www.npr.org/news/specials/hurricane/katrina/blog_090605.html.

[77] David Simon, "Michael Olesker Is A Plagiarist? Who Isn't?" *Baltimore City Paper*, Jan. 18, 2006.

> OK? Now he said that at a public event as opposed to a private interview. I realize there's a difference there. But, you know, when do you start, do you need to draw those lines?

Internal work rules can contribute to uncertainty about attribution. A *New York Times* editor removed attribution reporter Ira Berkow had included about how retired college basketball coach Dean Smith felt about the death penalty after directing Berkow to confirm the quotation with Smith directly.[78] One of the interviewees, Gunnar, cited an example of an editor removing attribution in a story "purely for space reasons." After *USA Today* reporter Tom Squitieri resigned over quotes that were not attributed to the *Indianapolis Star*,[79] his lawyer, Joseph Cammarata, said the sources had approved their reuse. "Tom spoke to each of these people directly, verified what the sound bite was in the past and sought their permission to use it," Cammarata told the *Washington Post*.[80] One of the people quoted, military father Brian Hart, defended Squitieri in a letter to the journalism Web site run by Jim Romenesko. "As I told the USA Today editors, I was both happy with the quote and discussed the matter extensively with Tom."[81] A frequent source for reporters, Bruce Bartlett of the National Center for Policy Analysis, spoke up on Squitieri's behalf, saying recycling quotations is a common practice. "There have been many occasions over the years when reporters have reused my quotes without talking to

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[78] "Editor's Note," *New York Times*, April 27, 2003. Original story: Ira Berkow, "Sports of the Times; A Stand on Death and Life," *New York Times*, Feb. 12, 2003, D1.

[79] "USA Today Reporter Resigns," *USA Today*, May 5, 2005.

[80] Howard Kurtz, "USA Today Reporter Resigns," *Washington Post*, May 6, 2005, C1.

[81] Brian T. Hart, "Letters Sent to Romenesko," Romenesko Web site, *Poynter Institute*, May 9, 2005, www.poynter.org/forum/view_post.asp?id=9479.

me and a great many times when they called me just to have me repeat what I have been quoted as saying to the other reporters."[82]

Another confusing factor is the use of the reliable remedy for plagiarism, paraphrasing. In some cases, paraphrasing is the last refuge of a scoundrel. The editor of a 6,000-circulation daily in Upstate New York filled holes on the opinion page by reusing other newspapers' editorials distributed through the *Associated Press* after revising the first paragraph.[83] In other cases, paraphrasing is considered routine. When the *Detroit News* was caught reprinting items from suburban newspapers without crediting those papers, the editor did not say the mistake was inadequate attribution, but failing to rewrite – "putting the information in our own words."[84] In 2000, a *New York Times* obituary on a woman who trained British agents to infiltrate Vichy France during World War II[85] merited a correction because five passages were taken from the *Times of London* without attribution. *Boston Phoenix* writer Dan Kennedy did more snooping, found other material from the *London Telegraph* and calculated that the two London newspapers accounted "for more than half" of the *New York Times* obituary.[86] What was most intriguing about the *New York Times* correction was that the paper said the passages in question should have been either attributed "or should have been rephrased."[87] In other words, attribution is unnecessary if the writer hides the theft. Kennedy described his own experience in rewriting the words of others:

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[82] Bruce Bartlett, "Letters Sent to Romenesko, Romenesko Web site, Poynter Institute, May 6, 2005, www.poynter.org/forum/view_post.asp?id=9472.

[83] Stacy Jones, "Reporter Quits, Editor to Resign," *Editor & Publisher*, May 3, 1997, 42.

[84] Mark Silverman, "Accuracy, Trust are Paramount," *Detroit News*, Dec. 22, 2000, 2A.

[85] Douglas Martin, "Vera Atkins, 92, Spymaaster for British, Dies," *New York Times*, June 27, 2000, C28.

[86] Dan Kennedy, "Changing the Rules," *Boston Phoenix*, July 20-27, 2000.

[87] "Editor's Note," *New York Times*, July 14, 2000, A2.

> In fact, Martin's task – trying to craft something original out of a pile of clippings – was not an easy one. Not too many years ago, newspapers regularly ran cut-and-paste jobs such as his, only without a byline. I remember sitting in the Uxbridge, Massachusetts, office of the Woonsocket (Rhode Island) Call many years ago, following my editor's orders to rewrite stories from the *Worcester Telegram & Gazette* without making them look too obviously pilfered. But when you put your name on something, you're announcing that what follows is – or is at least supposed to be – your own work.[88]

The Martin case is also noteworthy for exposing another complicating factor in attribution: when the newspaper sees its role as U.S. distributor of all the news that's fit to print. Martin, a former foreign correspondent, said reporters based overseas often repackage material from the local press for their American audiences. "Having been a foreign correspondent, I probably got too lax," he said.[89] Martin's assessment of the normalcy of borrowing by overseas reporters was invoked a dozen years earlier, when *Chicago Tribune* Middle East reporter Jonathan Broder was dismissed for blending the *Jerusalem Post* with original reporting.[90] The dismissal prompted an outpouring of support from journalists who thought Broder was judged too harshly and singled out for what was common practice. One colleague said, "Everybody rewrites the Jerusalem Post. That's how foreign correspondents work."[91] Although the *Washington Post* does not have the reach of the *New York Times*, its status as the leading newspaper in the U.S. capital gives it a national stature that also encourages a paper-of-record approach. Referenced earlier in this chapter, Blaine Harden at the *Post* was catching up on reporting a murder-suicide involving the Tacoma, Washington, police chief. Seattle-based Harden tried to update the story by driving 30 miles to Tacoma to solicit reactions from locals, but did

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[88] Kennedy, "Changing the Rules." Only one of the two newspapers is italicized in the original.

[89] Ibid.

[90] "Corrections and Clarifications," *Chicago Tribune*, Feb. 29, 1988, C2.

[91] Eleanor Randolph, "The Pulitzer Pipeline," *Washington Post*, March 4, 1988, D6.

not get any enlightening comments. His story was largely derived from reporting by Seattle and Tacoma newspapers. Harden told an alternative weekly reporter that he "tried to make it clear to readers that my story was a wrap-up of events that occurred in Tacoma over the previous week."[92] What Harden didn't say was that his story attributed only two paragraphs: the *(Tacoma) News Tribune* reporting that a worried human resources director had urged the chief's gun be taken away before the murder-suicide and that "an Internet publication" had broken news of the chief's divorce.[93] There is no clue in the story that it "was a wrap-up of events." Perhaps that was implied by the *Post's* standing in the journalistic hierarchy.

A more common entangling factor in research plagiarism is the genre – in particular, the distinct ethical practices of sports journalism. In 2000, after golfer Tiger Woods won the U.S. Open by 15 strokes, the sports editor of the *San Antonio Express-News*, Mitchell Krugel, published a question-and-answer column about the achievement. The detailed column included quotes from five people. The only attribution was a line at the end, "Express-News wire services contributed to this report."[94] Weeks later, Krugel published a column apologizing for failing to attribute four paragraphs, including three that were word-for-word, from a column written by a *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* columnist. Most revealing was Krugel's passing admission that the entire column under his name was taken from "wire stories and columns we had received that day."[95] In other words, it was nothing but a clip job. When the newspaper editor commented on the

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[92] Wemple, "Taking Names."

[93] Blaine Harden, "Tacoma Murder Case's Revelations Shake City," *Washington Post*, May 5, 2003, A3.

[94] Mitchell Krugel, "Can Man or Course Tame Tiger?" *San Antonio Express-News*, June 20, 2000, 1C.

[95] Mitchell Krugel, "A Letter From the Sports Editor," *San Antonio Express-News*, July 15, 2000, 2C.

episode the following day, he ignored that fact and focused on the slighted Fort Worth columnist.[96] Krugel, however, told *Editor & Publisher* such lifting is common. "I think we would be kidding ourselves if we thought this didn't happen all the time," he said.[97]

Krugel is hardly alone in viewing compilation columns as a normative practice in sports. After the *Hartford Courant* suspended sports writer Ken Davis for failing to attribute the first item in a notebook column, the paper's public editor wrote a column quoting the paper's sports editor, Jeff Otterbein, about its practices. Otterbein said the paper requires the first item to be self-produced, and tries to make the second item original. After that, the paper draws from a variety of sources. "There is a lot of sharing of information in notes columns across the country. Notes columns are unique [that way in] the sports world," Otterbein said.[98] Jack Sheppard wrote about the practice for the Associated Press Sports Editors organization, and included this telling paragraph:

> "Notes columns are what they are," said Barry Forbis, sports editor of the Rocky Mountain News. "They're information taken from other newspapers. I don't have a big problem with that. If we're taking information verbatim ... I have a problem. But, for the most part, we're just reporting what's going on in other cities."[99]

Tom FitzGerald of the *San Francisco Chronicle* authors a regular sports humor column drawn from "newspapers, wire services, magazines, online services, late-night TV talk shows, radio talk shows and a small army of readers whom I'm delighted to have as contributors."[100] When a reader complained that a paragraph in one of FitzGerald's columns was taken verbatim from the *Boston Globe*, FitzGerald was suspended for a

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[96] Robert Rivard, "A Commitment and a Confession," *San Antonio Express-News*, July 16, 2000, 3B.

[97] Joe Strupp, "S.A. Scribe Scored on Sourcing," *Editor & Publisher*, July 24, 2000, 14.

[98] Karen Hunter, "Stop Me If You've Read This Before," *Hartford Courant*, Feb. 9, 2003, C3.

[99] Jack Sheppard, "Plagiarism: Carpet of Broken Glass," *Associated Press Sports Editors*, October 2000, http://apse.dallasnews.com/oct2000/3-5sheppard.html.

[100] Tom FitzGerald, "Letter to Readers From Tom FitzGerald," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 26, 2001, D2.

week while the newspaper investigated his work over the previous eight months and found "four other instances of using work without proper attribution." Editor Phil Bronstein ended the suspension, saying he was satisfied intent was lacking.[101] Bronstein did not address the underlying presumption that a sports journalist is entitled to claim authorship of information created by other people.

Emily Badger was new to the *Orlando Sentinel* sports department, after an internship at the *Washington Post*,[102] when she was assigned to write a preview of baseball spring training facilities for the Feb. 22, 2004, edition. She gathered information by phone, from the Florida Sports Foundation, Web sites – and a book an editor handed to her, *Florida Spring Training: Your Guide to Touring the Grapefruit League*, by Alan Byrd.[103] When Byrd saw Badger's stories, he counted 36 instances in which material seemed to be taken from his book, without a shred of attribution.[104] Two weeks later, a clarification was published saying the book, along with 17 other sources, should have been credited.[105] The *Sentinel's* public editor, Manning Pynn, later explained that a clarification was warranted, and not a correction, because nothing was inaccurate. He also said the book and other sources were "not plagiarized, as in lifting something verbatim."[106] In her defense, Badger said she was taking the blame for an editor

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[101] Dan Fost, "Sports Humor Columnist Reinstated by Chronicle," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 26, 2001, A22.

[102] *Washington Post* intern bios, www.washpost.com/news_ed/summer_internships/bios2003a.shtml.

[103] Torea Frey, "Ex-Daily Editor Feels the Heat in Orlando," *Daily Northwestern*, May 21, 2004.

[104] Jim Clark, "Let's Get This Straight," *Orlando Magazine*, May 2004, 20-23.

[105] "Clarification," *Orlando Sentinel*, March 7, 2004.

[106] Richard Prince, "Orlando Plagiarism Charges Escape Much Attention," *Maynard Institute*, June 30, 2004, www.maynardije.org/columns/dickprince/040630_prince.

forgetting to include a source line in a chart and then told her former campus newspaper at Northwestern University:

> Sports departments do a notoriously poor job of sourcing. We run national notebooks (chocked) full of (Associated Press) info, we reprint quotes we assume came from public-domain press conferences ... This is a pretty unhealthy culture that sets many sports departments apart from the rest of their papers.[107]

Badger could have included attribution in what she wrote, instead of relying on an editor to make a blanket disclaimer through a small-type source line in a chart. But as the public editor's this-is-not-plagiarism response might have predicted, neither the offense nor Badger's candor about sports ethics kept her from getting a promotion within a year, to the Florida State University beat writer.[108]

Badger's observation about sourcing in sports departments was reflected a year later in a case involving one of the best-known sports writers in America, Mitch Albom. His newspaper, the *Detroit Free Press*, launched an internal inquiry into his work in the aftermath of a column he wrote for Sunday publication about the 2005 NCAA men's basketball Final Four. He talked to two former Michigan State stars in advance of the game and wrote the column as if the two players were present. "They sat in the stands, in their MSU clothing, and rooted on their alma mater," Albom wrote.[109] However, their plans fell through, and neither player ended up attending the game. Only one staffer at all the newspapers that subscribed to his syndicated column noticed that it was written and distributed in advance of the event – and the sharp-eyed journalist was a new college

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[107] Frey, "Ed-Daily Editor."

[108] Source; affirmed by byline search in Nexis database.

[109] Mitch Albom, "Longing for Another Slice of Dorm Pizza," *Detroit Free Press*, April 3, 2005; Mitch Albom, "I Owe You an Apology for Sunday's Column: Here It Is," *Detroit Free Press*, April 7, 2005.

graduate, perhaps not yet inured to the fuzzy standards of sports.[110] Apparently no one else at the *Free Press* or anywhere else saw anything unusual in a columnist claiming to witness an event that had not yet happened.

The internal investigation found several instances in which Albom used quotes from other sources without attribution, including exclusive quotes. Albom defended himself by saying lifting quotes was common practice among sports columnists at the paper, a statement confirmed by others in the sports department. The story reporting the results of the investigation – with a headline softened at the publisher's direction[111] – included this telling explanation from Albom and his superiors:

> "There has never been a question to me about attribution. It was understood," Albom said. "As long as the quotes were accurate, if they came from other sources, attribution could be used or it could not be used, particularly in the Sunday columns, which I think are more like essays than anything else."
>
> Albom's boss, Sports Editor Gene Myers, contends sports columnists, because of what they cover and the leeway columnists are given, play by different rules than reporters.
>
> "It was understood that Mitch, because he was a columnist, would use quotes on occasion from printed or broadcast sources," Myers said. "As long as the quotes were accurate, we did not insist on attribution to the original source. Other sports columnists have done this as well. This practice predates Mitch's 20 years at the Free Press and my 22 years at the Free Press."
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> Myers said others at the Free Press were aware of this policy: "To me, [it has] always been obvious and I think that's why no one has ever said boo about it."[112]

That attribution is not a concern in some sports departments reflects a culture in which sports journalists accept quotes handed to them from team-hired information

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[110] Chuck Woodling, "Editor Does KU Proud," *Lawrence (KS) Journal-World*, April 12, 2005.

[111] Ron French and David Shepardson, "Albom Inquiry Under Fire," *Detroit News*, May 17, 2005. They quoted Publisher Carole Leigh Hutton as saying the headline was changed to make it more "newsy."

[112] David Zeman, Jeff Seidel, Jennifer Dixon and Tamara Audi, "Albom Probe Shows No Pattern of Deceit," *Detroit Free Press*, May 16, 2005, Page 1.

specialists without notifying readers that the reporters did not hear the quotes uttered. One of the interviewees, Diane, who covered NASCAR auto racing among other sports, found acceptance of handout quotes to be endemic:

> There are writers who cover NASCAR, and I know this for a fact, who never leave the pressroom. And they write stories in which they quote drivers and crew chiefs and owners and they never talk to them. They never, they haven't talked to them for that story. I know that for a fact.
>
> Now, where those quotes come from are every manufacturer has a representative that goes around to all their teams, all the Chevy teams, and they get a bunch of quotes and they put a quote sheet out. And these guys come over to get the quote sheet and choose which they like and stick it in their stories. As far as the editors know, they've been out talking to Robert Yates and they've been out talking to Jeff Gordon. They hadn't talked to them….
>
> What about people that swap quotes in the press box? "Hey, I got a good one from Dale Earnhardt Jr." "What is it?" "Blah, blah, blah." How do you know that quote's true? You don't. You're just taking that guy's word for it. You weren't there, you didn't hear it, you didn't ask the question. How'd he answer it? So, you may be perpetuating a fraud. Yeah, that stuff happens all the time.

In summary, common research plagiarism can stem from any one of the antecedents in the model, or a mixture. It may be caused by individual factors or situational influences, or both. Research plagiarism may result from innocent mixing of notes or honest forgetfulness, or from deadline-induced shortcuts. A lack of attribution may reflect a presumption that the information was in the public domain or confusion over internal work rules about whether confirmed quotes should be attributed to an original source, or that the newspaper serves a paper-of-record function, or that attribution isn't necessary in certain departments.

A final example, involving Stephen H. Dunphy at the *Seattle Times*, illustrates the relationships among individual and situational antecedents in research plagiarism. Dunphy started as a sports department "copy boy" at the *Kansas City Star* in 1960 and came to the *Seattle Times* in 1967. He won a business journalism fellowship at Columbia

University in 1975 and covered business during most of his tenure in Seattle. He spent 14 years as business section editor and devoted much of his time to writing daily business columns in addition to regular feature stories. On June 8, 2003, the *Seattle Times* gave him the honorific of associate editor, the highest non-executive title at the paper. "Steve is the essence of what the associate editor title is meant to recognize and honor," Managing Editor Alex MacLeod wrote in recommending Dunphy for the title. In announcing Dunphy's new rank, Executive Editor Michael R. Fancher expressed amazement at his business columnist's output. "Dunphy's readers needn't fret. He'll continue his normal huge load of reporting and writing. I'm not sure how he'll do it, but I can't figure out how he does as much as he does already."[113]

Had Fancher looked in Dunphy's personnel file, he might have had a clue. In April 2000, Dunphy was caught plagiarizing from a book. He said the copying was unintentional and editors gave him a written reprimand,[114] warning that a second offense warranted dismissal.[115] Thirteen months after editors overlooked that incident and gave Dunphy the paper's highest honor, a reader sent an e-mail to the paper accusing Dunphy of pilfering seven paragraphs in 1997 from a 1996 *Journal of Commerce* story. The reader was correct. The paper's editors looked at 25 other stories, did not find any plagiarism, and gave Dunphy yet another warning. Dissatisfied by management's response, one of the paper's investigative reporters, David Heath, conducted his own

[113] Michael R. Fancher, "Expertise, Leadership Earn Dunphy New Title at Times," *Seattle Times*, June 8, 2003, A2.

[114] Michael R. Fancher, "Times Business Columnist Resigns Over Plagiarism," *Seattle Times*, Aug. 22, 2004.

[115] Philip Dawdy, "Copy and Paste Job," *Seattle Weekly*, Sept. 1, 2004.

inquiry. Heath found another questionable story from 1997 and two from 2004. Dunphy resigned. The paper quoted him as saying:

> In retrospect, I find that I got into trouble when I tried to do more than just a column. In hindsight, I wish I had been more of an SOB and said I would just do columns rather than to try to be more than I could be. The plagiarism represented in these cases came from taking shortcuts – to get the story done, to get the information to readers. It was not intentional in the sense of some other cases of plagiarism that have surfaced recently. I was not trying to make up things.
>
> I have always felt I was more a conduit of information than a "personal" columnist. I personally checked and reported all of the information in the Alaska piece (one of the stories in question). I knew one reporter had recorded the interview in the Taiwan-Singapore case (another of the stories), that he would have it word for word where my notes were lacking. In a perverse way, my goal was accuracy. But that, as I have said, is by way of explanation not an excuse. It was unintentional although the record is hard to argue with at this point.[116]

The *Seattle Weekly* did its own snooping and reported finding at least nine cases of plagiarism in Dunphy's work.[117] Two weeks later, the *Seattle Times* said it "found 13 stories with significant portions that we felt were blatant plagiarism" along with "six other stories in which he used smaller sections of copy inappropriately" and eight stories with inadequate attribution, all dating to 1997. "Not to minimize the seriousness of this, the stories would fit a pattern of someone trying to do too much and taking shortcuts to get there. I never intended to use someone else's work," Dunphy said.[118]

Dunphy's claim that he "never intended to use someone else's work" is indicative of a thought process rationalizing dishonesty. His word-for-word copying on multiple occasions cannot be attributed to chance; clearly, he intended to copy other people's work despite claims to the contrary. At the same time, his executive editor does not acknowledge a whiff of culpability in touting Dunphy's prolific output without

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[116] Fancher, "Times Business Columnist Resigns."

[117] Dawdy, "Copy and Paste Job."

[118] Michael R. Fancher, "Accounting Made for Plagiarism," *Seattle Times*, Sept. 12, 2004, A2.

questioning how he managed to produce so much. Fancher does not explain why the 2000 case was not investigated further. Nor does he explain why the newspaper ignored that 2000 episode to promote Dunphy to the highest stature possible. By overlooking plagiarism in promoting a staffer to an award given out only nine times previously in the paper's history, the *Seattle Times* communicated tolerance of an offense it later declared indefensible. By dismissing a second case with a written warning, management let employees know that filing reams of copy may be more important than how the work got done. To its credit, the newspaper was transparent and forthcoming about the offense and the paper's subsequent investigation. Yet the introspection was limited to Dunphy's behavior and did not extend to the systemic issues exposed, as predicted by paradigm repair theory. The Dunphy case illustrates the interplay between individual and situational factors in plagiarism.

6.3.3 Self-Plagiarism

Two cases of self-plagiarism were described in Chapter 4 involving Mickey Herskowitz of the *Houston Chronicle* and Octavio Roca of the *Miami Herald*. They require an independent placement in this plagiarism typology because they are distinct from traditional forms of plagiarism. Editors flagged them because each writer reused material that he had written for a prior newspaper. As noted earlier, the editors in the two cases disagreed over whether the offenses were plagiarism. Whether the definition for plagiarism is the commonly expressed "passing off as one's own the words of another,"[119] or the standard advanced by this study, using someone else's words or

[119] Douglas Perret Starr, "Some Musings on Plagiarism," *Media Ethics*, Fall 2005.

original ideas without attribution, self-plagiarism is an imprecise concept. Newspapers do not seem to mind when reporters recycle previous stories published by the same newspaper; it is only when the reporter has changed employers that the newspaper objects to the reuse. What this category probably reflects is a perceived obligation to attribute a prior employer when reusing one's previous writings. As applied to newspapers, self-plagiarism is less an ethical infraction than a potential violation of ownership rights, although media researchers have yet to explore the concept.[120]

6.3.4 Idea Plagiarism

Also noted in Chapter 4 were two cases of visual plagiarism, which are more precisely conceptualized as idea plagiarism. One involved a political cartoonist, David Simpson of the *Tulsa World*, who thought he was recycling a cartoon he had drawn previously for another employer but actually was created 24 years earlier by Bob Englehart of the *Hartford Courant*. The other involved a photographer at the *Richmond (VA) Times-Dispatch*, Cindy Blanchard, who was accused of copying a close-up picture of candy published previously by a weekly magazine. As a definitional matter, the Simpson cartoon is easier to identify as plagiarism and culpability resides with the cartoonist. The Blanchard photo is more problematic. The photos are similar but not duplicates and there are few options for close-up studio pictures of pieces of candy. In addition, Blanchard did not choose the picture for the cover, or design it, or write the headline, and all of those combined to create a similar look. Liability, if not shared along the work-flow chain, more properly belongs with the person who chose the picture and

[120] A March 11, 2007, search of the Communication and Mass Media Complete database using the term "self plagiarism" produced no records.

designed the cover. Yet many designers dispute the notion that designs can be plagiarized, believing that copying is not just fair but expected. The details embedded in the Blanchard case prove the fundamental problem with visual plagiarism as a concept: it defies definition. Perhaps definitional clarity may arise after academic researchers consider the concept;[121] until then, it more properly belongs to a broad heading of idea plagiarism.

One word case captured in this study belongs to this plagiarism type: the use of short but distinctive phrases by *(Minneapolis) Star Tribune* editorial writer Steve Berg. The newspaper complicated the issue by initially downplaying the accusation[122] because it was pushed by a conservative blogger who regularly criticizes the *Star Tribune*.[123] When the blog identified a second instance two weeks later, the newspaper announced a more thorough review would be undertaken and finally named Berg as the writer.[124] After another two weeks, the newspaper said it found no other problems in a year's worth of work and Berg returned to work.[125] The political overtones were clear when Berg disparaged the accusations by "a right-wing blog"[126] and the newspaper focused on the lack of intent and relatively small amount of material reused. By focusing on defending itself, the newspaper missed a chance to raise public consciousness on the real issue: that the idea for two editorials originated with the *New Yorker* magazine. What made the

[121] A March 11, 2007, search of the Communication and Mass Media Complete database using the term "idea plagiarism" produced no records.

[122] Susan Albright, "Editor's Note," *(Minneapolis) Star Tribune*, Nov. 14, 2006.

[123] Kate Parry, "Can a Writer Unintentionally Plagiarize?" *(Minneapolis) Star Tribune*, Nov. 19, 2006, 2AA.

[124] Susan Albright, "Writings to be Examined," *(Minneapolis) Star Tribune*, Nov. 29, 2006.

[125] Susan Albright, "No Pattern of Nonattribution Found," *(Minneapolis) Star Tribune*, Dec. 17, 2006, 4AA.

[126] "Star Tribune Plagiarism Probe Clears Minn. Editorial Page Writer's Work," *Associated Press*, Dec. 17, 2006.

copying discernable was the distinctive writing of the magazine's Hendrik Hertzberg. Phrases such as "festival of bribery" were reproduced while Berg paraphrased Hertzberg's longer phrases; had Berg done a better job of rewriting, *Star Tribune* Editorial Page Editor Susan Albright might not have concluded that the "two instances of nonattribution were improper and unfortunate."[127] But of greater importance to readers trying to interpret the unsigned editorials that supposedly reflect management's opinion would be an acknowledgment that ideas have to come from somewhere, and Berg happened to find inspiration in Hertzberg. A former speechwriter for President Carter,[128] Hertzberg is an astute observer of American politics and an original thinker whose ideas contribute to the national debate, at least among liberals. Perhaps the only result of Berg's brush with notoriety will be improved paraphrasing, not more attribution, even though attributing ideas would better serve readers. If newspapers truly wish to engage in greater transparency, they can do worse than admit to the sources of ideas.

[127] Albright, "No Pattern."

[128] PBS biography, www.pbs.org/newshour/character/bios/hertzberg.html.

SECTION 7: CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Why Plagiarism Matters

Before applying the findings of this study to answer the underlying research question of why newspaper plagiarism continues to occur, it is worth considering what makes plagiarism a journalistic transgression. The fuzzy and sometimes tortured explanations journalists offer publicly are of little help; many can do no more than describe plagiarism as wrong because it violates trust. *Hartford Courant* Editor Michael Waller said plagiarism "goes to the heart of trust and credibility."[1] *Detroit News* Editor Mark Silverman said plagiarism is "a break in the bond of trust" between the newspaper and readers.[2] *Sarasota (FL) Herald-Tribune* Executive Editor Janet Weaver said plagiarism "is a violation of the trust between the newspaper and our readers."[3] *Seattle Times* Executive Editor Michael R. Fancher referred to taking action "so that readers can trust that we are intellectually honest with them in our reporting."[4] *Miami Herald* Editor Tom Fiedler said plagiarism is "breaking faith with readers."[5] Other editors speak vaguely of journalistic standards. "Plagiarism is a fundamental breach of our statement of principles," said Linda Grist Cunningham, the executive editor of the *Rockford (IL) Register-Star*, without saying what those principles were.[6] Executive Editor Sherrie

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[1] Colin McEnroe, "On Plagiarism, and What to Do About It," *Hartford Courant*, Aug. 14, 1991, A1.

[2] Mark Silverman, "Accuracy, Trust are Paramount," *Detroit News*, Dec. 22, 2000, 2A.

[3] Janet Weaver, "From Grade School On, Plagiarism is Forbidden," *Sarasota (FL) Herald-Tribune*, June 23, 2002, BS3.

[4] Michael R. Fancher, "Times Business Columnist Resigns Over Plagiarism," *Seattle Times*, Aug. 22, 2004.

[5] Tom Fiedler, "The Herald's Most Valuable Asset: Your Trust in Us," *Miami Herald*, July 4, 2004, 1L.

[6] "Rockford Register Star Sports Reporter Glennon Dismissed," *Rockford (IL) Register Star*, May 26, 2001, 1C. In the story, an unnamed author added, without elaboration, that among the principles were "seek and report the truth in a truthful way" and "act with integrity."

Marshall, whose *Macon (GA) Telegraph* was hit by two cases about three months apart, evoked "the standards that must be upheld if we are to maintain credibility with our readers" but did not specify them.[7] Editor Harry T. Whitin of the *Worcester (MA) Telegram & Gazette* wrote that plagiarism "is a big deal because most of us feel a special obligation to readers. Our core values include timeliness, accuracy, objectivity and fairness. By publishing plagiarized material, we have failed in some measure to uphold those values."[8]

That Whitin could do no more than throw out a laundry list of values – and proclaim that plagiarism is a violation of, well, something – is no less lucid than editors who can speak only of "trust" in describing to readers exactly what is wrong with plagiarism. Moreover, the explanations don't hold water. Plagiarism does not hurt "timeliness," for taking shortcuts helps meet deadlines. Neither does it lessen "accuracy"; plagiarism may actually enhance accuracy by copying material whose precision is already affirmed. Plagiarism is unconnected to "objectivity" and "fairness" is an issue to the person or organization whose work was reused, not to the sense of balance in the news story. "Trust," an elusive concept, may be less significant than the editors cited above realize. After the *Seattle Times* confessed to serial plagiarism by business columnist Stephen H. Dunphy, Managing Editor David Boardman told an American Society of Newspaper Editors conference that his newspaper heard from people who thought newspapers tolerated plagiarism. "They just said that that's how they thought

[7] Sherrie Marshall, "Dealing With a Journalistic Breach," *Macon (GA) Telegraph*, June 29, 2004, A6.

[8] Harry T. Whitin, "Plagiarism: A Cardinal Sin of Journalism," *Worcester (MA) Telegram & Gazette*, Feb. 13, 2005, C2.

your business worked," he said.[9] Three-fourths of the public believes journalists commit plagiarism "sometimes" or "often,"[10] yet 80 percent have a favorable view of daily newspapers, far better than the ratings given any government institution, including the Supreme Court.[11] It seems that readers expect some plagiarism without seeing it as a violation of trust.

Journalists struggle to explain why plagiarism matters to readers because the offense matters more to journalists.[12] Editors and their staffs see plagiarism as an unearned benefit. As Fiedler's comments cited in Chapter 4 describe, editors tend to see plagiarism in the newsroom as teachers do in the classroom: it's cheating. Plagiarism is wrong in academic settings because the student is short-circuiting the learning the assignment was intended to foster. But newsrooms are not classrooms; they are production venues to compile and disseminate information to news consumers. Readers care more about the accuracy of the information than they do how it was put together. It makes little difference whether the author was a college intern or a grizzled veteran, whether the reporter crossed two continents to get the story or obtained it by phone, or whether the journalist was clumsy or careful in paraphrasing the story from the suburban weekly. What matters to the reader is whether the story is accurate in detail and balanced in tone. Readers who felt betrayed by a shortage of skepticism in the run-up to the 2003

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[9] Andrew Ackerman, "Ethics Panelists at ASNE Discuss Albom, Kelley, Blair," *Editor & Publisher*, April 14, 2005.

[10] Michael White, "Survey: Public Thinks Journalists Often Guilty of Ethical Lapses," *Associated Press*, Oct. 16, 1998.

[11] "Public More Critical of Press, But Goodwill Persists," *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press*, June 26, 2005, http://people-press.org/reports.

[12] After the *Hartford Courant* published an editor's note on the sports section front page about a plagiarism accusation involving writer Ken Davis, the newspaper's public editor remarked: "I didn't hear from a single reader about the incident; perhaps it just wasn't important to the readers who usually call." Karen Hunter, "Stop Me If You've Read This Before," *Hartford Courant*, Feb. 9, 2003, C3.

invasion of Iraq do not ask whether the reporters produced original reporting; they ask whether the press fulfilled its fourth estate obligation to challenge governmental assertions. Readers are not disinterested in how the sausage was made; they want to know that journalists regulate conflicts of interest so that sacred cows are not protected or payola-like practices skew coverage. But in general, readers care more about the end result than the process, and plagiarism is a process issue.

There is, in fact, a reason why readers care about plagiarism, but it's not the explanation most journalists give. Wasserman wrote that plagiarism withholds attribution from readers that would allow them to make independent judgments about the source of the information and its reliability. "Concealing a story's origin deprives the public of valuable information about how social realities come to light. How we know what we know – the social epistemology of the story – is obfuscated."[13] From the customer's point of view, attribution provides breadcrumbs for where the journalist gets data and ideas, and offers a roadmap for conducting their own research into the source of the senator's campaign donations or a school's academic rankings. Attribution is part of the story, not a boilerplate disclaimer tacked onto the end of a story or stuck in a chart. NASCAR fans might like to know that the quotes attributed to Jeff Gordon actually came from a manufacturer's representative or that the source for the "public domain" data about the promiscuity of college women is an Internet survey lacking scientific validity.[14] The issue is not whether plagiarism violates "trust," but whether readers are given the attribution that allows them to be informed consumers of news.

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[13] Edward Wasserman, "Plagiarism and Precedence," *Media Ethics,* Fall 2006, 20.

[14] Howard Kurtz, "Sex, Booze & Surveys: Journos Gone Wild," *Washington Post*, May 29, 2006, C1.

Conceptualizing plagiarism as a violation of reader expectations for sufficient attribution is more than a rhetorically superior explanation for why anyone should care about the offense. It also represents a shift in perspective that carries ramifications for how newspaper plagiarism is analyzed and evaluated. A view of plagiarism as an unearned benefit reflects and reinforces a pretense that journalism is about originality. With a few exceptions, journalism is rarely original; it is derivative, stitching together information and challenging official narratives with contrary statements that enable readers to get a more complete picture about events and public policy. As Wasserman wrote:

> Journalism, as normally practiced, is not an especially original kind of discourse. By and large, journalists are forbidden to originate things. They are professionally obligated not to invent characters or plots. And, unless they're commentators or editorialists, they're not supposed to express their own ideas. When they do, they may be accused of being improperly opinionated. Their whole métier is to capture and convey realities, words, ideas from elsewhere.[15]

Viewing plagiarism as a failure to provide readers with attribution information authorizes journalists to embrace the derivative nature of the craft and allows the offense to be evaluated in the context of other practices that affect readers. In other words, if newspaper plagiarism matters because it is an offense against readers, instead of an affront to other journalists, then its role in normative newspaper practice is easier to dissect and the reasons for why it continues to occur become more discernable.

7.2 Why Plagiarism Occurs

This first-ever study of plagiarism behavior, documenting all known cases over 10 years and supplemented by interviews with eight people accused of plagiarism,

[15] Wasserman, "Plagiarism and Precedence," 16.

demonstrates that plagiarism is situationally influenced. At first blush, it appears to be a relatively rare event. The 76 cases involving full-time journalists at U.S. daily newspapers, identified while trying to compile a census, are a tiny fraction of the 55,000 employees in those newsrooms. The study showed that the rate of cases revealed publicly has roughly tripled since Jayson Blair in April 2003, but even at the higher rate, a new case of plagiarism is revealed only about once a month. Yet those figures may reflect the proverbial tip of the iceberg. The 76 cases in this study were publicly revealed in some way, which excludes most episodes that were quietly handled internally. Several of the eight journalists interviewed cited calls and e-mails they have received from peers who pleaded guilty to a similar offense. Emmett was dismissed for doing what others at his newspaper had done a dozen times in just three months, only with a little more paraphrasing. Hazel recalled attending a professional gathering with "a room full of scared people … who said, 'I've done the same thing.'" The Newspaper Guild convinced a Pennsylvania arbitrator that plagiarism was rampant in the newsroom. Plagiarism may not be such a rare event after all, which behooves an examination of the systemic issues. Editors are loath to see plagiarism so expansively, for they prefer to see it as a rare event perpetrated by misguided individuals, in the pattern predicted by attribution theory. But as this study shows, the newspaper shibboleth that plagiarism is solely an individual-level problem is challenged by the finding that those accused of the infraction seem to resemble the larger population of journalists, and include many well regarded individuals and two Pulitzer winners. The study revealed no distinguishing characteristic of those accused of plagiarism, save for gender, which is probably a proxy for experience. Plagiarism must be studied in the environment in which it occurs.

The potency of situational influences does not mean that individual factors are insignificant, and this study identifies two such causes. The first is rationalizing dishonesty, which involves an opaque, individualistic process that justifies dishonesty through an external locus of control, doubts about competency and the factors embedded in equity theory. Hazel described how the unfair assignment she had been given the prior week while on vacation tending to a sick relative partially justified a shortcut. Diane, suffering from depression, knew that copying information from another paper was wrong, yet did it anyway. The study documented far more serious forms of dishonesty in the five cases of appropriation plagiarism, from sticking a byline on someone else's story to stealing a national columnist's anecdote about his dying mother. Excuses may range widely from letting overwork situations cloud judgment to brazen theft, yet all reflect some degree of rationalization.

The other individual factor entails techniques susceptible to error, such as copy-and-paste habits compounded by forgetfulness, as illustrated by Bernice, Emmett and Fanny. Journalists may fail to include the Internet address when copying material to their files or use a printout – sometimes provided by an editor – as a guide to their story and thus hoe too closely to the original. Such work habits are risky solutions to meeting deadline pressure. Note mixing can be a convenient claim; moreover, it is an entirely avoidable error. Yet it is a mistake analogous to tailgating: a common practice that rarely gets anyone in trouble until there is a crash because a driver followed too closely.

In terms of measurable situational influences on plagiarism, the most significant factor identified by this study was circulation size. A disproportionate percentage of plagiarism cases occur at newspapers of greater than 250,000 circulation. These larger

newspapers employ 27 percent of the nation's daily journalists, yet account for 46 percent of the plagiarism cases over the 10-year period. The disparity is reversed for newspapers at the opposite end of the spectrum, of less than 50,000 circulation. Those smaller papers employ 38 percent of the journalists yet have just 9 percent of plagiarism cases. The association between circulation size and plagiarism behavior is probably caused by three factors: (1) that press watchdogs such as alternative weeklies and city magazines are more prevalent in larger cities where larger newspapers are found, (2) larger newspapers are more likely to pursue a common type of story that can be imitated while smaller papers tend to focus on exclusive coverage of their immediate circulation areas, and (3) the largest newspapers, which compete in print or online for national audiences, have a greater financial incentive to shun attribution. The statistically significant relationship between circulation size and plagiarism behavior quantifies the observations of the interviewees that larger newspapers behave in ways that invite more plagiarism.

One of those behaviors is endemic in the newspaper industry, an ingrained aversion to attribution reflected by the normative practice of absolving the wholesale insertion of material into stories through an end-of-story disclaimer or a small-type credit line in a chart. As the earlier-cited comments of the ethics committee co-chair of the ethics-minded Society of Professional Journalists reveal, newspapers excuse themselves from attributing information and waive away responsibility to be more specific.[16] The *Seattle Times* policy allowing reporters to use quotations they didn't hear by simply adding "told reporters" reflects a minimalist approach to attribution. Hazel described instances in which editors told journalists to write stories that were nothing more than

[16] Fred Brown, "Ethics Calls Apply Widely," *Quill*, March 2004, 22.

rewrites of wire copy with a local reporter's byline atop and a nod to the wire services tacked onto the end. Claude described how an editor added an unattributed quotation in a story, only to later accuse him of doing the same thing. Newspapers look for reasons to avoid attribution by proclaiming the information to be "public knowledge," even when that phrase may be code for "heard on TV," or by figuring, as the *Wall Street Journal* lawyer asserted, that nobody needs to know that information anyway. Larger newspapers may have financial motivations to not credit competitors, but a desire to avoid attribution cuts across circulation categories. Telling in this study was the fact that seven of eight interviewees, from all sizes of newspapers, said their mistakes involved a failure to paraphrase, not a failure to attribute. By systematically minimizing or evading attribution, newspapers confuse journalists about when unattributed information is kosher and when it morphs into plagiarism. By teaching their employees to skip attribution whenever possible, newspapers cause plagiarism.

A second situational influence on plagiarism is definitional ambiguity, an institutional failure to define plagiarism beyond "don't do it" injunctions. Some ambiguity is inherent in plagiarism definitions, which cannot quantify how much borrowing is too much or determine when an idea is original. Yet there is evidence that newspapers are creating definitions on the fly. In the two cases of self-plagiarism, the two editors disagreed on the definition, and one could say no more than it was "bad form." In the case involving the *Richmond (VA) Times-Dispatch*, the editor came up with a name, visual plagiarism, to justify sacking the photographer, prompting staff members to question what the term meant. Definitions also vary by genre, especially sports. What might be considered plagiarism on the city hall beat is acceptable copying in the sports

department. If editors cannot define their terms or explain why something is wrong beyond that it looks bad, if they allow different departments to establish different rules, they offer little guidance to an employee trying to do the right thing. By failing to define ahead of time the behavior they want their employees to avoid, editors are signaling that plagiarism is situationally determined and depending on borderline violations to set boundaries.

Definitional ambiguity is amplified by inconsistent sanctions. Consistent disciplinary action reinforces definitions and guides behavior; inconsistent sanctions obfuscate policy directives and confuse employees. As the study documented, newspapers differ widely in their handling of plagiarism. Copying from a book at one newspaper may be dismissed as insignificant while at another it merits dismissal. A reporter was fired at *USA Today* for not crediting two paragraphs while a reporter who took most of a column at the *Bozeman (MT) Chronicle* got a slap on the wrist. Even within the same newspaper, discipline varies. The *Columbus Dispatch*, faced with identical amounts of plagiarism, fired one author and kept the other. The *Houston Chronicle*, in cases a month apart, declared a case of copying to warrant a month-long suspension while a case of apparent plagiarism went unpunished. Sanctions can vary according to external circumstances. Newspapers that incur ethical dishonor, such as the *Boston Globe* over Mike Barnicle, *USA Today* over Jack Kelley and the *Salt Lake Tribune* over reporters paid by the *National Enquirer*, treat the next infraction more harshly to restore their standing within the profession, a form of impression management.

Conversely, proclamations of zero tolerance for plagiarism – a determination that any plagiarism case will result in dismissal – induce definitional malleability. Although

the study showed that a majority of people accused of plagiarism lose their jobs, dismissal is correlated with terminology. The data show that in 70 percent of the cases that resulted in dismissal, newspapers called the offense plagiarism. However, in 86 percent of the cases in which the accused retained employment, the newspaper called the offense by a synonym. This statistically significant relationship suggests the possibility that newspapers call the offense plagiarism when they want to get rid of someone and avoid the word when they want the employee to stay. This association between sanctions and definitions was reflected in some of the interviewees' beliefs that they were targeted for dismissal, and plagiarism was the excuse to pull the trigger. The symbiotic relationship between definitions and sanctions can be illustrated by the following figure.

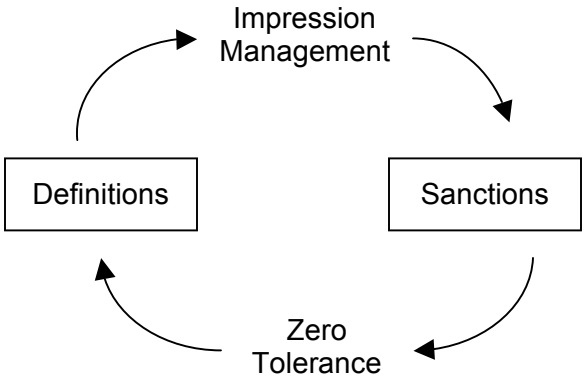

Figure 6: Relationship Between Definitions and Sanctions

Proclamations of zero tolerance for plagiarism reinforce its pariah state, which in turn leads to confusion about the term. As Hazel said, "I didn't make up fictional characters and have quotes from people who didn't exist, and in my mind, that's the really, that's the type of plagiarism that has no defense." Unfortunately, considerable attention given the Blair episode only reinforces the confusion, because he was guilty of plagiarism and fabrication. But journalists, who parse words for a living – discerning

between "convince" and "persuade," or "house" and "home"[17] – certainly can distinguish between copying and invention. That too many journalists continue to combine the two concepts betrays an unwillingness to distinguish between forms or types of plagiarism or to consider nuances. Instead, journalists lump plagiarism and fabrication into a basket of odious offenses that require banishment from the professional town square. In turn, journalists who need or want to engage in impression management publicly brand offenders with the *Scarlet Letter* "P" to assure their peers they have uncompromising standards. This need to find a scapegoat is predicted by paradigm repair, which holds that journalists will proclaim the offender outside the journalistic norm and expel him or her to preserve the purity of the profession. It is also supported by the data; the rate of dismissal in plagiarism cases has increased markedly (approaching statistical significance) since Blair's case was revealed.

There is reason, however, to question whether the crime fits the punishment. When plagiarism is viewed as something other than monolithic, such as the typology advanced in Chapter 6, only five of the 76 cases resemble the plagiarism stereotype. Eighty-seven percent of the cases are run-of-the-mill research plagiarism, usually blending some copied material with original reporting. When plagiarism is viewed as an ethical offense against readers, its status as "one of the worst offenses"[18] begs for comparisons with other infractions that hurt credibility. Readers expect their newspapers to be accurate and pull no punches, to avoid conflicts of interest that compromise the pursuit of truth. But even in the most hideous of errors, newspapers generally do not print the name of the erring reporter or editor in the correction, and reporters are rarely if ever

[17] Bill Walsh, *Lapsing Into a Comma* (Lincolnwood, IL: Contemporary Books, 2000), 124, 146.

[18] McEnroe, "On Plagiarism."

fired for a single howler. When a reporter is caught in a personal relationship with a source, most papers would quietly assign the reporter to another beat and say nothing of the change publicly. In terms of relative severity, serious accuracy issues or conflicts of interest detract far more from the quality of the information readers get than a failure to attribute. Yet the same newspaper that wouldn't think of firing a reporter for a factual blunder will sack a distinguished veteran for failing to attribute two paragraphs. The same newspaper that will suppress news about a reporter sleeping with a source will write a news story or correction about plagiarism and name the person involved. Such ethical comparisons raise doubts about whether typical plagiarism cases deserve their place in the severity hierarchy. Plagiarism should not be disregarded or condoned; as noted earlier, it is wrong because it deprives readers of valuable information. Yet when weighed against other ethical violations that shortchange readers, it is not clear that plagiarism is a more serious infraction than getting so cozy with sources that important news is withheld. Jayson Blair is properly denounced for serial plagiarism, yet he receives little or no condemnation for his admission that he traded news coverage for sex and changed a story to benefit a friend,[19] compromises that diminished the quality of what readers were given.

Peeling away this dichotomy between plagiarism's rightful place on the severity ladder with the prevailing view that it is a capital offense reveals the crux of the matter. Plagiarism unmasks an underlying predicament: a refusal to admit that newspaper journalism is less an original activity than one built upon parroting news sources, incrementally advancing the previous day's story and imitating coverage ideas.

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[19] Jayson Blair, *Burning Down My Masters' House: My Life at* The New York Times (Beverly Hills, CA: New Millennium Press, 2004), 138, 226.

Gladwell's words cited in Chapter 1 are worth repeating here: "because journalism cannot own up to its heavily derivative nature, it must enforce originality on the level of the sentence."[20] As Hazel described, newspapers detest appearing to be less than omniscient, so they borrow heavily from each other while rewriting just enough to avoid detection. When the copying is too close, and plagiarism observed, the newspaper dismisses the journalist for failing to hide the goods well enough. No one condemns the real source of the problem – copying – because that would topple the pretense of originality. That paraphrasing, rather than attribution, is seen as the sovereign remedy for plagiarism exposes the charade. Journalists do not attribute everything because it would require admitting that what they did was to repackage what they got from others. Certainly many journalists engage in original pursuit of stories, such as sifting through databases to discover that the U.S. military sends mentally unfit soldiers into Iraq.[21] Routine stories can involve reporters individually observing events or interviewing sources. Yet journalists operating independently also engage in pack journalism: they quote the same sources, follow similar story lines and look to each other for affirmation of their news judgments. Shoemaker and Reese identified this mutual dependency as a media routine that both defines news and shields journalists from uncertainty.[22] Wasserman noted that journalists should not be valued for their originality, in the way

[20] Malcolm Gladwell, "Something Borrowed," *New Yorker*, Nov. 22, 2004, 47.

[21] Lisa Chedekel and Matthew Kauffman, "Mentally Unfit, Forced to Fight," *Hartford Courant*, May 14, 2006, A1.

[22] Pamela J. Shoemaker and Stephen D. Reese, *Mediating the Message: Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content*, 2nd ed. (White Plains, NY: Longman Publishers, 1996), 122-127.

that poets and professors are. "On the contrary, we hope that the journalist's account remains ruthlessly faithful to source material, and we honor that fidelity as accuracy."[23]

If copying is a news routine, then the stiff sentences handed down for plagiarism can be seen as an extension of paradigm repair and christened "paradigm disguise." Plagiarism is a breach in the disguise and must be treated with grave severity, lest the paradigm of copying be exposed. The ideology of the profession requires that journalists insist on autonomy while taking their cues from what the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* put on their front pages,[24] on asserting independence while hewing closely to a consistent story line and on proclaiming originality in reporting while calling the same professor to deliver the same pithy quote.[25] An element of the ideology is what Lippmann described as "standardized routines" in which reporters depend on each other to describe news and rely on public relations agents to assemble story lines for them.[26] Without these routines, journalists would struggle mightily to perform their jobs. But admitting to the public the degree to which journalists depend on copying ideas and information from each other would challenge the news paradigm. Hence, the ideology requires that journalists who borrow liberally cloak their filching with minimal attribution and sufficient paraphrasing. This is the paradigm disguise. As long as journalism cannot own up to its lack of originality, it will encourage its practitioners to tut-tut over

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[23] Wasserman, "Plagiarism and Precedence," 19.

[24] During my tenure at the *Washington Post*, an image of the next morning's *New York Times* was uploaded to an intranet page about 11 p.m., and often an alert to the posting would be broadcast through the paper's internal messaging system. In the pre-Internet era, the Washington Post-Los Angeles Times wire service would send a text description each evening of the next day's front page and the relative position of stories.

[25] Al Kamen, "In the Loop," Sunday Magazine, *Washington Post*, Dec. 20, 1998, W02.

[26] Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004; reprint of a 1922 publication by Harcourt, Brace & Co.), 183-187.

similarities between sentences without recognizing the greater environment of copying and borrowing.

The theoretical construct of paradigm disguise explains the response of the *San Francisco Chronicle* in 2005 to one story in a seven-part series about suicides at the Golden Gate Bridge. On Nov. 5, the newspaper published this correction to the leadoff story in the series, by Edward Guthmann:

> The first installment of a series of stories on Golden Gate Bridge suicides, which appeared Sunday, contained material that had appeared in the Oct. 13, 2003, edition of the New Yorker magazine. The story should have attributed quotations from Ken Baldwin of Angels Camp and Marin County Coroner Ken Holmes to the magazine. It also used language nearly identical to that of the magazine to describe the California Highway Patrol's decision to halt the official count of suicides at 997 and to describe the unofficial 1,000th death.[27]

Guthmann later told a writer for *SF Weekly* that he felt the quotations were in the public domain. "Those quotes were not only two years old, but general enough that I didn't feel it was necessary to say where they originated. I was wrong," he said. The newspaper's executive editor, Phil Bronstein, wrote an ominous newsroom memo about the correction: "We believe plagiarism is among journalism's most serious professional breaches, if not the single most grave thing." What Bronstein did not say was that the entire series was inspired by the *New Yorker* story published two years earlier. In its "dog bites" section, *SF Weekly* wrote of the *Chronicle's* correction:

> It was a particularly inglorious end for a project in which the *Chronicle* had invested no little time and effort – eight bylines, seven front pages, and more than 30,000 words – and about which the first thing anyone with a *New Yorker* subscription said was, "Uh, didn't somebody already do this?"

The *SF Weekly* went on to write, "While some of the media world's pointier heads might cry, 'Plagiarism!' and mewl over the state of journalism in the era of Jayson Blair,

[27] "Editor's Note," *San Francisco Chronicle*, Nov. 5, 2005, A2.

it's worth considering whether the greater crime lay in the conception of a series that all but retraced the *New Yorker's* footsteps." The *Chronicle's* managing editor, Robert Rosenthal responded that the paper had the idea to report on the bridge suicides six or seven months before the *New Yorker* story.[28] Even still, the *New Yorker* got there first, and the *Chronicle* series mimics the magazine's story. The newspaper did not address the larger borrowing, sticking instead to the duplicated words while the paper's editor declared plagiarism to be perhaps journalism's most serious ethical offense. This is paradigm disguise.

In summary, plagiarism can happen because of reporters rationalizing dishonesty or making honest mistakes through faulty techniques like copying and pasting from the Internet or databases. Plagiarism can befall journalists hurrying too fast, covering unfamiliar topics, responding to sources' wishes or using material thought to be in the public domain. Newspapers can cause plagiarism behavior by teaching employees to minimize or avoid attribution and by failing to define through policies and practice what is acceptable borrowing and what is unacceptable plagiarism. Underneath it all, newspapers contribute to attribution confusion by engaging in paradigm disguise, pretending that journalism is an original enterprise instead of a derivative repackaging of information.

7.3 Practical Application

Although journalists are unlikely to challenge the originality paradigm that results in minor plagiarism being treated as a major crime, they can examine plagiarism from a

[28] Tommy Craggs, "A Bridge Too Far," *SF Weekly*, Nov. 16, 2005.

different perspective: that of the reader, instead of the journalist. When plagiarism is seen as depriving the reader of source information, the solution to plagiarism shifts from paraphrasing to attribution. In turn, when the cure is attribution, newspapers have to confront their historical reluctance to credit information. An emerging online ethic may help facilitate this perspective shift. Some online news organizations, such as MSNBC, make generous use of hyperlinks to direct readers to other sources of information from within stories. Such explicit and frequent attribution may weaken journalists' disinclination to acknowledge other sources of information. And more attribution means less plagiarism. Most of the eight interviewees might not have committed plagiarism if their newspapers had a workplace culture that acknowledged and credited competitors or other sources of information. Therefore, the primary application of this study is that if newspaper editors want less plagiarism, they must encourage more attribution.

Embracing attribution is easier said than done for journalists caught in the originality paradigm. Reluctance to credit competitors or acknowledge prior sources of information is part of the newsroom DNA. The not-invented-here syndrome is alive and well in newspapers, as the *New York Times* public editor discovered in 2007 in asking why his newspaper waited six days to report on the deplorable conditions at Walter Reed Army Medical Center after the *Washington Post* broke the story. "The Walter Reed story is only one of several examples I have found of the Times's belatedly publishing news first reported by other news organizations," the public editor wrote. "Excessive pride, I believe, is the fundamental problem."[29] Just as journalists take pride in scoops, they are quick to dismiss another's scoop as inconsequential; denial is an element of professional

[29] Byron Calame, "Reporting the News Even When a Competitor Gets There First," New York Times, March 1, 2008.

ideology. Yet as readers increasingly turn to the Internet for information, they become more aware of what competitors have to offer and have less patience for journalistic facades. Rather than pretend competitors don't exist, newspapers better serve readers by acknowledging their nonexclusive role in the information firmament.

Other journalists object on readability grounds, saying that attribution slows reading. But newspapers are not literature: they are vehicles for conveying information quickly. On those occasions when a newspaper has a well-researched story truly worthy of narrative techniques, attribution can be included at the end of the story or in a sidebar in a numberless version of footnotes or endnotes (for example: "he expressed his displeasure," Nov. 22 e-mail; "she vowed never to return," interview with artist). Sourcing cannot be skipped simply because it seems clunky, for attribution is vital information for the reader. Moreover, attribution enhances credibility, which may be a newspaper's most valuable asset. The answer is not to avoid attribution, but to find ways to provide that information to readers beyond a meaningless "wire services and online sources contributed to this report" disclaimer.

Some journalists reluctant to confront an environmental aversion to attribution prefer a technological solution. Several companies have written software that detects potential plagiarism, such as John M. Barrie's Turnitin program aimed at schools and his iThenticate targeted at publishers.[30] LexisNexis has partnered with Barrie's company to create CopyGuard,[31] which has been pitched to several newspaper companies. The programs compare target stories to a large database and return a color-coded "originality" report. Barrie claims some high-profile successes, such as *Oprah Winfrey Show* essay

[30] http://www.plagiarism.org.

[31] http://www.lexisnexis.com/copyguard.

contestants and a former president of Central Connecticut State University.[32] However, the programs are inherently imperfect. Each depends on the size and structure of proprietary databases that become more valuable as more original student material is submitted to programs such as Turnitin and MyDropBox.com,[33] and as books, government documents and archival materials are scanned online. In addition, the software algorithms can only provide hints; judgment is still required to determine whether the duplicated words reflect similar sourcing or imitation. Ironically, LexisNexis had made a sales call to the *Baltimore Sun* just before Michael Olesker was accused of plagiarism, and the *Sun* tested the software on his columns. The *Sun* found the software to be unreliable. LexisNexis rewrote the algorithm and eventually caught 10 of the 12 problematic columns already identified – after 10 hours of human evaluation of the computer report.[34] Software does not eliminate the need for personal intervention. Besides, anti-plagiarism software does not fix an environmental reluctance to attribute; all it can do is automate the most reliable detection system now in use: the eyes and minds of readers who smell a rat and alert the newspaper. Newspapers that continue to sow attribution aversion will continue to reap plagiarism.

After embracing a culture of attribution, the second step newspapers can apply from this study is to discontinue zero-tolerance assertions, which ignore shades in plagiarism and force definitional malleability. Assertions that plagiarism is perhaps the gravest offense in journalism can be supported only by reserving the term for its most acute manifestations, such as the five cases of appropriation plagiarism identified in this

[32] Mike Thomas, "Steal Traps," *Chicago Sun-Times*, July 9, 2006, B1.

[33] Mary Pilon, "Anti-Plagiarism Programs Look Over Students' Work," *USA Today*, May 23, 2006.

[34] Gadi Dechter, "Plagiarism 2.0," *Baltimore City Paper*, Feb. 15, 2006.

study. The problem is that 93 percent of plagiarism episodes are not nearly so severe. Yet because journalists have attached such dire pronouncements to plagiarism, they have to play word games in dealing with the vast majority of cases that are not so calamitous. Such linguistic contortions can backfire if they become dismissive euphemisms that, as studies show, can actually encourage unethical behavior. Newspapers would be wise to stop pretending that copying isn't plagiarism. Instead of trying to mask the behavior with synonyms, editors should call it by its proper name, plagiarism, while conceding that it varies in type and severity. Variations in severity imply variations in sanctions. Altering zero-tolerance policies enables newspapers to stop treating plagiarism as a monolithic offense and start acknowledging its nuances.

Third, newspapers should define plagiarism in ways that help guide staff behavior, before the next crisis hits. It took a serial plagiarism case for the *Seattle Times* to admit that its employees were perplexed about where to draw the line. Though its 3,000-word policy is flawed in several respects, it nevertheless offers a more effective guide to employees than the simplistic injunctions that comprise most newspaper policies, if they even address plagiarism. Newspapers need to define whether to credit information that comes from their archives, wire services and press releases. They need to define whether to treat "private" information differently than that in the "public domain," and if so, how to distinguish between the two. They need to be clear about whether reporters can use quotations they did not hear, such as the quote sheets passed out to sports reporters, or whether the source of those statements – the team publicists – should be acknowledged. They need to decide whether standards will differ between departments or be universal. Journalists tend to think that such definitions are

unnecessary because the rules are "common knowledge." Yet after an episode arises at their paper they quickly distribute new policies on attribution because it turns out that not everyone knew the rules. Newspapers that want to prevent plagiarism have an obligation to define it first, in clear terms – and prohibit the lawyers from stupefying the new policy into mush. To avoid having such definitions gather dust on the shelf, newspapers should make plagiarism part of regular staff conversations on ethics rather than consider it too obvious to discuss. None of the eight people interviewed recalled any discussion in their newsrooms about plagiarism before their episodes. Had there been such discussions, supported by written definitions and guidelines, their infractions might not have occurred.

Fourth, editors should remove intent from their definitional calculus and reserve it for sanctions. Too many journalists declare that copying isn't plagiarism because intent was lacking. This is akin to drivers of two cars who smash into each other at an intersection insisting that a collision did not occur because they did not intend to cause an accident. Conventional wisdom that there are two kinds of plagiarism, intentional and accidental, is specious; like collisions, plagiarism can occur inadvertently. Rather than intent, editors should address negligence. In the collision, negligence may be apportioned to one driver, to both, or even to situational factors, such as inadequate signage or inaccurate traffic signals. Similarly, negligence in plagiarism cases may be applied to individuals who employ faulty techniques, bend to deadline pressure or misread an editor's instructions. It may be shared with editors who remove attribution to save space or sow confusion through inconsistent definitions. Few people intend to do wrong, and even fewer intend to get caught, which is why negligence is a better standard, and more properly reserved for sanctions than in defining plagiarism.

Finally, journalists should match sanctions to the crime. Plagiarism is an ethical infraction not to be taken lightly, and sometimes dismissal is warranted. Yet newspapers treat plagiarism more severely than they do factual errors. In May 2005, *USA Today* pressured reporter Tom Squitieri to resign for failing to attribute two quotations published previously by the *Indianapolis Star*.[35] Eight months earlier, *USA Today* published a story asserting that the Texas Air National Guard had been giving favored treatment to George W. Bush based on the same disputed documents used by CBS.[36] When the person supplying the documents admitted to lying about their source, *USA Today* backed away from the story. Its top editor said the paper "never did vouch for the documents' authenticity" and admitted using the story only because CBS did.[37] A year after the Squitieri incident, *USA Today* published a story asserting that several companies had supplied the National Security Agency with domestic telephone call records.[38] Later, the newspaper published a long correction pulling back on the story.[39] "We take every error seriously," *USA Today* Editor Ken Paulson told the *Washington Post*. "This was obviously a big story…. All we can do is set the record straight."[40] The National Guard story reflects problematic techniques – failing to verify accusations and letting the CBS report dictate coverage– while the phone records story apparently went awry due to innocent misunderstandings. In neither factual error is there evidence of sanctions, nor

[35] "USA Today Reporter Resigns," *USA Today*, May 5, 2005.

[36] Dave Moniz and Jim Drinkard, "Guard Commander's Memos Criticize Bush," *USA Today*, Sept. 9, 2004.

[37] Howard Kurtz, "CBS, Sitting Between Fiasco and Fallout," *Washington Post*, Sept. 22, 2004, C1.

[38] Leslie Cauley, "NSA Has Massive Database of Americans' Phone Calls," *USA Today*, May 11, 2006, 1A.

[39] "A Note to Our Readers," *USA Today*, June 30, 2006.

[40] Frank Ahrens and Howard Kurtz, "USA Today Takes Back Some of NSA Phone-Record Report," *Washington Post*, July 1, 2006, A2.

should there be; mistakes happen. Yet Squitieri's non-attribution cost him his career. Only decision-makers in these cases know the full story, and extenuating circumstances may have affected the sanctions administered. However, *USA Today* is by no means alone in forgiving major factual errors while prosecuting plagiarism. The ranking of relative severity reflects the influence of paradigm disguise, rather than a careful parsing based on the consequences of the infractions on readers.

7.4 Suggestions for Further Study

First, ongoing documentation of plagiarism cases as they occur in 2007 and beyond will extend the research and may allow refinements in the four-factor model of plagiarism advanced by this study, which was inductively drawn from the 76 cases over 10 years. Already in 2007, a case surfaced in which an editor was accused of directing staff members to copy stories from other newspapers and falsely identify them as Associated Press creations. The editor denies giving such an instruction,[41] but if true, it reflects a new type that could be called institutional plagiarism. Additional cases may also allow for divisions in the most frequently occurring type, research plagiarism.

Second, further research is needed into the statistically significant association between circulation size and plagiarism behavior. Surveys of journalists in the smallest category (less than 50,000 circulation) and largest category (more than 250,000 circulation) augmented by interviews could affirm the hypotheses in this study or develop better explanations for why plagiarism occurs disproportionately often at larger papers and less often at smaller papers. Additionally, case studies of representative newspapers

[41] Sharon Dunn, "Tribune Puts a Stop to Questionable Practice," *(Greeley, CO) Tribune*, Feb. 23, 2007; Kevin Darst, "Greeley Paper Acknowledges Ethical Lapses," *(Fort Collins) Coloradoan*, Feb. 23, 2007.

in both categories may yield insights into organizational behaviors that may trigger plagiarism.

Third, development of a model newspaper plagiarism definition would benefit the industry. Such a model could be developed through a joint project with an industry or professional association. Various methods to shift newsroom culture from avoiding to embracing attribution could be field-tested and measured for effectiveness.

Fourth, additional development of paradigm disguise is necessary for the term to become a theoretical concept. Paradigm disguise may be applied to pack reporting so prevalent in political reporting, and to the shared definition of news: why news organizations desire to see their judgments affirmed by imitation. To serve a predictive or descriptive purpose, paradigm disguise will require further debate and intellectual development.

Finally, researchers will need to watch how a shift from print to online will affect attribution and plagiarism behavior. One of the underlying suppositions fueling attitudes about plagiarism is intellectual property, a legal and regulatory concept now challenged by the mash-up Internet culture. Greater reliance on online media and the hyperlinks it affords may increase expectations of attribution and lessen plagiarism behavior. On the other hand, the online environment also encourages an ethos in which movies, term papers and music are community property to be distributed free. Some college students believe plagiarism from the Internet is an oxymoron, because the Internet is devoid of ownership claims. Whichever of these approaches – the hyperlink vs. the wiki – proves dominant in the evolving online news world may significantly impact plagiarism. Plagiarism may become less frequent as journalists attribute more, or it may become a

relic in a collectivist culture. However the underlying philosophy evolves, newspaper plagiarism is likely to become a different concept as organizations shift more resources away from print and toward the Internet.

Appendix A: Full-Time Journalists Accused of Plagiarism, 1997 to 2006

Name	Publication	Year	Type
Abdullah, Khalil	Macon (GA) Telegraph	2004	Appropriation
Adams, Cindy	New York Post	1997	Research
Albom, Mitch	Detroit Free Press	2005	Research
Badger, Emily	Orlando Sentinel	2004	Research
Bagley, Carla	Greensboro (NC) News & Record	2006	Research
Barnicle, Mike	Boston Globe	1998	Research
Beal, Thom	(Denver) Rocky Mountain News	2005	Research
Behziz, Nada	Bakersfield Californian	2005	Appropriation
Berg, Don	(Minneapolis) Star-Tribune	2006	Idea
Berkow, Ira	New York Times	2003	Research
Blair, Jayson	New York Times	2003	Appropriation
Blanchard, Cindy	Richmond (VA) Times-Dispatch	2005	Idea
Blocker, Kevin	Spokane (WA) Spokesman-Review	2003	Research
Brown, G.	Denver Post	2003	Research
Brown, Lloyd	(Jacksonville) Florida Times-Union	2004	Research
Burkett, Michael	(Ogden, UT) Standard-Examiner	1997	Research
Casey, Rick	Houston Chronicle	2004	Research
Cawthon, Raad	Philadelphia Inquirer	2000	Research
Cecil, Chris	(Cartersville, GA) Daily Tribune News	2005	Appropriation
Chou, Hsiao-Ching	Seattle Post-Intelligencer	2000	Research
Costello, Daniel	Wall Street Journal	1998	Research
Dasher, Anthony	Athens (GA) Banner-Herald	2005	Research
Davis, Ken	Hartford Courant	2003	Research
Dunphy, Stephen H.	Seattle Times	2004	Research
Epstein, Warren	Colorado Springs Gazette	2000	Research
Erlanger, Steven	New York Times	2005	Research
Fields, Greg	Macon (GA) Telegraph	2004	Research
FitzGerald, Tom	San Francisco Chronicle	2001	Research
Fitzpatrick, Catherine	Milwaukee Journal Sentinel	2003	Research
Garza, Thelma	San Antonio Express-News	1997	Appropriation
Geller, Andy	New York Post	2006	Research
Gilpin, Kenneth N.	New York Times Web site	2004	Research
Glennon, Ed	Rockford (IL) Register Star	2001	Research
Guthmann, Edward	San Francisco Chronicle	2005	Research
Haas, Tim	Bozeman (MT) Chronicle	2003	Research
Hall, Steve	Indianapolis Star/News	1999	Research
Hallett, Joe	Columbus Dispatch	2005	Research
Harden, Blaine	Washington Post	2003	Research
Herskowitz, Mickey	Houston Chronicle	2004	Research
Jacoby, Jeff	Boston Globe	2000	Research
Johnson, Bill	(Denver) Rocky Mountain News	2006	Research
Kelley, Jack	USA Today	2004	Research
Kinney, Michael	Sedalia (MO) Democrat	2003	Research
Knowles, Skip	Salt Lake Tribune	2003	Research
Krugel, Mitchell	San Antonio Express-News	2000	Research
LeDuff, Charlie	New York Times	2003	Research

Name	Publication	Year	Type
Levine, Al	Atlanta Journal-Constitution	2005	Research
Love, Dennis	Sacramento Bee	2000	Research
Martin, Douglas	New York Times	2000	Research
Mubarak Dahir	St. Louis Post-Dispatch	1998	Research
Nelson, Kathleen	St. Louis Post-Dispatch	2000	Research
Olesker, Michael	Baltimore Sun	2006	Research
Parker, Karen	Sarasota (FL) Herald-Tribune	2002	Research
Perkins, Ken Parish	Fort Worth Star-Telegram	2005	Research
Pfeiffer, Eric	Washington Times	2006	Research
Plummer, Don	Atlanta Journal-Constitution	2006	Research
Porter, Phil	Columbus Dispatch	2005	Research
Powers, Ken	(Worcester, MA) Telegram & Gazette	2005	Research
Prufer, Mona	(Myrtle Beach, GA) Sun News	2001	Research
Puleo, Gary	(Norristown, PA) Times Herald	2003	Research
Rasmussen, Cecilia	Los Angeles Times	2005	Research
Renzhofer, Martin	Salt Lake Tribune	2002	Research
Rice, Glenn	Kansas City Star	2002	Research
Roca, Octavio	Miami Herald	2004	Research
Ryan, Tim	Honolulu Star-Bulletin	2006	Research
Simpson, David	Tulsa World	2005	Idea
Smith, Brad	Tampa Tribune	2005	Research
Squitieri, Tom	USA Today	2005	Research
Stanton, Barry	(Westchester, NY) Journal News	2002	Research
Stewart, Phyllis	Malone (NY) Telegram	1997	Research
Storozynski, Alex	amNew York	2005	Research
Sykes, Shinika	Salt Lake Tribune	2006	Research
unnamed	Detroit News	2000	Research
unnamed	(Fort Lauderdale, FL) Sun-Sentinel	2005	Research
Weinraub, Bernard	New York Times	2003	Research
Wigler, Stephen	Baltimore Sun	1999	Research

Appendix B: Plagiarism Case Content Analysis Codebook

Sex
- 1 Female
- 2 Male

Date

Circulation
- 1 Under 50,000
- 2 50,000-100,000
- 3 100,001-250,000
- 4 Over 250,000

Department
- 1 Features
- 2 News
- 3 Opinion
- 4 Photo
- 5 Sports
- 9 Unknown

Position
- 1 Cartoonist
- 2 Columnist
- 3 Critic
- 4 Editorialist
- 5 Manager
- 6 Photographer
- 7 Reporter
- 9 Unknown

Experience
- 1 0-2 years
- 2 3-10 years
- 3 Over 10 years
- 9 Unknown

Severity
- 1 Limited
- 2 Substantial
- 3 Serial

Outcome

1	Kept job
2	Lost job
9	Unknown

Termed

1	Synonym
2	Plagiarism
3	No correction
4	Unavailable

CircGroup

1	Under 250,000
2	Over 250,000

TermSimpl

1	Synonym
2	Plagiarism

Blair

1	Pre-Blair
2	Post-Blair

Appendix C: Similar Columbus Dispatch Cases

Part One: 2002 case, 111 words, no sanction

	First Story	Second Story
	News story by reporter Brigid Shulte, Washington Post, March 26, 2002	*Commentary by Senior Editor Joe Hallett, Columbus Dispatch, March 31, 2002*
1	More blacks graduated from the College Park campus under Kirwan than from any other university, not including historically black colleges.	… **more blacks graduated from the College Park campus under Kirwan than from any other universit**y, except for **historically black colleges**.
2	When the local city council was about to stymie the deal in a midnight vote, Kirwan, who had been watching the deliberations on local cable in his pajamas, burst through the hearing room door, pulling on his suit jacket, and turned the vote around.	It [passion] is what drove him years ago to wiggle out of his **pajamas, pull on his suit** and **burst through the doors** of the College Park City Council chambers at **midnight** to stop council members from scotching a deal to land a research center for the University of Maryland.
3	And his passion – shown by the e-mails at 2 a.m. …	**Passion** is what drives him **to e- mail** Ohio State University colleagues **at 2 a.m.**
4	In a speech at the University of Virginia in February 2000, Kirwan said his epiphany came during the summer he graduated from high school, when he worked in a rock quarry making concrete blocks. He became fast friends with a young black man, and when they wanted to go to dinner one night, he realized that there was nowhere they could go in the white community. So they went to the black neighborhood. "I was the only white there, of course," Kirwan said. "Right away, I felt that sense of discomfort that many minorities must feel even today when they enter the 'white world.'"	Kirwan's commitment to diversity as president at Maryland and, since 1998, as OSU president resulted from an **epiphany during the summer** after **he graduated from high school. He worked in a quarry making concrete blocks** and **became fast friends with a young black man**. **One night, they wanted to go to dinner** but **realized there was nowhere in the white community** that would accept his friend. **So they went to the black neighborhood**. **"I was the only white there, of course," Kirwan** recalled during a speech in 2000. **"Right away, I felt that sense of discomfort that many minorities feel even today when they enter the 'white world.'"**

Part Two: 2005 case, 123 words, reporter fired

	First Story	Second Story
	No-byline story by Columbus Business First March 25, 2005	*News story by reporter Phil Porter, Columbus Dispatch March 26, 2005*
1	Michael J. McMennamin, vice chairman of Huntington Bancshares Inc., is retiring. McMennamin will leave the bank March 31, Huntington reported Thursday in a filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission.	**Michael J. McMennamin, vice chairman of Huntington Bancshares Inc., is retiring Thursday, Huntington said in** a one-sentence **filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission**.
2	The 59-year-old McMennamin was chief financial officer of the Columbus-based banking company until August, relinquishing the position amid an investigation by regulators into a series of accounting restatements. John D. Van Fleet, Huntington's controller, gave up his post at the same time.	**McMennamin, 59, was chief financial officer of the Columbus-based banking company until August**. **He** left **the position amid an investigation by regulators into a series of accounting restatements. John Van Fleet, Huntington's controller,** stepped down **at the same time.**
3	After McMennamin stepped away from the CFO role, he retained the title of treasurer. Mahesh Sankaran, a former executive with Compass Bancshares Inc. of Birmingham, Ala., became Huntington's treasurer in February.	Until Feb. 28, **McMennamin retained the title of treasurer. Mahesh Sankaran, a former executive with Compass Bancshares Inc. of Birmingham, Ala.,** has since taken over the **treasurer's** post.
4	Huntington attracted the attention of regulators in 2004 over questions about its accounting and financial reporting practices, especially its methods for booking automobile leases. The company said March 1 it had reached agreements with the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland and the U.S. Comptroller of the Currency to settle investigations into its accounting practices, but an SEC probe continues.	**Huntington attracted the attention of** the SEC last year for accounting miscues, most of which are related to the way the bank recorded **auto leases**. **The company said March 1** that **it had reached agreements with the Federal Reserve of Cleveland and the** Office of the **Comptroller of the Currency to settle** the **investigations. An SEC probe continues**.
5	Huntington Capital is looking for a new chief, Grier-Ball said, and a management team will run the company in the interim.	**A management team will run the company in the interim**.

Appendix D: Depth Interview Consent Form

Consent Form

"Systemic Influences on Newspaper Plagiarism"

This is a research project conducted by Norman Lewis at the University of Maryland, College Park. You are being invited to participate because you once were accused of newspaper plagiarism. The purpose of this research is to study the circumstances surrounding newspaper plagiarism. You will be asked to respond to questions regarding the circumstances of your case and the atmosphere of the newspaper where you worked. The interview is expected to take 1 to 2 hours.

I will keep your identity confidential. Only two people will hear the recording of this interview: the transcriber and the researcher. Only the transcripts, which will use a pseudonym for your identity, will be used for this research project and for any subsequent publication. Once the interviews are transcribed, the digital recordings will be burned on a CD-ROM and removed from the researcher's laptop hard drive and the researcher's iPod. The CD-ROM will be stored in the researcher's locked file cabinet for 10 years after completion of the dissertation and then will be destroyed.

Comments made in the interview will be published in the researcher's dissertation. The researcher also will seek to publish findings in academic journal articles. The researcher may seek to publish findings in industry publications or a book. Generally, publication involves summary findings (X of Y people interviewed cited Z as a factor) and verbatim excerpts to provide authenticity, but without details that would betray confidentiality.

This interview could pose a psychological risk by inviting you to revisit an episode that may have affected you and/or your career. This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the researcher and the newspaper industry by better understanding the circumstances surrounding plagiarism.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You may choose not to take part. If you decide to participate, you may stop participating at any time. Also, if you request, I can send you a copy of an interview transcript and allow you to clarify remarks or add something you neglected to mention during the interview.

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact me at the University of Maryland, Philip Merrill College of Journalism, College Park, MD 20740; nlewis@jmail.umd.edu; or by cell phone at 301-642-4769. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; irb@deans.umd.edu; 301-405-0678. This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age, the research has been explained to you, your questions have been fully answered and you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.

Name:

_____ Date: _____

Do you allow the interview to be recorded, subject to the confidentiality restrictions described above?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

Appendix E: Depth Interview Questions

1. Tell me a little bit about your journalism career.
2. What do you consider to be your key career accomplishments?
3. Describe the incident in which you were accused of plagiarism.
4. How would you describe the atmosphere in the newsroom about this time?
5. At the time, did you think it was plagiarism? Why/why not?
6. Now that you look back on it, would you define what you did as plagiarism? Why/why not?
7. Why do you think you did it?
8. If you had it to do all over again, what would you have done differently, and why?
9. How often was plagiarism discussed in the newsroom?
10. How often were discussions about ethics held in the newsroom?
11. Was there an ethics code at the time? If so, what were the circumstances in which it was talked about?
12. If you were the boss, how would you have handled a case like yours?
13. On a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 is not serious at all and 100 is very serious, how would you rate plagiarism as an ethical offense?
14. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about this case, or your career?

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