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A Phenomenological Investigation of College Students' Construction and Representation of Plagiarism

Kurt William Bouman
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF COLLEGE STUDENTS'

CONSTRUCTION AND REPRESENTATION OF PLAGIARISM

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Kurt William Bouman

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania
The School of Graduate Studies and Research
Department of English

We hereby approve the dissertation of

Kurt William Bouman

Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September 21, 2009   Signature On File
                             Bennett A. Rafoth, Ed.D.
                             Professor of English, Advisor

September 21, 2009   Signature On File
                             Michael M. Williamson, Ph.D.
                             Professor of English

September 21, 2009   Signature On File
                             Jean Nienkamp, Ph.D.
                             Associate Professor of English

ACCEPTED

  Signature On File
Timothy P. Mack, Ph.D.
Dean
The School of Graduate Studies and Research

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Title: A Phenomenological Investigation of College Students'
         Construction and Representation of Plagiarism

Author: Kurt William Bouman

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Bennett A. Rafoth

Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. Jean Nienkamp
                                    Dr. Michael M. Williamson

This dissertation describes an empirical research study of plagiarism at the college undergraduate level. In a series of semi-structured research sessions—nine individual interviews and six focus group conversations—the researcher met with 31 college students to ask questions and prompt discussion about plagiarism.

Plagiarism has been of broad interest to the academy, and scholars from Composition Studies and other disciplines have examined it through theoretical and empirical lenses. Their research has revealed substantial disagreements in the ways that plagiarism has been constructed and represented within the academy. Some studies have explored how college students understand and negotiate the academic construction of plagiarism; few studies, however, have asked what college students see when they consider the topic.

This dissertation employs a phenomenological research approach; it seeks to understand plagiarism as it is understood and experienced by college students themselves. The study addresses plagiarism both as a concept and as an act with significant ideological, ethical, institutional, and pragmatic aspects. In doing so, it considers some of the social, ethical, and textual implications of contemporary Western conventions and expectations regarding source use and citation, and it addresses the nature and function of source-based writing in college.

Based on an analysis of the conversation from the study's interview and focus group sessions, the dissertation presents, describes, and analyzes the research participants' construction

and representation of plagiarism. The students' voices, stories, and experiences reveal a series of alignments with and disconnections from many of the primary beliefs and assumptions we hold about plagiarism, authorship, and student writers. The teaching and policy implications of these alignments and disconnections are at times confirmatory, at times unsettling. In conclusion, this dissertation suggests that college students' perspectives on plagiarism can and should inform our disciplinary and institutional constructions and policies regarding plagiarism.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to all who have helped and supported me in my studies, in my research, and in my profession. In particular:

My doctoral director, Dr. Bennett Rafoth. At the beginning of my graduate studies, you welcomed me into an academic community that finds a really good question just as important (and equally dangerous) as a confident response. Ben, you valued and encouraged my curiosity, and you helped me build a future in words. I appreciate the bar and the model you set for us all.

My partner in the trip, Amy Minett. I saw you through charcoal, and more than two were saved that day. Even if I wasn't Kurt from the circus, Amy, I'm so glad I am now.

My first teachers, Bill and Cindy Bouman. Mom, I watched without understanding as you took seriously the minds and experiences of two year olds. Dad, I watched without understanding as you drew yellow lines over inscrutable text at the desk your mother had given us. I didn't understand, and maybe you didn't, either, but you still watched me take things apart just to see what was inside, and as you watched as my hole to China deepened inch by inch. I came out with a passion for curiosity, and you have been my strongest and most steadfast supporters. Forty two years later, I'm glad to report that I've hit China. And still so much to learn.

To you, and to all who have lit my path:

Whether on shoulders or in shadows, each of you has helped me take on the giants, and neither MLA (Gibaldi 142) nor APA (American Psychological Association, 2003, p. 63), not Chicago[1], nor even Uncle Ho, can help me give you the <u>shout-out</u> you deserve.

Thank you, thank you.

---

[1] Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 65.

This doctoral dissertation, *A Phenomenological Investigation of College Students' Construction and Representation of Plagiarism*, by Kurt William Bouman, has been awarded "Pass with Distinction" in recognition of the outstanding quality and scholarship of the dissertation. The award was assigned on the 21st day of September, 2009, by the members of Kurt William Bouman's Ph.D. committee: Dr. Bennett A. Rafoth (Chair), Dr. Michael M. Williamson, and Dr. Jean Nienkamp.

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To Fidentinus

You stole my book—one page and one alone
    Is yours, indelibly 'tis signed and sealed
With vilest imperfections all your own:
    Thus of the rest your theft doth stand revealed.
So when the courtly gallants of the Town
    Are elbowed by a bumpkin smeared and patched,
Their cloaks are sullied by the greasy clown;
    Is vulgar clay with clearest crystal matched?
When to swan-haunted streams a crow is nigh
    The carrion bird hath yet a fouler taint,
When thrills the grove to nightingales, the pie
    Mars with her evil shriek the Attic plaint.
No surer proof, no advocate, I need
Your page stands forth to prove your felon deed.

                    Martial (Marcus Valerius Martialis)
                    Epigram I.53 (approx. AD 84)
                    (Trans. J. A. Pott and F. A Wright, 1924)

CHAPTER ONE:

OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION

Introduction

Over the past decade or so, plagiarism has become an increasingly prominent concern for many of us who teach college composition, serve in writing centers, and direct college writing programs. Technological advances—most notably the tremendous reach of the Internet—have made easily available to students enormous reserves of information and text. In addition to providing access to rapidly expanding databases of popular and scholarly full-text articles, networked computers now permit writers to publish and share their privately composed documents in ways unthinkable only twenty years ago. Then, students wishing to crib a paper needed to reach beyond the edge of their desktops, whether by visiting a fraternity's term-paper file, by writing to one of the "research assistance" services advertised in the back pages of magazines, or by quietly paying off a classmate. Today, however, students' easy access to electronic repositories of texts has raised the index of suspicion regarding plagiarism, and many writing teachers and administrators believe that college students are cribbing texts more than ever—despite empirical data which suggests otherwise (Brown & Emmett, 2001, p. 536). Indeed, recent high-profile stories of plagiarism among both undergraduate and professional writers have convinced many people that today's college students are living in a textual candy shop, surrounded by the constant threat of the temptations to plagiarize.

Writing teachers and institutions have responded to our lack of control over students' access to nearly limitless texts and how they use them—as well as to our inability to reliably

determine the provenance of our students' papers—in diverse ways. Some of us have developed aggressive anti-plagiarism policies that describe the punishments that await the plagiarist, threatening sanctions that range from the rewriting of a paper to full academic dismissal. Some of us have responded pedagogically: we teach "proper" and "improper" ways to use and cite sources; we restrict students' source use to specified, authorized texts; or we require that students document their research processes with proposals, abstracts, summaries, and copies of their sources. Others have addressed their plagiarism concerns by designing writing assignments that require the kinds of personal or reflective writing that might be difficult for students to fake. Some colleges and universities have chosen outsource the verification of writers' texts, purchasing expensive plagiarism detection services (such as that offered by Turnitin.com) that promise to reveal the true scope of student plagiarism in rich, hypertextual detail. Finally, some teachers have abandoned writing assignments altogether, finding that the authentication of student authorship has become too burdensome.

Scholars within the field of Composition Studies have explored plagiarism's challenges in diverse ways. We have considered the concept of plagiarism by discussing it in terms of voice (Bowden, 1996); we have looked to ancient discussions of originality and imitation in rhetoric (Swearingen, 1999); and we have suggested that plagiarism might be most accessible for students if we present it as an issue of copyright and intellectual property (Walker, 1998). Some scholars have insisted that plagiarism is a "moral issue [that] asks us to take a moral position" (White, 1999, p. 206), while others have maintained that "morality is not a necessary component of plagiarism" (Howard, 1995, p. 788), pointing out that certain kinds of plagiarism might represent an attempt at writerly growth rather than an academic violation that demands swift, decisive punishment (see also Howard, 1992, 2000a).

Many composition and TESOL theorists have represented plagiarism as a socially constructed concept, explaining that it is grounded in culturally specific beliefs about authority, authorship, and epistemology (e.g., Howard, 1999; Ede & Lunsford, 1990; Jaszi & Woodmansee, 1994; Deckert, 1993). Alastair Pennycook (1994) described plagiarism's context-specific nature particularly well:

> Plagiarism needs to be understood relative to the context of the concept (Western academic concepts of authorship, knowledge, and ownership), the context of the students (their cultural and educational backgrounds), the context of the institution (the demands of English-medium institutions in a colonial context), the context of the specific tasks required (assumptions about background knowledge and language ability), and the context of the actual use and "misuse" of text (the merits and demerits of the actual case of textual use). (p. 278)

The notion of plagiarism as a context-specific phenomenon suggests the importance of studying plagiarism as a contextually situated practice. However, a cribbed paper presents only one face of student plagiarism; words on a page do not fully account for the contexts of their production, and a submitted text may not accurately represent a writer's intentions nor align with her understanding of plagiarism.

Composition Studies has a rich discourse on plagiarism; our professional literature abounds with theoretical perspectives on student plagiarism, most of which offer alternative explanations and new suggestions for teaching and responding to plagiarism. However, our empirical discourse on plagiarism—a discourse grounded in systematic, research-based studies— is thin, and explorations of how college students understand plagiarism are rare. When we fail to

include the perspectives of student writers in our plagiarism discussions, we overlook those who are most affected by our various theories, values, policies, and beliefs about plagiarism.

Students' texts prompt a variety of instructional, institutional, and theoretical responses to plagiarism. However, despite many theoretical and empirical inquiries into plagiarism, we know little about students' beliefs, values, attitudes, and experiences regarding plagiarism; we know little as well about how their constructions of plagiarism affect students' research strategies and writing practices. We have talked about, researched, and theorized plagiarism without a rich understanding of what our students bring to the phenomenon. Simply put, we haven't yet paid enough attention to the ways that our students conceptualize plagiarism.

<div align="center">The Research Approach of This Study</div>

This dissertation investigates student plagiarism as college writers understand it. It considers plagiarism as a textual and compositional practice, without contending that the act is inherently improper or reprehensible. When students plagiarize, deliberately or inadvertently, they are engaging in writing behaviors that *they* believe to be somehow appropriate and/or justifiable. It is likely that plagiaristic strategies have served some student writers well, even if their compositions do not reflect the learning, performance, or textual processes that their instructors and institutions expect.

This dissertation's research approach is a phenomenological inquiry into how students view plagiarism. To position the study as phenomenological, I draw on the concept of *bracketing*, in which a researcher attempts to adopt a "naïve" stance toward the topic (Kleiman, 2004; see also Ashworth, Freewood, & Macdonald, 2003). This naïve positioning—essentially, a suspension of preexisting explanatory theories—helps the researcher to understand how the research participants make meaning of the topic being investigated. An insistence on plagiarism

as inherently unacceptable would undermine the phenomenological objective of the dissertation by locating students' perspectives on plagiarism against a pre-existing interpretive framework that they may or may not share.

The discourse of plagiarism embeds within itself—sometimes explicitly, but often not—beliefs and values about voice, originality, autonomy, authorship, collaboration, and intertextuality. These beliefs and values undergird all of our exhortations about writing with sources, yet they can obscure the complexity of student plagiarism beneath blanket judgments about its impropriety. This can lead us to make too-hasty judgments, incorrect interpretations, and unsupportable conclusions about the act. As Pennycook (1994) wrote, "Rather than assuming that there is some clear and identifiable 'problem' called 'plagiarism, we need to ask why this particular problematization is occurring.... We need to understand the diverse practices and assumptions that underlie [the] concept" (p. 277). As a researcher hoping to draw out college students' ideas about plagiarism, therefore, it seems both useful and important to regard plagiarism through the lens of phenomenology, adopting a naïve stance for the inquiry by setting aside the institutional, cultural, and discursive values that form the foundation of our plagiarism policies and practices.

Research Questions for the Study

The question that frames this study is, "How do college students understand and experience plagiarism?" However, the diverse contexts of plagiarism, as well as the complexity of its constructions, prompt a series of more specific research questions. As I make clear, the primary question explores students' construction and representation of plagiarism; as I address this question, I raise several related ones:

1. How do college students conceptualize plagiarism?

(a) How do students define, construct, and represent plagiarism?

(b) Do college students address plagiarism through the same frames that academics have used to discuss it, or do their notions and discussions offer alternative ways for us to understand, explain, and respond to plagiarism?

(c) What beliefs, values, and experiences are behind their constructions of plagiarism?

(d) What do the ways in which students discuss plagiarism suggest about how they regard it? Do students speak about it freely and comfortably, or is it, for them, a sensitive or emotionally charged topic?

2. What questions do students have about plagiarism? What dimensions of plagiarism do students feel confident about, and what specific things about it are unclear?

3. What experiences have participants had with plagiarism, and how have their previous experiences shaped their ideas about plagiarism?

4. In what ways have issues and concerns about plagiarism affected their composing and research strategies?

5. What do students say about the ways their instructors and institutions understand and address plagiarism? What ideas do they offer for how we should address plagiarism?

To answer these questions, I held a series of semi-structured research conversations (nine interviews and six focus groups) in which 31 college students shared their thoughts, stories, and ideas about plagiarism. Although I worked from a list of questions and prompts, I followed the participants' conversational leads. I found, not surprisingly, that they had a lot to say.

In the following chapters, we will hear from students such as David and Shelley, who describe having received widely divergent instruction in plagiarism from their previous schooling:

> DAVID (INT 05): I think that when you get to this point, people do assume that you know what plagiarism is. And from my personal experience through high school and elementary school, I can't ever remember being taught that much about what plagiarism is. I don't know if you can give a specific definition to it, but I can't ever remember being taught the parameters of it.

> SHELLEY (FG 03): From day one, we learned what plagiarism was, what it wasn't, and what happened if you were caught plagiarizing. It's always been if you use somebody's ideas, or their wording. If you copied down somebody's words exactly, that was plagiarism; if you just did a thesaurus look-up and changed the words but they still meant the same thing and were still in the same order, that was still plagiarism; and if you cited it, that's fine, but if you just said that it was your own, or if you didn't say anything about it—if you didn't give credit to who wrote it—then that was plagiarism. Even if it was [only] a sentence.

We will hear from students such as Susan, who describe the sometimes surprising roots of their personal sensibility concerning citation and attribution:

> SUSAN (INT 02): I was raised in the church, and through scripture—it wasn't something that we had to do, but pretty much from a very young age we knew what Moses said, Noah, Christ, the disciples, God. And we were able to quote the scripture, and we would be able to see what book it was from, what chapter was from, who said it, why they said it—and we could quote that. And maybe that's where it really comes from, if you want to go all the way back to the origin of the sensibility.

Students will also talk about the underground economy of college composition. All three participants from one focus group, for instance—Wendy, Erica, and Kayla— will mention that they had been asked by peers to write papers for them; and several students, including Laura, will describe having done so:

> KURT (FG 04): Have any of you three ever been asked to write a paper for somebody else?
> WENDY (FG 04): Yes [laughs]
> ERICA (FG 04): Yeah.
> KAYLA (FG 04): Yeah, actually.

LAURA (INT 04): I mean, I—it's for friends, you know? I am not going to charge them a hundred dollars for it. But—I know that are essays online for—well, I've seen them for like two hundred dollars…. I mean, I haven't really done it that long. I stayed with a friend in Jersey last summer, and she wasn't charging me rent; so I'm not going to charge her for her paper being written. It was only like a three-page paper, so it wasn't really that big of a deal. She's just not too swift, so—it was easy for me to write; it wasn't that hard….

We will hear from students such as Larry, Hilda and Bobby, who explain how their concerns about plagiarism affect their processes of composition:

LARRY (FG 06): I no longer like to paraphrase, at all. I don't like to paraphrase, because I—I think it's easier just to directly quote what I'm using, and to be safe. I—I really don't want to take a risk of writing a sentence the wrong way.

HILDA (FG 06): I have never written below my ability, but sometimes I think, "Oh, that was a really good sentence—maybe I should change it," you know? Just because I've had professors be like, "Oh… that looks interesting…." You know, just kind of second guessing if I wrote it or not.

BOBBY (FG 06): Yeah, sometimes you stop and think, "Maybe that sounds too intellectual—they're gonna second-guess that [HILDA laughs], so I should change it around a little bit" or "That sounds kind of like something this author would say—I shouldn't do that."

Overall, the research participants' voices will reveal a series of alignments with and disconnections from many of the primary beliefs and assumptions we hold about plagiarism, authorship, and student writers. The teaching and policy implications of these alignments and disconnections are at times confirmatory, at times unsettling.

Students enter our classrooms and institutions with a background of textual experiences—as well as with concepts of authorship and intellectual property—that are much newer—much *younger*—than our conceptual, theoretical, and institutional structures for understanding and dealing with plagiarism. By seeking out student voices, and by making room for students' stories about plagiarism—whether they confirm or unsettle our beliefs and practices—we can expand and enrich the discourse on plagiarism. This dissertation study has the potential to change the threatened, threatening tone of many conversations about plagiarism;

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it can reforge the discourse on plagiarism from one marked by fear, anger, and suspicion into one that is more open and less prejudgmental. By inviting college students to share their thoughts and reflect on their experiences with plagiarism, I engaged in a discourse of exploration and inquiry, believing that we have much to learn even from students whose composing and textual practices sometimes offend our most tightly held beliefs.

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into eight chapters. Chapter One introduces the dissertation, locating its topic—college student plagiarism—amid the rapidly changing technologies and textualities of the contemporary academy. Many people believe that plagiarism represents an increasingly uncontrollable threat to the integrity of the academic environment, and I continue the chapter by surveying a number of the responses that scholars within Composition Studies have offered to help us understand and address the situation. I position this dissertation's approach to understanding plagiarism against a disciplinary background that has been quicker to advance theories about what student plagiarism represents than it has been to study the issue empirically. I continue by describing the research approach that I take in this dissertation study; I explain the reasons for grounding the study's design in phenomenologically oriented research methods, and I note the research questions that formed the basis of the study.

Chapter Two, "Academic Constructions of Plagiarism," reviews the Western academy's various constructions of plagiarism in order to show that plagiarism escapes easy classification. While most definitions of plagiarism are written in plain, easy-to-understand language, there are substantial differences in terms of how academics understand and apply the specific terms commonly used around plagiarism. I begin the chapter, therefore, by noting the diverse ways in which academic scholarship has defined and explained *plagiarism*. I briefly address the term's

etymology to show that the contemporary concept is linguistically anchored in ancient questions and quarrels about ownership, authorship, and property. I then map out the territory that plagiarism inhabits within the contemporary Western academy. First, in order to show *what* many academics understand plagiarism to be, I describe some of the of the textual dimensions of the construction of plagiarism. I discuss works by scholars such as Rebecca Moore Howard and Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford, among others, who have closely examined how plagiarism has been addressed and understood in various academic and instructional contexts. Next, to understand *how* and *why* plagiarism has been accorded its status within the academy, I explore the nature of plagiarism as it has been constructed and represented by a variety of academics. In particular, I address scholarship that has ascribed a moral and ethical dimension to plagiarism. To highlight an important dimension of moral arguments made about plagiarism, I describe a number of religiously based injunctions that have been made against plagiarism.

Because the textual dimensions of academic plagiarism involve representations about authorship and acknowledgement, I continue the literature review by examining the contemporary Western academy's conventions regarding authorship, attribution, and source use. Drawing on the work of authorship theorists such as Marilyn Randall, Martha Woodmansee, and others, I gloss the development of the contemporary Western concept of authorship. My discussion will show that even though student plagiarism violates some of the most basic principles of academic discourse, it should not be understood or approached as simply a matter of loose ethics or ignorance of conventions. Instead, as the literature review will show, plagiarism often involves issues such as intent, agency, and linguistic and rhetorical development. These issues are particularly important when questions about plagiarism involve writers who are novices and/or outsiders in the world of English-language academic writing. I

review discussions by scholars including Shelley Angélil-Carter and Kembrew McLeod, among others, to show that some plagiarism can be traced to the linguistic and rhetorical challenges encountered as writers attempt to paraphrase a complicated source text or try to navigate the literacy expectations of an unfamiliar discourse environment. I also note scholarship that has considered how plagiarism might allow a writer to fulfill creative and constructive goals, rather than simply serving as a strategy for bypassing them. Drawing on Eric Prochaska and Dilin Liu, for instance, I address some of the special challenges that source-based writing presents for many nonnative English speaking writers.[1] I conclude Chapter Two by noting how I will define plagiarism for the purposes of this study—or, rather, how the study's theoretical and methodological approaches preclude such definition. Overall, this literature review establishes a background against which the dissertation's research design and methods can be better understood—and against which its findings, and my conclusions about their significance, can be better assessed. This overview will show that a phenomenologically oriented study can inform and enrich our understandings and practices by creating a research space that invites *students'* voices and views on plagiarism.

Chapter Three, "Empirical Research on Plagiarism," addresses the empirical literature on plagiarism. The topic has been of broad interest to the academy, and the studies I discuss represent a variety of disciplinary perspectives and research designs. The chapter addresses quantitative and qualitative research from Composition Studies as well as from other academic disciplines. I have structured the chapter around research methodologies. I first consider quantitative designs, discussing the widely referenced survey-based studies of plagiarism and

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[1] Several different terms are used in the literature I review to refer to nonnative English speaking writers: ESL (English as a Second Language); NNES (nonnative speaker of English); and L2 (second language). For consistency, I will use L2 and second language to refer to writers for whom English is a second or foreign language, and L1 to refer to native English speakers. However, when discussing or quoting a source, I will employ the source's terms.

academic integrity conducted by Donald McCabe and others. I then address composition's

plagiarism surveys, noting studies by Barry Kroll and Glenn Deckert, among others. Next, I

discuss some of the challenges of operationalizing plagiarism in research, pointing to studies by

Roig and DeTommaso, and Scanlon and Neumann, as models of surveys done particularly well.

I mention task-based research designs by Cherry Campbell, Casey Keck, and others whose

plagiarism studies analyzed writing samples from participants who had been given a particular

writing task; and I note two experimental studies of plagiarism—narrowly designed inquiries in

which researchers test hypotheses by using control groups. Following this, I address qualitative

inquiries into plagiarism. I discuss studies in which researchers have explored students' ideas

about plagiarism through in-depth individual interviews, such as Pat Currie's. I then mention the

findings from the few focus group studies that have addressed plagiarism, highlighting focus

group research by Faun Bernback Evans and Madeleine Youmans. Throughout the chapter I

note some of the strengths and weaknesses that the various research methods have in terms of

plagiarism research, in order to demonstrate the importance of this dissertation study's

phenomenologically oriented approach to investigating and understanding student plagiarism.

Chapter Four, "A Pilot Study of Plagiarism Research Methods," discusses the

methodological backdrop against which the dissertation study's research took place. The chapter

explains a two-part pilot study I conducted to explore, assess, and refine my methods of inquiry

for learning about college students' perspectives on plagiarism. I describe, explain, and evaluate

the pilot study's survey and focus group research methods. I note several findings from each

research approach, and I comment on how conducting the pilot study informed and affected the

design and implementation of the formal dissertation study's interview and focus group research

methods. The chapter clarifies my rationale for building this dissertation study on interview and

focus group research methods, and provides important background about focus group research design.

Chapter Five, "The Research Methods of the Study," describes the design and implementation of the study's research methods in detail—in part, to provide future composition researchers insight into the challenges and benefits of a phenomenological approach. In the chapter, I explain and assess the methods I employed to recruit participants for the interview and focus group discussions. I note the demographic and academic characteristics of the college students who comprised the study's subject pool, and I describe the structure of the research sessions, as well as my role as interviewer and moderator. In particular, I explain how a list of prompts and questions allowed me to establish a consistent thematic focus across the different the research sessions while remaining open to the phenomenological orientation of the study. I conclude the chapter by considering the sensitive terrain of student plagiarism; I describe the study's negotiation of the process of full review by the university's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB), and I detail the methodological and operational steps I took to minimize the potential risks and harm that study participants might face.

Chapter Six, "Development of Themes and Topics from Participants' Construction and Representation of Plagiarism," begins where the data collection ended. I open the chapter by reviewing the phenomenological principles that guided my design and implementation of the study's research methods. As I show in Chapter Six, these principles shaped my analytical approach to the data as well. Consistent with the principles of phenomenological inquiry, I looked to the data itself—the transcripts of the research session—to understand the themes and patterns within participants' discussions of plagiarism. This chapter details the process by which I developed an analytical coding system for the conversations. It describes how I identified,

labeled, consolidated, and refined participants' ideas, experiences, questions, and representations about plagiarism. This analytical approach led me to create a complex conceptual model in which 36 specific topics about plagiarism are arranged into eight broad themes. This analytical model served as a conceptual map of participants' construction and representation of plagiarism as they had addressed it in the interviews and focus groups. This analytical approach helped me understand the various themes and topics that comprised students' understanding of and experiences with plagiarism.

In Chapter Seven, "Presentation and Discussion of Students' Construction and Representation of Plagiarism," I take up the content of my conversations with students. I move away from the analytical dimensions of the study and shift into a presentational, explanatory, interpretive mode as I examine the ideas, experiences, and stories that students shared about plagiarism. To clarify my presentation and discussion of participants' perspectives on plagiarism, Chapter Seven is structured around a slightly different analytical model than the one I developed in Chapter Six. While still organized in terms of themes and topics, the model that drives Chapter Seven frames my discussion more clearly in terms of my research questions as well as against the broader professional and disciplinary discourses of plagiarism.

I begin the chapter by addressing participants' constructions of plagiarism. I discuss their definitions for plagiarism, and demonstrate what they classify as plagiarism in terms of a variety of textual acts. I present their ideas about collaboration and assistance in the writing process, and illustrate some of the ways in which students understand, approach, and negotiate the elusive borders around plagiarism and propriety. I engage more deeply in their questions of propriety in the next section of the chapter. Here, their comments reveal varied and nuanced perspectives on the ethical and moral dimensions of plagiarism. We will see how strongly the participants felt

that, when it comes to determinations about plagiarism, a writer's intent matters; we will also see how hard some students work to fulfill the expectations of an academy whose own constructions and values related to plagiarism are highly unstable.

We will learn that students are able to understand and approach matters of authorship, acknowledgment, and intellectual property in ways both familiar and surprising to us. We will come to understand how important many students believe it is to provide appropriate credit when using someone else's work, and we will recognize that while many of them try diligently to meet our expectations for citation and referencing, they sometimes make mistakes. We will learn how complex and random our conventions and practices can appear, and we may be moved by some of the stories students tell about this.

I will show students addressing plagiarism in terms of voice and style, and note that some students have encountered pedagogies based in imitation and modeling. I will suggest the complexity of plagiarism's backstories by presenting the reasons, factors, and decision-making processes that participants represented as sometimes motivating student plagiarism. Next I present students' encounters with some of the facets of plagiarism that make it unique among textual practices: issues related to policing, detecting, and responding to plagiarism—and questions and concerns about matters of instructional and institutional consequences and policies.

Chapter Eight, "Conclusions and Implications," brings the dissertation to a close. I revisit some of the major themes of the research, and I present a number of the conclusions I have come to on the basis of my research. Primarily, though, this chapter elaborates what I consider to be our responsibilities toward plagiarism and toward our students. My study has led me to believe that our instructional, institutional, and policy-level positions and responses to

plagiarism do not always align with our beliefs about teaching, textuality, or our ethical and

professional obligations. The dissertation's conclusion mixes the voices that compose this study:

We hear mine, we hear our scholars', and, most importantly, we hear our students'.

CHAPTER TWO:

ACADEMIC CONSTRUCTIONS OF PLAGIARISM

Few topics, whether discussed in hallways, classrooms, or disciplinary journals, provoke such ire among otherwise gentle academics as plagiarism. It has been called "the scourge of academic life" (Angélil-Carter, 2000, p. 1), "the worm of reason" (Kolich, 1983), "the cheating disorder" (Murphy, 1995), and a "disease" (Drum, 1986, p. 231). Those who engage in it have been labeled "pirate[s]" (Ede & Lunsford, 2000, p. 45), "the thieves of academe" (Hawley, 1984), and "the parasites of literature" (Salzman, 1931, p. 29); and when confronted and accused, the guilty must "swallow their pride," "confess," and "apologize" (Decoo, 2002, p. 202). Plagiarism is regarded as a high crime in the modern academy. And it is complicated— even its definition has sparked vigorous debate.

Academic writers have developed highly specialized, complex systems of citation and referencing in order to trace their textual and ideological influences. These systems, however, are often befuddling to our students, most of whom work in earnest to meet our confusing, sometimes conflicting demands for full, accurate documentation. Even professional academics avow widely divergent standards regarding plagiarism and source use; this puts students in the difficult position of having to negotiate a set of discursive practices that are typically presented as being logical and universal, yet which students often experience as variable and irrational. As teachers of writing, then, we find ourselves in a tricky position: We must help students learn to apply a set of conventions that we typically take for granted, yet the construction of the concepts underneath these practices is so ill-structured that we ourselves can't even agree on it.

Given these inconsistencies, and before turning to some of the empirical inquiries researchers have made, I review the theoretical scholarship on plagiarism. My discussion shows how scholars have constructed some of the sources of our beliefs and practices regarding plagiarism, and it establishes a role for phenomenological exploration of college students' understandings of plagiarism. The approach I take in this chapter is unique, and I believe it can greatly enhance our understandings and practices by showing the need for space in plagiarism's professional discourse for the voices and views of our students.

The Difficult Definition of Plagiarism

I start this review of literature by examining the many difficulties and differences we encounter in definitions of plagiarism. Many contemporary definitions for the term appear simple, clear, and consistent. The definition given by *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (11th ed., 2008) is typical: *Plagiarize* means "to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own; [to] use (another's production) without crediting the source; *vi*: to commit literary theft; [to] present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source." One of the most widely used handbooks in college composition, Diana Hacker's (2003) *A Writer's Reference* (5th ed.), explained plagiarism in terms of academic conventions: "Three different acts are considered plagiarism: (1) failing to cite quotations and borrowed ideas, (2) failing to enclose borrowed language in quotation marks, and (3) failing to put summaries and paraphrases in your own words" (p. 331). The *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (6th ed.) framed plagiarism in legal terms by explaining

Plagiarism involves two kinds of wrongs. Using another person's ideas, information, or expressions without acknowledging that person's work constitutes intellectual theft.

Passing off as another person's ideas, information, or expressions as your own to get a

better grade or gain some other advantage constitutes fraud. (Gibaldi, 2003, p. 66)

And at the university where this study was conducted, the English Department's guidelines for

first-year composition stated, "We define plagiarism in the conventional sense of our discipline:

the unacknowledged borrowing of ideas, facts, phrases, wordings, or whole works, either

through direct quotation, indirect quotation, paraphrasing or summarizing without appropriate

documentation" (*Statement on Plagiarism*, 2005).

While many definitions of *plagiarism* appear in seemingly straightforward,

unproblematic language, the practices they describe as plagiarism—and the terms they employ

in framing it—are varied and complex. For instance, composition scholars have used *plagiarism*

to represent a variety of textual acts:

- submitting a purchased or ghostwritten paper;

- imitating the language and structure of a source text (Howard 2000a, p. 82);

- presenting other peoples' ideas as one's own (Decoo, 2002, p. 51);

- "patchwriting," in which a writer strings together source text with only minor changes
  (Howard, 1992, p. 233); and even

- getting too much help from peers or tutors (Clark & Healy, 1996, and I. Clark, 1999).

As Rebecca Moore Howard (1999) has noted,

The 20th-century plagiarist potentially engages in any one of a disparate set of textual

activities. He or she may (1) purchase, download, or copy a term paper; (2) copy text

without supplying quotation marks; copy text without identifying the source; use ideas

from a source without acknowledging the indebtedness; or (3) talk about a source while

using language clearly derived from it. (p. 96)

Some linguistics scholars have explained plagiarism as a form of intertextuality—of what happens when texts inform each other—and this conception of plagiarism is reflected in the terms they have used for it: *discursive repetition* (Randall, 2001, p. 13) or *transgressive intertextuality* (Chandrasoma, Thompson, & Pennycook, 2004). Several cognitive psychologists have labeled certain types of plagiarism as *cryptomnesia*—the failure of a research subject to separate her previous knowledge of a topic from more recently acquired knowledge about it (Bink, Marsh, Hicks, & Howard, 1999, p. 293). A scholar of education policy described intentional Internet-based plagiarism as *cyber-pseudepigraphy*, building on a term used to describe the false ascription of authorship (Page, 2004, p. 429). The term "patchwriting"—a neologism coined by Rebecca Moore Howard (1992), a leading plagiarism scholar within Composition Studies—reflected Howard's notion that plagiarism often results from a beginning academic writer's strategy of composing by patching together excerpts of too-closely-copied source text. *Patchwriting* constructs plagiarism as something of an academic interlanguage used by developing writers attempting to gain entry and acceptance into the discourses of the academy. Given these varied and complex practices and terms, it is no wonder that so many students struggle to understand it.

Plagiarism's Etymology

While its definition has been the site of much debate, the etymology of *plagiarism* is uncontested. Its origin provides insight into why plagiarism can cause such ire—and, in some cases, can lead to dire consequences for students whose writing is labeled *plagiarized*. The first known use of the term to mean *literary piracy* was recorded late in the first century, around AD 84, when a Roman epigrammatist used it to express his scorn at a competing poet who had apparently recited the original writer's verse without crediting him (Howell, 1980). The poem is

brief, and in its last line its author, Marcus Valerius Martialis (now simply Martial), appropriates

the Latin word *plagium* to brand his transgressor:

I.52

> *Commendo tibi, Quintiane, nostros—*
> *nostros dicere si tamen libellos*
> *possum, quos recitat tuus poeta—:*
> *si de servitio gravi queruntur,*
> *adsertor venias satisque praestes,*
> *et, cum se dominum vocabit ille,*
> *dicas esse meos manuque missos.*
> *hoc si terque quaterque clamitaris,*
> *inpones plagiario pudorem.*

> I entrust my books to you, Quintianus—if, that is, I can call those books mine,
> which your poet recites. If they complain about their harsh servitude, I ask you to
> appear as their champion and provide guarantees, and, when he calls himself their
> master, to say that they are mine and have been given their freedom. If you shout
> this out three or four times, you will make the plagiarist feel shame.
>
> (as cited in Howell, 1980, pp. 54-55)

Many contemporary sources claim that Martial's *plagiario* is the Latin word for

kidnapper. A closer examination of its Latin usage, however, indicates that the term originally

referred to slave-stealing: "Literally *plagium* is the stealing of someone else's slave, or the

forcing of a free man into slavery" (Howell, 1980, p. 230). Either way, its etymological roots

locate *plagiarism* amid issues of ownership, control, and false representation. Martial's poetic

appropriation of the concept of slave-stealing and his figurative use of its term illustrate

something about Roman expectations of authorship—and they suggest Martial's high disdain for

the man who falsely stole his.

Martial was not the first writer to trope his books as slaves; Horace had used the same

metaphor in his Epistle 1.20 (Howell, 1980, p. 229). However, Martial was the first (and,

according to Howell, the only) classical Latin writer to use *plagiarius* to refer to a literary

appropriation rather than a property theft, and his contemporaries would certainly have recognized his scorn for the uncredited recitation of his words.

Moving forward in time, the *Dictionarium Linguae Latinae et Anglicanae* offered three different English meanings for the Latin *plagiarius*: "He that buyethe a man for a slave, knowing him to be free; a stealer of bookes or one that fathereth other mens bookes upon himself; a stealer of mens servants and children" (Thomas, 1587/1972). The *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) presented the first English recording of *plagiarism* (and its inflections) early in the 17th century, and demonstrated that the term was then used in both its original (*man-stealing*) and figurative (*literary theft*) meanings. In considering *plagiarism*'s varied definitions, and its usage that reaches back over two millennia, we may come to understand the underpinnings of the pointed contemporary representations of plagiarists described in the introduction to this study: *pirates*, *thieves*, and *parasites*.

<center>The Violatory Crime of Plagiarism</center>

In formal academic writing, comma splices and typographical errors are regarded as wrong—as violations of grammatical rules and conventions. Plagiarism, too, is considered wrong, yet its complex construction makes the precise nature of its wrongness harder to describe. Even the clearest assertion that plagiarism is wrong does not help students understand the academic values and principles behind our conventions and expectations regarding source use and attribution in writing. First, we must be able to explain why the academy regards plagiarism as a violation. As Ashworth et al. (2003) wrote,

> For students to fully appreciate what plagiarism is and why it will be punished they need
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> to possess not just a clear understanding of what constitutes plagiarism, or the skills

needed to avoid it, but also to understand why it is imbued with its particular status. (pp. 261-262)

Plagiarism's Transgressive Nature

Many in the academy regard plagiarism as much more than a text-level error like a typo. In fact, plagiarism may not even appear as an error, for when perfect it will go undetected, invisible to the sharpest reader. In fact, plagiarism may be "related to the perfect crime, in that its 'discovery' is at once its coming into being as criminal and the loss of its perfection" (Randall, 1991, p. 530).

Yet even its discovery does not mark a copied passage as plagiarism, for a text does not exist as violatory until it is branded as so by a reader. While a spell-checker can reliably flagg many typos, plagiarism is not simply a textual feature. It is, rather, "the result of judgments involving, first of all, the presence of some textual repetition, but also, and perhaps more important, a conjunction of social, political, aesthetic, and cultural norms and presuppositions that motivate accusations or disculpations" (Randall, 2001, p. 4).

David Leight's (1999) study highlighted some of these judgments as they appeared in contemporary (late 20th century) college writing textbooks. Based on his analysis of the textbooks' definitions of plagiarism, Leight reported that the textbooks primarily explained plagiarism's wrongness in one of four categories of transgression:

> plagiarism constitutes stealing and is therefore morally wrong; plagiarism is an ethical problem in which the plagiarist violates an unwritten code of conduct for students; plagiarism is a "borrowing" in which "credit" is left undelivered; and plagiarism is a failure to intellectualize like a member of the academy. (p. 221)

My reading of the literature on plagiarism, as well as my experience as a student, a teacher, and a program leader, has led me to conclude that within the modern Western academy plagiarism is regarded as problematic because it transgresses many of the academy's core values:

- it disregards textual and rhetorical conventions;

- it violates principles of academic comportment;

- it offends values related to honesty and integrity;

- it misrepresents ownership;

- it decapitalizes intellectual property;

- it conflates reproduction with creation, and transmission with production;

- it destabilizes authorship;

- and it subverts the intended purposes of a formal education.

As Edward White (2001) asserted, plagiarism "makes a travesty of education and a parlor game out of thinking and writing." With such wide-ranging harm, plagiarism is a true equal-opportunity offender.

In large part, the contemporary Western academy constructs plagiarism as severely violatory because of the great value we place on authorship. In fact, several sections of *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th ed.) prescribe specific rules and responsibilities regarding the determination and representation of authorship[2] (American Psychological Association [APA], 2001; see pp. 6-7, 332, 348-355, 395-396). Authorship matters to academics not just for its rhetorical power but also for the social and institutional power that attach to and follow it. Plagiarists, however, "are essentially failed or false authors—those who are seen to have transgressed or left unfulfilled the cultural function authorship

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[2] The *Publication Manual* bases its concept of authorship on Principle 6.23 of the "Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct" (1992), as published in *American Psychologist, 47*, pp. 1597-1611.

defines for them" (Randall, 2001, p. 20). Rebecca Moore Howard (2000b) wrote that plagiarism "represents authorship run amok" (p. 486), rendering it impossible for the academy to accurately and transparently assign the intellectual and social capital of a text.

Susan Stewart (1991) scrutinized the transgressive nature of plagiarism from a legal perspective, and noted that plagiarism is "legislated in England and America by the community of scholarship and not by the more general law" that legislates property claims which involve rights of economic ownership (1991, p. 24). "Plagiarism exists as a crime," according to Marilyn Randall (1991), "only if appropriate legal evidence of intention to deceive coexists with an active legal contract protecting the author's—or publisher's—rights" (p. 526). Stewart (1991) argued that plagiarism is *not* analogous to forgery or piracy; like stealing, these are matters of *ownership*, whereas plagiarism is a matter of *authorship*: "Literary forgery and pirating involve claims of ownership and theft…. A forger, unlike a plagiarist, makes a claim for the authenticity of a document rather than for the authenticity of himself or herself as a site of production" (p. 24).

In another study exploring the legal terrain of plagiarism, copyright, and intellectual property, Laurie Stearns (1999) located the roots of contemporary Western copyright law in "the belief that the 'law of nature' entitles human beings to reap the fruits of their labors" (p. 12). Copyright law established a legal basis for understanding words as *property*. Yet words, Stearns wrote, are "an odd form of property":

> At any instant they are finite in number and yet can be freely and infinitely invented or duplicated. They cannot be marked with the insignia of ownership. When first invented, they are subject to exclusive possession before being written or uttered, yet such exclusive possession leaves them incapable of fulfilling their communicative function.

They can be initially withheld from others but, once transmitted, they can never be

retrieved. (p. 12)

Despite the status of language as "an odd form of property," the idea of plagiarism as a property

crime—as *stealing*—dominates the perspectives of many college instructors. Alice Roy (1999)

reported that "the words 'taking' and 'stealing' occurred over and over again" in the definitions

of plagiarism offered by the college instructors whom she interviewed in a study on plagiarism

(p. 58).

Many academic discussions of plagiarism focus on theoretical questions of literary

authorship and belletristic intertextuality. In our classrooms, however, most questions of

plagiarism are concerned with student compositions rather than with literary forgeries. And

when it comes to student writers, plagiarism is more often regarded as a transgression of

academic rules than as a breach of textual conventions or authorial functions. The wrongness of

student plagiarism is its abrogation of academic values: it represents a transgression of *student*

more than of *writer*. Because plagiarism plainly violates policies of academic integrity, it

undermines the authority of the student writer who submits a plagiarized text.

Yet plagiarism's threat to the academy extends beyond that of author and text. For in

defying an institution's instructional and evaluative systems that privilege autonomous

originality, student plagiarism threatens the authority of the institution. Marilyn Randall (1991)

has argued that plagiarism is profoundly destabilizing on an institutional level:

The importance of plagiarism is that, like successful forgery, it undermines institutional

authority by soliciting a false set of presuppositions with respect to the values appropriate

for judging its conformity to aesthetic norms. When the same aesthetic object becomes

either invaluable or worthless depending on its institutional validation, successful

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impostures reveal the circularity of the self-invested authority of institutional

legitimation, for it lies solely within the domain of the institution to determine what

objects rightfully constitute its territory. (p. 530)

Considered in this light, the act of student plagiarism can be seen as a *behavioral*

transgression rather than a *textual* one. Indeed, the writing a student submits is almost

immaterial except insofar as the text provides the evidence of the student's authorial failing.

Plagiarism's Wide-Ranging Harm

In closing this discussion of student plagiarism as violatory, I add here scholarship which

highlights other forms of violation or harm it can cause. While plagiarism clearly imperils its

student "writer," its effects reverberate across the academic community. In closing this

discussion of plagiarism's violatory nature, I address some of the other constituencies that have

been represented as harmed by student plagiarism. As one college's plagiarism policy has

explained,

Inevitably, one cheater throws the taint of suspicion upon all, [and] the entire climate is

poisoned…. Furthermore, the values of humane education are perverted when the

instructor is forced to give extraordinary attention to the integrity of the grade and can no

longer assume the integrity of the student. (*Preamble*, 2006)

While the language in this policy may seem extreme, the damage done by plagiarism can

easily extend beyond the student who plagiarizes. In an institutional context, plagiarism imperils

instructors as well. Wendy Sutherland-Smith (2005), who interviewed instructors of

postsecondary EAP (English for Academic Purposes) courses, reported that many teachers might

be reluctant to discuss student plagiarism with their colleagues. The majority of the instructors

she interviewed felt that the discovery of plagiarism in their classes would open them to

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accusations of "professional negligence," and they suspected that their colleagues would regard the plagiarism "as a failure on their part to ensure a suitably stringent learning environment" (p. 91). Additionally, some faculty do not report plagiarism they have discovered because the process of "verifying plagiarism, collating student work and presenting it to the responsible committee takes an inordinate amount of time"—as much as 15 hours per case (p. 92).

Clearly, the discovery and prosecution of a student's plagiarism can expose college instructors to increased scrutiny, administrative regulation, and many additional hours of work. As such, a student's plagiarism becomes a threat to her teacher's identity (Robillard, 2007, p. 13), particularly in composition courses. With such threats in play, the wonder is not how much student plagiarism occurs in the academy—the wonder is whether, and how, we might ever respond to it effectively.

The Moral and Ethical Construction of Plagiarism

In a recent article in *College English*, Amy Robillard (2007) wrote that plagiarism undermines the most central instructional values of our field. Robillard argued that we may be right to feel outrage at plagiarism, explaining that "anger is a legitimate and justifiable response to what one has been persuaded is an insult that violates one's sense of moral justice and the sacred values of one's community" (p. 17). Robillard's perspective offers another dimension of the construction of plagiarism: Plagiarism is not simply a violatory or transgressive act, but an assault on ethics and morals as well. Considering this perspective can help us understand our responses to plagiarism. At the same time, it underscores the importance of finding new ways to research what is a very sensitive topic within our classrooms and institutions.

Many instructors regard plagiarism as a matter of cheating, and many college and university handbooks locate their plagiarism policies in their sections on student behavior,

addressing plagiarism as an element of academic integrity. However, while many institutions'

plagiarism policies "define plagiarism in *formalist* [italics added] terms, as features of texts,"

these same policies represent plagiarism "in *moral* [italics added] terms when they classify it as a

form of academic dishonesty" (Howard, 1995, p. 797). Student plagiarism thus becomes a

complex construction that involves both textual and behavioral/performative dimensions.

Within the instructional literature of Composition Studies, plagiarism is regularly

constructed as a moral and ethical transgression. Diana Hacker's (2003) *A Writer's Reference*

(5th ed.)—one of the field's most widely used handbooks—cautioned students, "To be fair and

ethical, you must acknowledge your debt to the writers of those sources. If you don't, you are

guilty of plagiarism, a serious academic offense" (p. 331). And the most canonical text of many

college English courses—the *MLA Handbook* (6th ed.)—has written that "plagiarism is almost

always seen as a shameful act, and plagiarists are usually regarded with pity and scorn" (Gibaldi,

2003, p. 66). The *MLA Handbook* explained that plagiarists are "pitied because they have

demonstrated their inability to develop and express their own thoughts … [and] scorned because

of their dishonesty and their willingness to deceive others for personal gain" (p. 66).

Religious Perspectives on Plagiarism[3]

The moral and ethical terrain of plagiarism, and the implications of positioning it as such,

become strikingly apparent when one considers various religious perspectives on plagiarism.

While many people refer to plagiarism as a "sin," few of them intend to represent it as a sacred

infraction. By contrast, the "sin" of plagiarism has been explicitly characterized as a religious

transgression by a number of religiously affiliated colleges. In fact, arguments about

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[3] My interest in religious dimensions of academic policies toward plagiarism was initially prompted by a conference paper presented by Lauren Fitzgerald and T. Kenny Fountain (2003).

plagiarism's sinful nature have been made on the basis of several major religions' doctrines and dogma.

The English Department at Calvin College, an undergraduate institution affiliated with the Christian Reformed Church, has written that plagiarism "breeds a moral atmosphere which denies all students the dignity and freedom due them as human beings" (*Policy on Plagiarism*, 2006).[4] The Department noted that, as a Christian college, Calvin's mission was "not only to impart knowledge but also to nurture moral character"—a goal shared by many secular institutions as well. However, Calvin's discussion ultimately characterized plagiarism's immorality as theological; it described plagiarism as a "deception" and a "theft," and explained that "plagiarism is a sin, a violation of the Eighth Commandment ["You shall not steal"]. It is inimical to the values and ideals of a Christian educational institution."

A number of religiously affiliated colleges have referenced Christian theology and scripture in their policies of academic plagiarism.[5] Westminster Theological Seminary, for example, boldly asserted that "plagiarism is a serious infraction of the law of God" (*Plagiarism*, 2007-2008). Westminster regarded plagiarism as transgressing two Biblical commandments:

> The eighth commandment requires that we honor the property of others, whether that property be material possessions or copyrighted ideas. Stealing, destroying, misusing, and even borrowing without permission the property of others are among the sins prohibited by the eighth commandment.... The ninth commandment ["You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor"] requires that we honor the truth. Presenting as our

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[4] In a recent revision, the Calvin College English Department secularized its plagiarism policy. While it still paints plagiarism as morally troublesome, the policy no longer includes any references to Christian scripture or doctrine. The Department has explained that the new policy, "draws from both *The New St. Martin's Handbook* and a draft version of the *Plagiarism Statement* from the National Council of Writing Program Administrators" (*Handling Plagiarism*, 2008).

[5] Ironically, Calvin's strong religious condemnation of plagiarism is itself plagiarized by Covenant College, whose student handbook copied much of Calvin's policy without acknowledgment (see "Plagiarism and Cheating," 2007).

own the ideas of others without full and appropriate documentation [is] among the sins

prohibited by the ninth commandment. (*The Honor System*, 2006)

Another Christian school has constructed plagiarism as a violation of three commandments.

Grove City College has explained that plagiarism "involves claiming as one's own original work

the ideas, phrasing, or creative work of another person. As such, plagiarism is a direct violation

of the biblical commandments against stealing, bearing false witness, and covetousness [the 10th

commandment]" (*The Mission*, 2007).

Grove City warned its students, somewhat ominously, that "the College encourages students to

think seriously about the demands of their Christian faith in regards to this issue."

Academic policies such as those of Calvin, Westminster, and Grove City clearly

construct student plagiarism as an offense that has spiritual implications as well as worldly ones.

Following this logic, writers who plagiarize may face consequences much more severe than a

failing grade; these policies, in fact, suggest that plagiarism imperils a student's very soul. Yet

while each of these secularly accredited colleges has drawn on Christian scripture to warrant the

impropriety of plagiarism, they are not the only institutions that use doctrine to justify

plagiarism's proscription. Nor is Christianity the only religion whose scripture has been used to

criminalize it. In fact, scholars from each of the three major Abrahamic religions (Judaism,

Christianity, and Islam) have raised theological arguments against plagiarism.

Several years ago, Rabbi Jeremy Wieder (2002), the head of a Talmudic academy at New

York's Yeshiva University (a Jewish seminary and university), also addressed students on

plagiarism. Wieder argued that plagiarism is made unethical by the Talmudic concept of *gneivas*

da'as, the notion that it is a scriptural prohibition to create or promote "a false impression" of

one's self for one's own benefit. Wieder quoted Schmuel, a revered Talmudic commentator,

who said, "It is forbidden to deceive, literally to steal the mind of, people, even an idolater."

Drawing on both scripture and Talmudic commentary for support, Wieder argued that

> cheating and plagiarism … are very obvious forms of *gneivas da'as*. The person is
> submitting work as if it's his own, as if he deserves a certain grade, as if he deserves
> certain credit, [when] he's not entitled to that credit, he's not entitled to that impression
> of what a wonderful student he is, he's not entitled to that grade. This is a classic form of
> *gneivas da'as* and it's an *issur d'oraisa* [Torah prohibition].

In addition to Christian and Jewish scriptures, Islamic texts have also been used to

construct plagiarism as a violation of moral and ethical imperatives. Muhammad Amanullah, a

professor of *fiqh* (Islamic law) at Malaysia's International Islamic University, asserted that while

the acquisition and the dispersion of knowledge is important in Islam, the religion does not

permit plagiarism (2006, p. 310). Amanullah explained that contemporary Islamic ideas of

source-based writing are based on the *hadith* (the sayings of the Prophet—a sacred text for

Muslims), which required the strict authentication of religious texts. Amanullah noted that the

Islamic scholarly disciplines of *al-Jarh* and *al-Tàdil* had established basic notions about textual

authentication and authorial rights long before these issues were addressed by Europeans (p. 302,

310).

In terms of contemporary questions about copyright and plagiarism, Amanullah (2006)

asserted that plagiarism transgresses a number of Islamic guidelines concerning the appropriate

use of property. [6] He referenced both the *hadith* ("Harm neither should be inflicted nor should

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[6] While Amanullah (2006) focused on the "intellectual property" dimension of plagiarism in terms of Islamic law, Sanni (1998) offered a discussion of some of the discursive and belletristic dimensions of plagiarism as it has been addressed by Arabic literature and theory from the Islamic period; and Grunebaum (1944) provided a definitive discussion of belletristic plagiarism as addressed in Arabic literature and theory from the both the pre-Islamic and the Islamic periods.

be reciprocated" [p. 307][7]) and the Qur'an ("Don't eat your property among yourselves in a wrongful way" [p. 307] [8]) in his argument that, in an Islamic framework, plagiarism is wrong—wrong because it causes harm to the author whose work is plagiarized, and because it is the equivalent of "eating or receiving the wealth of others without having legal justification for it" (p. 307). Violation of these guidelines, Amanullah asserted, would cause "severe punishment on the Day of Judgment" (p. 307).

Despite the scriptural invectives that have been raised against it, plagiarism remains a concern for many religiously affiliated colleges, just as it does at most secular schools. Students are students, after all—even those who attend highly religious institutions. As an anonymous Yeshiva student explained, "Cheating is like speeding…. Even though you know it's wrong and someone can get hurt, we still all do it" (qtd. in Nagel, 2002).

In considering these varied religious perspectives on plagiarism, it becomes apparent that when plagiarism is marked as a moral or ethical violation, the task of instructors becomes one of *enculturation*—of finding ways to lead writers to buy into a disciplinary and institutional system of values (Ashworth et al., 2003, p. 261). Instructors can certainly introduce students to the principles of academic integrity, and can require their writing to conform to academic conventions regarding source use and citation. However, there is no way to compel students to adopt the particular values that undergird these principles and practices. In other words, although the texts that student writers submit can be ordered through policy and rhetorical convention, the students themselves cannot be forced to value the moral and ethical framework that has made plagiarism so distasteful to so many academics. As writing instructors, we should pay more attention to the ways in which our own moral and ethical values affect our

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[7] See Verse 29 of the *Surat an-Nisa* (Chapter 4) of the Qur'an.
[8] See Verse 188 of the *Surat al-Baqarah* (Chapter 2) the Qur'an..

understanding of plagiarism's nature. Such reflection will create spaces in our classrooms and institutions where we can represent our constructions of plagiarism more fully to our students—and space as well where we can talk more openly about our students' understandings of and experiences with plagiarism.

Authorship, Agency, and Identity

The Evolution of the Western Author

Before copyright laws imbued language with exchange value, the dominant Western construction of language treated words and ideas as part of the public domain. Knowledge was seen as "given freely to us by God and should be freely shared for the common good" (Lunsford, 1996, p. 264). Before words had material worth, there was no belief that knowledge could be *owned*; language was common property, and writing existed to transmit public words to other readers (Woodmansee, 1984, p. 434). There was no need for a writer to separate his own ideas from those of others; written texts were regarded as received wisdom, not as the original product—the intellectual capital—of an individual.[9]

In line with many other contemporary authorship theorists, Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford (1990) have described the mainstream Western notions of authorship as "directly related to the Western philosophical tradition defining the autonomous individual as the source or foundation of all knowledge" (p. 73). This belief is foundational to our notions of plagiarism, because plagiarism, as the modern Western academy regards it, can only exist in a culture that believes in the importance of a creative, original self. Rebecca Moore Howard (1995) has

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[9] See Ede & Lunsford (1990), Pennycook (1996), and Swearingen (1995) for more detailed discussions of the development of the contemporary Western construction of authorship. For discussions of Arabic perspectives on authorship and originality, see Amanullah (2006), Grunebaum (1994), and Sanni (1998).

explained, "If there is no originality, there is no basis for literary property. If there is no originality and no literary property, there is no basis for the notion of plagiarism" (p. 791).

Authorship historian Martha Woodmansee (1984) located the genesis of the contemporary Western construction of authorship in eighteenth-century Germany. It is, she wrote,

> the product of the rise…of a new group of individuals: writers who sought to earn their livelihood from the sale of their writings to the new and rapidly expanding reading public. In Germany this new group of individuals found itself without any of the safeguards for its labors that today are codified in copyright laws. In response to this problem, and in an effort to establish the economic viability of living by the pen, these writers set about redefining the nature of writing. (p. 426)

Woodmansee argued that the redefinition that these writers brought about included a new belief about the nature of being a writer. Earlier notions of authorship treated writers as mere conduits of information, and understood that a writer's authorial skills were truly *inspired*—"attributable to a higher, external agency—if not to a muse, then to divine dictation" (p. 427). In the eighteenth century, however, a theoretical shift redefined the locus of authorial inspiration. What had formerly been regarded as bestowed by muses or by God came to be seen as the product of a writer's own mind—as an act of original, independent, creative genius. Effectively, the contemporary Western author was born, and this change allowed "the inspired work [to be] made peculiarly and distinctively the product—and the *property* [italics added]—of the writer" (Woodmansee, 1984, p. 427).

One consequence of the evolving construction of authorship is that in the contemporary Western academy successful authorship requires that a writer adopt a Western sense of rhetorical agency—the feeling that the writer has both the standing and the invitation to contribute a unique, individual voice to those of others speaking. It also requires that a writer indicate lexical, syntactic, and conceptual ownership within a text by employing particular strategies for referencing sources. Such citation conventions allow readers to understand the boundary between a writer's own words and ideas and those of her sources.

The modern Western academy's sense of rhetorical agency, and its practices regarding plagiarism and source use, are based in its authorial tradition. As Shelley Angélil-Carter (2000) explained, "Originality and autonomy as [rhetorical] values are based on an ideology which tends towards individualism and competition, rather than community and cooperation, independence rather than interdependence, analysis rather than synthesis, [and] commodification rather than intrinsic value" (pp. 27-28). These dichotomies can present real problems for some writers; they also challenge much contemporary rhetorical theory and pedagogy, which regards authorial collaboration and intertextuality as increasingly important. As Peter Jaszi and Martha Woodmansee (1994) explained,

> The problem, at least in part, is that even as the notion of authorship is subjected to the scrutiny of critical theory, the teaching of literature and composition…continues to reinforce the Romantic paradigm [of genius as the product of an autonomous individual]. Most writing today—in business, government, industry, the law, the sciences and social sciences—is collaborative, yet it is still being taught as if it were a solitary, original activity. (Jaszi & Woodmansee, 1994, p. 9)

College composition is one area in which these clashing values play out. Many students have internalized our injunctions against plagiarism and take pains to avoid it as they write. In fact, some students even over-compensate in an effort to avoid plagiarism, developing habits of writing and revising that inhibit the kinds of writerly collaboration and discursive intertextuality that many of us hope to encourage in our classrooms (Spigelman, 2000, p. 109). As Candice Spigelman has written, these students find themselves "caught between what Lunsford and Ede characterize as an institutional 'near obsession' with plagiarism (1994, p. 437), with its attendant 'anxieties of influence,' and their writing teacher's charge to collaborate" (p. 21). Yet despite the collaborative nature of so many contemporary writing tasks, one of Composition Studies' most foundational scholars has written that "if students want to prosper in the U.S. culture or one like it, they will need to learn to engage in the academic practices of individualism to some considerable degree" (Elbow, 1999, p. 329).

Western Agency and the Student-as-Author

In contrast to the Western valorization of individualism, many scholars assert that the apparent plagiarism evident in some Asian students' English compositions is due to the collectivist, communitarian nature of their traditional Eastern cultures' ideologies. Ron Scollon (1995) has argued that "the apparent difficulty that at least some non-native writers of English have in correctly using reference, quotation, and paraphrase… might be better construed as reflecting a different ideological base" than that which informs their English-language classrooms (p. 6). For instance, Colin Sowden (2005) claimed that in China, "good students do not challenge their teachers or other authorities, but faithfully *copy and reproduce* [italics added] them" (p. 227).

Guanjun Cai (1999) has presented an example of how such ideological differences can result in a discursively transgressive text. Cai analyzed papers written by a Chinese student in an American university, and reported that the writer "tends to develop her points by frequently employing questions, quotations, abstract wording, and word-by-word translation into English of Chinese prescribed phrasings or sayings" (p. 285). Even if they did not find it to be plagiarism, many American readers would regard the student's use of stock phrases as ineffective writing. Such composing practices directly oppose the principles of American composition pedagogy, which expects students to form independent claims in their own authorial voices.

While culturally based ideological differences may account for some aspects of plagiarism in second language writing, Abasi, Akbari, and Graves (2006) have proposed another reason why some L2 students have trouble using sources in ways their Western instructors expect them to: "ESL students' view of their role as writers may not be congruent with what successful academic writing...calls for" (p. 114). Based on their research with L2 graduate students, Abasi et al. suggested that a writer's level of experience directly affects his ability to construct a "socially appropriate" authorial identity (p. 107). The authors reported that the more experienced writers in their study entered into dialogic relationships with their source texts, helping them to establish authorial identities independent of their sources. By contrast, the less experienced writers did not break from their sources, preferring the reproduction/transmission of source content rather than building on it to construct new arguments in their own authorial voices in English (p. 114).

It is problematic to make sweeping claims that assert a direct and causal relationship between collectivist cultural ideologies and absent or vague referencing practices. Indeed, many L1 college students fail to effectively signal and integrate source information within their

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writing. At the same time, whether the difficulty may be due to their level of rhetorical experience or to divergent cultural ideologies, when students in the Western academy do not adopt an authorial stance that privileges autonomy, originality, and writerly agency, they will find it hard to manipulate and interrogate source texts in the ways their teachers expect them to. Without a feeling of individual agency—of believing they have the permission, the expectation, and the standing to talk back to their sources in their own individual voices—writers may find themselves parroting the words and ideas of others, opening themselves and their writing to accusations of plagiarism. Thus, notions of agency become another dimension of the construction of student plagiarism.

Attribution, Citation, and Problems of Paraphrasing

Once issues of agency and authorial identity have been settled, students must deploy their rhetorical skills of summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting in order to incorporate their sources' words and ideas into their own writing. And, in order to avoid charges of plagiarism, as they write from their sources students must also master one of the highly complex systems that academics employ to ensure clarity, correctness, and completeness in attribution. Whether it be through MLA, APA, or Chicago style—or a hybrid of these, or one of the dozens of less common style systems—the successful avoidance of plagiarism demands that a student fully and transparently account for her influences (Pecorari, 2003, p. 324). Thousands of academic integrity policies, and tens thousands of course syllabi, have reminded students that the failure to achieve this transparency may result in failure of the class—or, worse, in their expulsion from the institution.

Many college instructors assume that their students have already been taught how to avoid plagiarism, so they offer simple reminders about the importance of citing sources rather

than detailed instruction in ways of incorporating a source's ideas and words into their own writing. Yet as Stephen Wilhoit (1994) pointed out, "Few students enter college fully understanding the relationship between plagiarism and the rules about quoting, paraphrasing, and documenting material" (p. 162). This presents a series of challenges for both students and instructors.

The Challenges of Paraphrasing

One significant challenge student writers face is that the point at which a paraphrase differs enough from its source text to be considered "safe" is unclear (Angélil-Carter, 2000, p. 45). "Repetition becomes plagiarism," Marilyn Randall (2001) wrote, "when it is seen to transgress a set of conventional expectations governing discursive behavior" (p. 13); yet even within the academy, as noted previously, these "conventional expectations" vary. For example, the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th ed.) characterized paraphrasing as "summariz[ing] a passage or rearrang[ing] the order of a sentence and chang[ing] some of the words" (American Psychological Association [APA], 2001, p. 349, as noted by Roig, 2001, p. 320). This practice, however, might well be regarded as inappropriate— even as plagiarism—by many writing instructors. Rebecca Moore Howard (1995) has represented the boundaries of correct paraphrasing as much more restrictive than the APA guidelines appear to permit; she wrote that "academic writers *may not* [italics added] paraphrase a source by using its phrases and sentences, with a few changes in grammar or word choice— even when the source is cited" (p. 799).

As I have shown, the determination of plagiarism is not based on clear rhetorical conventions; nor is it uniformly understood within the academy. Uncertainty around paraphrase contributes to the confusion. Miguel Roig (2001) explained that "the absence of a general

operational definition for paraphrasing leaves plenty of room for disagreement as to when a paraphrase might be considered an instance of plagiarism" (p. 320). In a study of faculty beliefs about plagiarism and paraphrasing, Roig asked college instructors to determine which of several passages of text had been plagiarized. He found substantial disagreements among the respondents, which led him to note, "There can be substantial differences in how paraphrasing and plagiarism are defined even within a single discipline" (p. 321). Roig concluded that "a significant proportion of professors maintain criteria for correct paraphrasing that may be viewed by some of their colleagues as plagiarism" (p. 313). Roig's findings underscore an argument that Rebecca Moore Howard (1992) made nearly a decade earlier. Howard wrote,

> If [even] faculty have difficulty comprehending and manipulating the languages of the various academic cultures, how much more difficult a task do undergraduate students face as they are presented with a bewildering array of discourse, none of which resonates with the languages of their homes and secondary schools?" (p. 233)

Paraphrasing can be a particular challenge for second language writers. Kurt Bouman (2009) noted that an L2 writer's "developing English can make summarizing and paraphrasing difficult" (p. 162), and pointed out that an accusation of plagiarism may come as a shock to an L2 writer who felt confident that she had paraphrased correctly. In an article on plagiarism among second language writers, Sharon Myers (1998) described paraphrasing as "arguably the highest and most synthetic language skill of all" (p. 9), and noted that successful paraphrasing requires a writer to have both "a large and sophisticated vocabulary" and the ability to "recognize (so as not to repeat) sometimes very subtle stylistic features of writing" (p. 9).

Many experienced academic writers have a sufficiently complex syntax and lexicon to allow them to avoid close repetition of their sources. Student writers, however, are still building

up their repertoires of linguistic strategies and techniques, and many of them cannot completely avoid repeating source language in their paraphrases. Some students look to rules of thumb for guidance, being sure not to copy more than three, five, or ten consecutive source words without quotation marks. Others turn to a thesaurus, performing a series of word-for-word substitutions as they attempt to present their sources' ideas in a new set of words. Finally, some beginning academic writers approach source-based writing by simply cutting and pasting together ideas and chunks of text from their sources, composing their "own" papers by simply patching together the work of others—a practice which a number of scholars have carefully considered.

Patchwriting and Writerly Development

Not all scholars have agreed that patched-together writing necessarily constitutes plagiarism. Mary Minock (1995) noted that student writers often "unconsciously imitate [a text's] syntax and its rhetorical structure both during their readings and responses and when they are asked to present formal papers as a continuation of their responses" (p. 492). Yet Rebecca Moore Howard has claimed that such imitation is often clearly *conscious*.[10] Many student writers, she has argued, deliberately draw on the syntax and structure of their sources, even to the extent of simply cutting and pasting sections of source texts together into the texts that the students are constructing. Howard has characterized this kind of writing as "patchwriting," defining her neologism as "copying from a source text and then deleting some words, altering grammatical structures, or plugging in one-for-one synonym substitutes" (1992, p. 233).

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[10] Rebecca Moore Howard is arguably most influential plagiarism scholar within composition studies. In this dissertation I reference 5 of the nearly 20 works on plagiarism and authorship that she has authored over the past two decades (1992, 1995, 1999, 2000a, and 2000b). Because my discussion encompasses arguments about plagiarism that have appeared throughout much of Howard's scholarship, I have provided parenthetical citations only when referencing particular words or ideas traceable to a specific source.

It is important to note that Howard does not assert that a patchwritten paper should constitute an appropriate end product in a writing course. She has clearly explained that students need to learn and employ standard academic practices for referencing. Yet according to Howard, patchwriting is a part of this learning process. Howard has described patchwriting as "a necessary appropriation" (2000a, p. 82) of texts as student writers engage with unfamiliar voices and challenging discourses, claiming that it functions as a sort of developmental stage for writers encountering new discourses: "writers often patchwrite as a way of understanding unfamiliar material, as a way of appropriating a new vocabulary—as a way, in other words, of entering a new discourse community" (p. 85).

Howard has written that patchwriting may "signal neither a willing violation of academic ethics nor ignorance of them, but rather a healthy effort to gain membership in a new culture" (1992, p. 236). Patchwriting, she claimed, is a "gesture of reverence" in which a writer "recognizes the profundity of the source and strives to join the conversation in which the source participates…. Patchwriting is not only a means of students' learning; it is at the heart of writing itself" (1999, p. 7). As Howard has described it, patchwriting is "an act of enthusiasm in which students collaborate with their source texts for the purposes of understanding them and entering their discourse" (1999, p. 166). It represents an intertextual collaboration between writer and text (1999, p. 166) rather than the evidence of a criminal process of fraudulent authorship; accordingly, Howard has argued that patchwriting should be removed from the category of plagiarism (2000a, p. 85). Howard's notions about the ways in which student writers use patchwriting echo the powerful assertion that David Bartholomae (1985) made about developing academic writers:

The student has to appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse, and he has

to do this as though he were easily and comfortably at one with his audience, as though

he were a member of the academy or an historian or an anthropologist or an economist;

he has to invent the university by mimicking its language while finding some

compromise between idiosyncrasy, a personal history, on the one hand, and the

requirements of convention, the history of a discipline, on the other. He must speak our

language. Or he must dare to speak it to carry off the bluff, since speaking and writing

will most certainly be required long before the skill is "learned." (p. 134)

As both Howard and Bartholomae have shown, discursive imitation and mimicry in student

writing does not necessarily represent a student's poorly disguised plagiarism. Instead, borrowed

language in a paper may be the evidence of a student writer's still-developing ability to

appropriately and effectively erase the influences of the sources that the writer turned to in her

attempt to move more fully into the academic community. Through this theory about source use

and student composition, Howard's work has offered a new way of looking at a textual practice

that many instructors have constructed as plagiarism.

Questions of Intent

Rebecca Moore Howard's theory of patchwriting leads to another key construct

connected with plagiarism: intent. Source-based writing is the hallmark of contemporary

Western academic discourse, and it demands a lot from student writers. In their attempts to

navigate this terrain, some students fail to acknowledge and credit their sources, leading them to

submit transgressive texts. In failing to disclose the source of borrowed textual and discursive

features, these papers violate academic expectations regarding citation and acknowledgment,

distorting the boundary between student and source. Whether deliberate or accidental, plagiarism

> unmakes old affiliations and creates new ones, giving the child a new parent, the slave a
>
> new master, the text a new author. By breaking the law, in short, the plagiarist disrupts
>
> the field of significations that the law sets in place, disputing claims of legitimacy and
>
> natural authority. (Weinauer, 1997, p. 700)

Many institutional definitions of plagiarism fail to distinguish between intentional plagiarism (a sin of deception) and unintentional or accidental plagiarism (sins of omission or ignorance). As a widely used composition textbook has explained,

> When students present the work or thinking of others as their own, it's called plagiarism,
>
> whether their intention was to compensate for academic-performance anxiety, steal
>
> someone else's ideas and get away with it, or take full credit in all innocence for what
>
> became their ultimate opinion…. Most important, it can be deliberate or accidental;
>
> students can plagiarize with full knowledge of the consequences or none at all. (Connors
>
> & Glenn, 1999, pp. 37-38)

So when we identify *textual* features that might indicate plagiarism (a shift in register, style, vocabulary, or sentence structure, or a localized variation mechanical correctness), many of us suspect and respond to it as an *ethical* violation—in other words, we act as though the student's intention was to deceive—even though a text alone cannot signal intentionality. Eric Prochaska (2001) highlighted this incongruity:

> Our students are students not only in name but in intellectual development: if we are
>
> teaching them a skill, we cannot penalize them for not doing it correctly. Who would

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ever think that expulsion from school would be an appropriate response to incorrect

punctuation? (p. 69)

Intent thus becomes another component of the complex construction of plagiarism. And

we may find, too, that students and teachers have divergent ideas about the roles of error and

intention as they relate to plagiarism.

Imitation, Intertextuality, and Creative Cribbing

Pedagogies of Imitation

Scholars have also addressed plagiarism as it relates to questions of copying, modeling,

and imitation. As a pedagogical strategy, the imitation of models has a long history. When

composition scholar Tom Miller (2004) reviewed the earliest known corpus of college student

essays, written in the mid-18th century at Edinburgh University, he found a pair of identical

essays dated forty years apart. Miller questioned how that could happen, and proposed an

answer based on a pedagogy of imitation: "Both students probably copied from the same London

magazine."

Through the nineteenth century, a common exercise for college writers was to compose

imitations of model essays. Students were expected to imitate classic, belletristic texts, as much

for their moral instruction as for their exemplary rhetoric (Brereton, 1995, p. 3). T. Miller (2004)

explained how this pedagogy played out in classrooms: "Students in English courses sometimes

delivered readings from texts that they had copied, sometimes they wrote close imitations of the

style of such texts,… and sometimes they wrote 'original' compositions that merely imitated the

sentiments of belletristic essayists" (2004).

Most discussions on imitation admit that simple copying is not the end of composition.

Instead, imitation is held up as a developmental stage (similar to Howard's claims about

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patchwriting) or as an invention strategy employed to prime the writer's pen. Even ancient

Quintilian (circa AD 95/2001) explained that that the imitator should build on the original text in

some way:

> Imitation is not sufficient of itself, if for no other reason than it is the mark of an indolent
>
> nature to rest satisfied with what has been invented by others…. For in the originals,
>
> which we take for our models, there is nature and real power, while every imitation, on
>
> the contrary, is something counterfeit, and seems adapted to an object not its own. (p.
>
> 401)

While rote imitation is clearly not "sufficient of itself," this notion, too, provides a point

of entry for thinking about the many strategies available to help students enter into dialogue with

their sources.

Intertextuality and Community Building

Discursive imitation and reproduction can serve a variety of rhetorical goals beyond the

instructional. As I have discussed, in cultures organized around social principles of collectivity

rather than individuality, "there develops a sense of common knowledge, common ideas and

opinions that do not have to be explicitly stated to be understood" (Fox, 1994, p. 36), and these

cultures use textual imitation and appropriation to foster a sense of social harmony and cultural

continuity. For instance, some 20th century feminist scholars appropriated uncredited passages

"in order to remind readers of previous arguments and to position [their] ideas in a tradition of

women writers" (Lamb, 1998). The use of these familiar phrases served to "heighten readers'

feelings of belonging to a community" (Lamb, 1998).

According to Kembrew McLeod (2001), a tradition of shared rhetoric and intertextuality

is also well-established within the African-American community (p. 71). McLeod has argued

that the discursive strategies and practices associated with this tradition may not be apparent to those who are outside that community or who are unfamiliar with its traditions. In 1991, *The Journal of American History* devoted an entire issue to accusations of plagiarism in the academic compositions of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Borrowed thoughts and passages have been identified in many of Dr. King's writings and speeches, from King's graduate school days as well as in his public life (McLeod, 2001, p. 73). King, however, may not have regarded his textual repetition as a transgression; McLeod has speculated that "the practices that led [King] to appropriate the words and ideas of others were so much a part of the cultural tradition that King grew up in that he did not see what he did to be a problem" (p. 74).

Rebecca Moore Howard (1995) has claimed that Dr. King's literary borrowing was not a matter of textual indiscretion; she argued that King "was engaged in 'voice merging'—the African-American folk preaching tradition of patching together unattributed words, phrases, and even extended passages from theological sources, the Bible, and other preachers' sermons" (p. 792, addressing ideas from Keith Miller, 1991). Keith Miller (1991) himself noted that "King crafted highly imaginative, persuasive discourse through the [African-American] folk procedures of voice merging and self-making," even though such language use "resist[ed] his professors' rules about language and many notions of the Great White Thinkers." Howard (1999) suggested this resistance might have been intentional:

> One way—whether conscious or unconscious—of maintaining his ethnic identity while gaining European-American credentials would be to apply the textual ethics of African-American folk preaching to all of his writing…. Martin Luther King, Jr., may on some level have been aware of that meaning…, and his divergent rhetorical code-switching

may have been imbued with positive political meaning for his African American ethnic identity. (p. 123)

The clashing expectations of textuality between the African-American folk preaching tradition and the mainstream Western academic community may arise from divergent notions of the role of individuality and originality in composition. King's congregational audiences would have been acquainted with the familiar images and phrases which appeared in his sermons, and they would not have expected him to formally cite these sources. Academic audiences, however, make no provision for the inclusion of uncredited source material, and some academics who noticed Dr. King's unacknowledged intertextuality have branded him a plagiarist.

Creative Plagiarism

In another embodiment of unacknowledged intertextuality, several works by the experimental novelist Kathy Acker contain unambiguous, clearly intentional plagiarism. Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford (2000) have described Acker's writing as reshaping and reproducing the prose of other authors, "collapsing genres, time periods, genders, and selves" (p. 45). Acker, they argued, employed "'criminal' techniques…to wrench genres and languages completely out of context, to remake them through and with one another" (p. 47)—in other words, to create something anew. Acker herself has described the genesis of her plagiaristic writing as being somewhat more experimental than critical:

What I was interested in was what happens when you just copy something without any reason…. I came to plagiarism from another point of view, from exploring schizophrenia and identity, and I wanted to see what pure plagiarism would look like. (Friedman, 1988)

Acker's plagiaristic writing "acts out her theory that language cannot be owned—particularly not by coherent, organic 'individuals'" (Ede & Lunsford, p. 46). It engaged notions of agency (p.

46), authority, and propriety, thereby forcing readers to confront their own notions of textuality as they entered into Acker's text. Ede and Lunsford pointed out that Acker's writing serves "to both deconstruct and *construct*" (p. 47), presenting the notion that plagiarism itself can be a creative, constructive authorial technique.

Plagiaristic strategies of creation have been employed in many fields of production beyond composition, and a brief consideration of these may prove especially useful as we think about the world that students encounter outside the walls of the academy. Rebecca Moore Howard (1992) chose "A Plagiarism *Pentimento*" as the title of the article in which she introduced her theory of patchwriting. Howard repurposed *pentimento*, an art term used to describe the images of an earlier painting that sometimes telegraph into the new work when an artist paints over an old canvas. While such traces are typically unintentional, some artists have deliberately exploited previously existing images, as Andy Warhol did with his soup cans. Artists have also wholly reappropriated existing figures, as Marcel Duchamp did when he signed a urinal "R. Mutt" and presented it as a work of art. More familiar to many college students, probably, are the intertextual and appropriative techniques that are employed in the creation of new and unique musical compositions. Rap and hip-hop, for instance, have drawn heavily on sampling, a remixing strategy in which artists embed existing musical phrases (often copied directly from a recording) into their own songs (McLeod, 2001). As a compositional technique, however, sampling does not simply fulfill musical goals; it has also been described as "a way of paying homage to older artists; it is also a kind of musical archaeology that is significant when it is applied to black music" (McLeod, p. 82, addressing ideas from T. Rose's [1994] *Black Noise: Hip-hop Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*).

A notable pioneer of sampling in late 20th century African-American music is the old-school rap/hip-hop artist Grandmaster Flash. His 1981 composition "The Adventures of Grandmaster Flash on the Wheels of Steel" interwove and superimposed musical excerpts from Queen, Chic, and Blondie, among others. Another rap act, The Sugarhill Gang, brought musical intertextuality to the mainstream as their song "Rapper's Delight" climbed the Billboard charts. Over two decades later, another DJ artist, Danger Mouse, drew both ire and a copyright violation suit for *The Grey Album*, a 2004 mashup that remixed the lyrical track from Jay-Z's *The Black Album* with the musical track of The Beatles' *The Beatles* (popularly called *The White Album*). Although originally intended for a very limited release, the file-sharing ease of the Internet allowed peer-to-peer distribution of *The Grey Album* to explode ("*The Grey Album*," 2008), pushing it onto the radar of EMI, the recording industry giant that holds the rights to The Beatles' work. To the recording industry, *The Grey Album* flaunted questions of copyright, ownership, and authorship in many of the same ways that students' plagiaristic compositions flaunt academic practices and conventions.

Myriad dilemmas face artists, students, and teachers as we consider issues of intentional intertextuality and referentiality. One contradiction is the gulf between literary theory and academic practice. For instance, for decades contemporary literary theory has admitted the impossibility of true originality. Critic Harold Bloom made famous in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973) his theory that all writing is, at its base, plagiaristic—because most writers are unable to break from the domineering literary genealogy that precedes them. Before him, French theorist Roland Barthes (1968/1977) declared authorship impossible, proclaiming the unique, original author to be dead. A text, Barthes asserted, is "a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of

writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centres of culture," (p. 146), rendering the representation of authorship impossible.

Mary Minock (1995) drew on Mikhail Bahktin when she wrote that, "in reality—reality reflecting the discrete situations in time and space in which we engage in dialogue—our language is 'heteroglot,' taking its shape from all the elements in any particular context and from many prior dialogues" (1995, p. 495). Most college students dwell much more fully in a world of popular culture and media than they do in the academy, and they are immersed in practices of referentiality and intertextuality that the academy—and contemporary copyright law—has yet to accommodate. Yet we continue to assign writing tasks that expect students-as-authors to be fully responsible for meaning-making, and we insist that they define their writerly process through the use of quotation marks, footnotes, and parentheses. Rebecca Moore Howard (2000b) stated this postmodern dilemma clearly: "We in the academy and specifically in English Studies believe that the textual work required by the discourse of plagiarism is impossible, yet we continue to require that work of our students" (p. 474).

Plagiarism, Power, and Resistance

A critical discussion of plagiarism as a construct must necessarily consider the relationship between plagiarism and power. In a classroom context, plagiarism is often represented pedagogically as an expert/novice issue in which teacher/experts remind student/novices to avoid plagiarizing. In an institutional context, plagiarism issues play out as teachers and administrators exercise the juridical powers of discrimination, fact-finding, and sanction against students who stand accused of violating a most basic academic principle. These contexts reify the authority of the institution, whose plagiarism policies constantly remind

students that they lack the agency, knowledge, and experience to interact with source texts in mimetic, referential, unacknowledged ways.

"Our construction of plagiarism," Rebecca Moore Howard (1999) wrote, "is designed to bar the Great Unwashed from membership in the intellectual elite" (p. 14). But it is not just students whom our plagiarism policies and practices affect. As English continues to grow as a global lingua franca, some academic professionals from non-English-speaking countries have found their access to the international discourse community challenged or denied due to the high level of English proficiency required for publishing in English-language journals.

According to Eric Prochaska (2001), when we require that second language writers employ Western textual conventions in their English compositions, we are asking them, in effect, to suppress their own rhetorical traditions. Prochaska—like Howard (1999)—has described plagiarism rules as serving as a sort of border control. For Prochaska, the Western academic construction of plagiarism functions as a "gatekeeping device" against many nonnative English speaking academics (p. 65). A Chinese chemist explained one strategy some L2 scholars employ to open this gate: "Many scientists are not good at English. In order to publish their articles in foreign journals they have to translate their journals from Chinese to English. So they usually borrow some words from foreign articles" (S. Myers, 1998, p. 15). Another L2 academic—a Taiwanese computer scientist quoted in the same study—offered this perspective:

> After working hard in research, locally trained researchers with poor English writing skill still need to struggle very hard for translating their research findings into English. It is even more disappointing when their papers are probably rejected simply because of writing problems. As a result, imitating the "sentence structures" from well-written papers seems a good way to escape from the writing problems. (p. 15)

Beyond helping L2 writers negotiate a language barrier, plagiarism in the face of power may also represent a student's tactical response to the increasing commodification and commercialization of education. As Sue Saltmarsh (2004) explained,

> In a climate which measures "success" (rather than learning) according to quantifiable "results", in which the process of learning is reconstituted as a financial transaction for which individuals are increasingly responsible and in which the urgency to complete and progress is mirrored in a competitive results-driven labour market, it is hardly surprising that plagiarism has come to be seen by some as a viable alternative to overload, poor performance or failure. (p. 448)

For many student plagiarists, I suspect that intentional plagiarism is not an attempt to bring about any broad-scale social change; nor is it intended to challenge Western theories of authorship. Rather, it is an attempt to undercut our expectations by bypassing the work we ask students to perform and produce for us. While such plagiarism may not have a broad social agenda, it nonetheless undermines institutional authority; it also throws our best evaluative systems into havoc. Plagiarism of every kind subverts and sabotages the Western academic ideals of autonomous authorship, of the integrity of the individual, and of the teaching practices that require writers to commodify and account for all of their words, influences, and ideas.

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Plagiarism and Second Language Writing:

Special Challenges for L2 Writers

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Even though no empirical evidence supports the position, many academics believe that plagiarism is more common among L2 writers than among native English speaking students (Pecorari, 2003, p. 321). I have already discussed some of the ways that Western academic

audiences think about agency, authorship, and authorial identity; and I have shown how these ways of thinking may clash with those of other cultures. I have also noted several theories about how plagiarism functions within (and against) the academy. With these points in mind, I now turn to scholarship which offers a few more reasons for why some second language writers employ plagiaristic composing practices.

Successful navigation of the academy's conventions regarding plagiarism and source use is difficult for all beginning academic writers, yet it is substantially more complex for L2 students (see Bouman, 2009). As Roz Ivanič has observed, "The only way an apprentice member can learn to become a full member is by copying, adapting and synthesizing from the words of other members" (as cited in Sowden, 2005, p. 230). While such appropriation is necessary for all writers entering a discourse community, second language writers face additional challenges, many of them grounded in the nature of second language acquisition and development. As Angélil-Carter (2000) explained,

> Also evident in relation to plagiarism, particularly where it concerns students using English as an Additional Language, is the fact that all language is learnt and reproduced in chunks or formulas, so that phrases which are reproduced word-for-word, or only slightly altered, may be a necessary part of the language learning process. Compounding the problem for these students is the lack of optional vocabulary and syntax available to them in their additional language when they are attempting to use their own words. (2000, p. 113)

These points of view can deepen our understanding of why some L2 writers seem to plagiarize, whether intentionally or inadvertently. Yet nonnative English speakers—even experienced academic writers—may compose plagiaristic texts for reasons beyond linguistic challenges.

In some cases, texts may appear transgressive due to a writer's use or misuse of citational and referencing practices. Kurt Bouman (2009) wrote that it can take years of practicing citation conventions before a writer can use them confidently and correctly when writing with sources (p. 162), yet many second language writers are introduced to our expectations for citation at the same time we ask them to correctly put these expectations into practice, and they may well make mistakes. In other cases, an L2 student's paper may appear plagiarized because the writer employed citational practices unfamiliar to their Western academic audiences. Phan Le Ha[11] (2006) pointed out that "while one educational practice may consider a certain act as normal, another educational practice may see the same act as wrong" (p. 277). For instance, she explained that in Vietnamese universities

> it is acceptable for students to give a full list bibliography at the end of their essays
> without having to give full in-text references to the readings they use. This way of
> presenting ideas is not considered plagiarism, at least at the undergraduate level, as long
> as students acknowledge all the authors whose ideas they have referred to in the
> bibliography. (p. 78)

Such a system of attribution is entirely incompatible with the citation conventions of the primary Western style guides (MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.), and in order to be successful in the Western academy, writers accustomed to alternative referencing practices will need to move "from an implicit to an explicit attribution" system that their English-speaking academic audiences will recognize (Chandrasoma et al., 2004, p. 191).

Another explanation that has been offered for the plagiarism of L2 writers is the belief that plagiarism is permissible in other cultures—a particularly common misperception with regard to Asian students. Although some international students have reported that in their

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[11] Following Vietnamese convention, this author's name appears on the References list as Phan Le Ha.

countries plagiarism "is viewed as absolutely necessary to success in school" (Evans & Youmans, 2000, p. 57), many scholars have refuted the notion that some cultures regard plagiarism as acceptable.

Dilin Liu (2005) challenged the belief that some L2 writers plagiarize because their culture permits it. Liu, a native Chinese and a researcher/teacher at an American university, wrote, "The concept of 'plagiarism' as an immoral practice has existed in China for a very long time" (p. 235). He explained, "Chinese has two terms for plagiarism and they are both derogatory: *piao qie*, which literally means to rob and steal someone's writing, and *cao xi*, which means to copy and steal" (p. 235). Liu concluded,

> It is thus accurate to say that, in most cases, those who plagiarize in China, like those who do it in the West, know that what they are doing is wrong and they do it anyway as an easy way to obtain personal gains. As for those Chinese ESL students who are found plagiarizing but claim that it is an acceptable practice in China, they are doing it either out of ignorance or out of the need for an excuse for their wrongdoing. (p. 237)

Drawing on a series of interviews with international graduate students, Amy Minett (2001) reported that the L2 writers she spoke with all recognized plagiarism as "a moral issue," even though each of them "grappled with the difficulties" of defining plagiarism. I suspect that the confusion Minett observed results in large part from the different ways in which the term *plagiarism* is understood and applied in its varying contexts, rather than from truly divergent understandings of the term itself. In fact, Evans and Youmans (2000) reported that the definitions of plagiarism offered by the international students they interviewed were generally consistent with the definition used in the West, noting that these students asserted that "the definition of plagiarism is the same throughout the world" (pp. 51-52).

Through a series of one-on-one interviews, Ashworth, Bannister, and Thorne (1997) explored British university students' attitudes toward cheating and plagiarism. The authors reported that, for the students they interviewed, "plagiarism appeared to generate a host of difficulties" (p. 200). The 19 students—primarily recent graduates and upper-level undergraduates—expressed uncertainty about what specific textual practices constituted plagiarism, and showed "widespread ignorance" regarding the appropriate methods for referring to others' work in their own writing (p. 201). So even though its definition may appear to be stable and uniform—even across the globe—the concepts and practices to which the term *plagiarism* refers are anything but.

Definitions Revisited (Plagiarism Operationalized)

"As a disciplinary signifier," Rebecca Moore Howard (2000b) wrote, "*plagiarism* is unwieldy, unstable, and insidious" (p. 488). Howard's scholarship has consistently urged us to unpack the term *plagiarism*, by inviting us to understand and respond to the enactment of plagiarism differently depending on which textual practices it corresponds to. In 1995, Howard proposed a policy statement on plagiarism that replaced the word *plagiarism* with the terms *cheating*, *non-attribution*, and *patchwriting* (p. 799). Several years later, responding to the ways that the construction of plagiarism reinforced a binary, gendered, heterosexual hierarchy of authorship, Howard (2000b) recommended that "we in English Studies discard the term *plagiarism* altogether," substituting instead these "more specific, less culturally burdened terms": *fraud*, *insufficient citation*, and *excessive repetition* (p. 475). Howard's suggestion reminds us that the way *plagiarism* is defined establishes the way in which we think about it and respond to it. In coming to my own understanding of plagiarism, I am moved by Howard's call that we

abolish the term. *Plagiarism*, as a term, is simply too weighted down by its history to be very useful.

How, then, will this study define *plagiarism*? Briefly: it will not. In contrast to much of the scholarly literature on plagiarism, this study is framed by principles of phenomenological research. Accordingly, it will represent *plagiarism* in the words that the study's interview and focus group participants used to construct it.

Phenomenology, as it pertains to social science research, is not a research method in itself. Rather, it describes a stance, both ideological and rhetorical, from which a researcher acts. Philosophically, phenomenology posits that meaning is constructed by, and dwells in, individuals, rather than in a priori truths or categories (see Davis, 1995, and Schwandt, 2000). Methodologically, phenomenological studies aim to understand how research participants understand the topic. For an inquiry investigating how plagiarism—a conceptual object that contemporary composition theory recognizes as constructed rather than as received—is regarded by college students, research methods informed by phenomenology seem both well-suited and immediately useful.

It is useful and important for composition teachers to know the existing frames through which the academy has regarded and represented plagiarism. That has been the central purpose of this literature review. At the same time, "The key concepts of a discipline," according to Ashworth and Lucas (2000), "are not always plain to 'experts' and the researcher can certainly not assume that the selected concepts will form the taken-for-granted basis of conversation with students" (p. 299). It seems significantly less useful, therefore, to base an inquiry into student plagiarism on the dominant academic constructions of plagiarism. Accordingly, as my purpose in this dissertation is to explore how students understand plagiarism, I made my research

questions as open-ended as possible. I did not offer a definition for *plagiarism* in the interviews or focus groups, and I tried to avoid asking questions that constrained participants' responses into predetermined categories.

While it feels easy to label plagiarism an ethical aberration, and seems logical to respond to plagiarism by punishing it, I suggest a different approach. I suggest that by suspending our theories and beliefs about plagiarism we can better listen to what our students have to say about it. In this chapter, I have reviewed and discussed many of the theories and beliefs that scholars have advanced in their efforts to understand and respond to our concerns about plagiarism. In doing so, I sought to lay some groundwork for establishing the need to suspend our theories and beliefs about plagiarism. In the rest of this dissertation, I will not only reinforce the need for this suspension, but more importantly will demonstrate why and how empirical approaches to understanding plagiarism can insert the views and voices of our students into the professional dialogue. By considering the ways in which student plagiarism responds to as well as resists our assignments; by exploring students' construction of plagiarism's textual and performative boundaries; and by addressing plagiarism's challenges to our practices of teaching, we will view from a fresh perspective some of the clashes that occur in the contact zone of a classroom. We will also develop a richer understanding of what stands between students' stolen words and the cultural and disciplinary codes, conventions, and expectations that so scorn them.

CHAPTER THREE:

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ON PLAGIARISM

Chapter Two reviewed some of the theoretical scholarship on plagiarism, showing how scholars represented some of the sources of our beliefs and practices. The chapter also suggested that empirical, phenomenologically oriented research could provide a way for students' ideas about and experiences with plagiarism to contribute to the professional discourse's constructions of, and teaching practices regarding, plagiarism. Now, in Chapter Three, I turn to the empirical literature on plagiarism. In this chapter, I discuss a wide variety of research studies that have investigated plagiarism. The topic has been of broad interest to the academy; the studies I review represent many disciplinary perspectives and demonstrate a variety of methodological approaches.

As we move from theoretical constructions into empirical explorations, we move away from conceptual representations of plagiarism and toward more highly contextualized realizations of plagiarism's phenomena. I have structured this chapter accordingly; I review the empirical literature on plagiarism by addressing the various research methods that have been used to study it. I first discuss quantitative research studies—surveys, task-based performance studies, and experiments that have investigated plagiarism through primarily researcher-designed frames. Next, I address studies based on interviews and focus groups—qualitative methods whose specific research approaches seek out participants' understandings of and experiences with plagiarism.

Theoretical literature dominates Composition Studies' professional discourse on plagiarism. The empirical discourse on plagiarism is thin, and studies of students' perspectives

on plagiarism are rare. Theoretical scholarship has given us many different frames through

which we can think about student plagiarism; empirical approaches to plagiarism have allowed

us to put some of our theories to the test. My discussion of plagiarism's empirical research aims

to establish the importance that the dissertation study's research methodology holds for helping

us learn more about college students' constructions and practices of plagiarism.

<div align="center">Quantitatively Oriented Survey-Based Research on Plagiarism</div>

A number of researchers within the academy have investigated student plagiarism

through survey-based research studies. Typically, these researchers have asked questions about

plagiarism as part of broader student surveys about academic integrity and cheating, and much of

our empirical knowledge about college student plagiarism is based on quantitatively oriented

data generated by such surveys (see, for instance, McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 2001b;

Scanlon & Neumann, 2002).

When supported by data from a formal survey, claims about student plagiarism can

appear quite compelling. Surveys are a well-known research method, and their data can be

presented in familiar, easily understood ways. For example, in an effort to market its

Turnitin.com plagiarism detection program to concerned teachers and schools, the Plagiarism.org

Web site turned to survey data to report that "84% [of the students surveyed had]admitted to

cheating on written assignments" (*Did You Know?*, 2007).[12] Although the Web site did not

explain what specific dubious practices these cheaters had engaged in, the implication of the

statistic is clear: Student plagiarism is a widespread phenomenon, and the Turnitin.com service

will help us respond to the immediate threat it poses to the integrity of our students' writing.

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[12] *Plagiarism.org* cites McCabe and Treviño (1996) as the source of this statistic.

Findings from Research Surveys on Plagiarism

Donald L. McCabe's Research on Plagiarism, Cheating, and Academic Integrity

Many of the statistics referenced by the *Plagiarism.org* Web site (Did You Know?, 2007) come from survey-based research studies that involved Donald L. McCabe, a management professor at the Rutgers Business School. McCabe's *Curriculum Vitae* (McCabe, n.d.) lists him as having authored—either solely or jointly—over 45 separate academic publications on cheating, plagiarism, and academic integrity since 1993. McCabe is arguably the academy's most widely referenced source for data on student plagiarism, and his research has gone viral: a recent Google search returned over 1.5 million hits for "McCabe" and "plagiarism," and McCabe himself has noted that he has discussed his work in over 80 "major media citations" since *People* magazine featured him in an article on student cheating in 1991 (McCabe, n.d.). For many people—both inside and outside the academy—Donald McCabe's construction and representation of student plagiarism accurately and convincingly represents the current state of academic integrity on our campuses.

In spite of the prominent role that McCabe's research has played in the public discourse on student plagiarism, the validity of studies like his can easily be undermined by definitional or interpretive disparities. For instance, McCabe has reported that student cheating is influenced by factors such as "laziness, a lack of responsibility, a lack of character, poor self-image, a lack of pride in a job well done, and a lack of personal integrity" (McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 2001a, p. 228). However, these findings are based on an unstated set of value judgments about actions and principles, and the authors' assertions assume an alignment of values that McCabe's readers cannot all possibly share. The usefulness of claims about student plagiarism depends upon a common understanding of terms and concepts related to plagiarism—and, in the case of

McCabe, Treviño, and Butterfield (2001a), a totalizing convergence of judgments about immensurable abstractions like "laziness," "character," and "responsibility." Yet as my review of literature has demonstrated, the understanding of the terms and concepts related to plagiarism is anything but common, even within the academy.

McCabe's research has allowed us to better understand how some dimensions of cheating and plagiarism seem to vary based on students' social and academic contexts. For instance, McCabe's studies have reported more cheating among student athletes than non-athletes, and more cheating among students with lower grade point averages than among students with higher GPAs (McCabe & Treviño, 1997). McCabe has also reported that less cheating occurs among students at schools that have explicit honor codes than among students at schools without such codes (McCabe & Treviño, 1993, p. 224). Yet we must look carefully at how researchers make claims about student plagiarism based on their interpretations of survey-based data. For instance, McCabe, Treviño, and Butterfield (2001a) have reported that two thirds of the respondents for one research survey had admitted to "serious cheating on written work" (p. 223). Their phrase "serious cheating" represents a value judgment about specific textual or behavioral acts. It is an interpretive assertion about the nature of particular practices, and one that McCabe himself recognizes as somewhat subjective.

In a subsequent discussion of the study, McCabe (2005) has noted that the survey itself did not use the word *cheating*; he explained that the survey's questions had been "worded to ask students about a specific behavior, without labeling it as cheating."[13] The specific behaviors McCabe et al. (2001a) categorized as "serious cheating on written work" included "students who have engaged in plagiarism, fabricated or falsified a bibliography, turned in work done by

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[13] The survey instrument McCabe (2005) refers to here is discussed elsewhere in this dissertation as McCabe & Treviño (1997).

someone else, or copied a few sentences of material without footnoting them in a paper" (p. 223). Most people would agree with McCabe that the submission of a ghostwritten paper is, indeed, "serious cheating," yet few of us would locate it on a continuum of severity in the same position as "[copying] a few sentences of material without footnoting them." McCabe's consolidation of such different textual acts under the common heading of "serious cheating" obviates any differences between these diverse compositional practices, making it harder for us to accurately understand—and therefore respond to—the phenomenon of student plagiarism.

Composition's Plagiarism Surveys

Many of the conclusions about plagiarism reached by McCabe and other researchers have been based on data from surveys that addressed general issues of academic integrity. Several composition scholars, by contrast, have conducted research studies that focused specifically on plagiarism. Within the field of Composition Studies, one of the first empirical studies to focus on college students' attitudes toward plagiarism was Barry Kroll's (1988). Kroll's survey included both open-ended and forced-response questions, and his analysis sought to establish an emergent rather than a predetermined interpretive framework. Kroll's use of such an analysis was a strength of the study, and his use of student-generated categories extended our understanding of what students say about plagiarism. However, the framework that formed this strength of the study also presented its most substantial limitation. While Kroll had aimed "to investigate what a sample of college freshmen thought about plagiarism" (p. 204), the survey instrument itself began with the assumption that plagiarism was "wrong" (p. 205) and "should [be] avoid[ed]" (p. 207).

Kroll (1988) rightly acknowledged that "we know very little ... about why our students think plagiarism is wrong" (p. 204). However, the methodological positioning of plagiarism as

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inherently wrong conflicts with the phenomenological research principles around which I designed this dissertation study. In my mind, the more interesting and valuable question to ask about plagiarism is not *why* students believe it to be wrong, but *whether* they believe it is wrong. This distinction is crucial, for in asking "Why is plagiarism wrong?," Kroll compelled the students he surveyed to locate their thoughts about plagiarism within a construction of plagiarism that he had pre-established. Simply put, Kroll's survey presumed that the college student writers he surveyed would agree with, and support, the standards of behavior and textuality that have dominated much of the professional and public discourse on plagiarism. I contend that this may not be the case, and that our attempts to better understand student plagiarism should begin with our seeking to understand how students construct and experience plagiarism on their own terms.

Several years after Kroll, Glenn Deckert (1993) surveyed Chinese students enrolled in first-year studies at a Hong Kong university in order to explore how second language college students regarded plagiarism. Deckert based part of his research design on Kroll's study, asking respondents to assess plagiarism's unfairness with regard to several different constituencies (the student writer who plagiarizes, the student's classmates, the teacher, the college, and the author of the original source). I find that Deckert's study, like Kroll's, raises several methodological red flags. For instance, while Deckert's survey distinctly framed plagiarism in terms of contemporary Western academic expectations, his research questions required the participants to classify plagiarism on a moral continuum that Deckert had established for the study, rather than according to the participants' own moral constructions of plagiarism. The assumption that undergirded Deckert's survey was that plagiarism is, on its face, *unfair*. This assumption ascribes qualities of stability and universality to the recognition and determination of plagiarism—a theoretical position that many scholars question, as I have shown.

In a response to Deckert's study, Alastair Pennycook (1994) directly challenged the author's conclusions. Pennycook stated, "While [Deckert] is right in some senses that students cannot recognize plagiarism, his basic premise that plagiarism is clear and objectifiable and can therefore be easily recognized is much more open to question" (p. 277). To check his notion, Pennycook asked 22 of his departmental colleagues—all experienced postsecondary ESL teachers—to complete the section of Deckert's questionnaire that asked respondents to identify plagiarized passages in six writing samples. "Indeed," Pennycook wrote, "on none of the six passages was there complete agreement and on four out of the six [their] responses covered all three categories. None of the teachers got all the answers 'right'" (p. 278). Why might nearly two dozen experienced English teachers within the same department show such disparity in their application of the most basic concepts of plagiarism? Perhaps the answer goes to definitional disparity; in other words, the problem may very well be related to participants' varied understandings of the term *plagiarism*. If this is the case, then the problem is likely one of *operationalization*—of how the word *plagiarism* appeared in the language and context of the research instrument.

The Challenging Operationalization of Plagiarism

Few survey-based research studies have operationalized the term *plagiarism* in such a way as to make their findings very useful for writing teachers. Despite the potential power that surveys hold as a research methodology, the imprecision and inconsistency with which many survey-based studies have defined and constructed *plagiarism* opens the door to significant interpretative disagreements.

My review of some of the plagiarism and cheating studies included in the meta-analysis studies by Whitley (1998) and Brown and Emmett (2001), as well as my examination of a dozen

articles authored or co-authored by Donald McCabe, suggests that the great variation in the number of students who report cheating depends in large part on how the question is put—in other words, on how the research instrument operationalizes *cheating* and *plagiarism*. Clearly, the best survey-based research on plagiarism carefully operationalizes the concept. Rather than asking questions that require a common understanding of terms ("How many times in the past year have you *plagiarized*?"), these questionnaires will inquire about specific textual acts ("How many times in the past year have you *copied one or more sentences from a Web site into your paper without providing a citation*?").

One such study explored the connections between academic integrity and procrastination. Through survey-based research with 115 college students, Miguel Roig and Lauren DeTommaso (1995) designed a study to examine whether a statistically significant relationship existed between procrastination and academically dishonest behaviors such as cheating and plagiarism. The authors developed a 24-question survey which asked respondents to reply to a variety of statements using a five-point frequency scale (*never* through *very frequently*). Unlike many of the surveys I reviewed, Roig and DeTommaso's instrument examined student plagiarism through a syntactically neutral vocabulary, operationalizing *plagiarism* with clarity and precision. For example, one survey item asked respondents how frequently they had

> taken one or two sentences from someone else's written work (e.g., a published source, another student's paper or homework), changed them moderately (e.g., transposed the subject and predicate, changed articles and prepositions, used synonyms to substitute some but not all of the terms, added a few words and short phrases), and inserted this information in [their] paper (or written homework assignment) as [their] own writing. (p. 696)

The well-crafted prompts about plagiarism and cheating complemented the survey's questions about procrastination, and Roig and DeTommaso reported finding a "low but statistically significant positive correlation… between cheating and procrastination" (p. 693), and a similar correlation between plagiarism and procrastination (p. 693). Because the survey had been constructed to inquire about specific actions instead of generalized behaviors, its findings can accommodate and inform scholars working with a variety of different definitions for *plagiarism* or *cheating*.

Patrick Scanlon and David Neumann (2002) also inquired about plagiarism through student surveys. Their study, too, operationalized the term *plagiarism* with nuance and sophistication. Scanlon and Neumann surveyed almost 700 undergraduates from nine different institutions in order to learn how college students think about Internet plagiarism. They asked students to estimate how often they and their classmates had engaged in particular plagiaristic acts using either conventional (paper-based) or Internet-based sources. Like Roig and DeTommaso (1995), Scanlon and Neumann's prompts inquired about specific behaviors. In fact, just as McCabe (2005) had done, Scanlon and Neumann mentioned that their survey had avoided using the word *plagiarism*. They explained:

> Because plagiarism in its more abstract sense often is misunderstood by students and is difficult for them to define (Ashworth, Bannister, & Thorne, 1997), in this survey students were asked about specific acts. In fact, the word plagiarism appeared in none of the items on the survey. (p. 378)

Scanlon and Neumann reported that most of the survey participants responded that they had *never* or *rarely* engaged in plagiaristic writing—whether from conventional or Internet-based

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sources. Their findings appear to strongly refute the common presumption that the Internet has led to a plagiarism epidemic.

In fact, results from a number of empirical inquiries complicate claims about the frequency of plagiarism, as surveys of cheating and academic integrity have returned widely divergent rates of student plagiarism. Two extensive meta-analyses of plagiarism research each reported finding that the rate of student plagiarism ranged from 3% to 98% across more than 30 different studies (Brown & Emmett, 2001, p. 532; Whitley, 1998, p. 238). One of these meta-analyses also reported finding no increase in student cheating over the 30-plus years of research (1966 to 1999) its authors examined (Brown & Emmett, p. 536). The findings of these meta-analyses compel me to question the usefulness of standardized surveys as a research method for investigating student plagiarism. Although surveys can be designed and conducted with methodological rigor, their reliability and validity depend on a consistent understanding and application of terms—and when different research studies report that either 3% or 98% of students are plagiarizing, the incongruity must be due to a different understanding of terms.

Even Donald McCabe has acknowledged the limited ability of his survey-based research to offer broad explanations of academic dishonesty among college students. He has reported that the factors his research has targeted—such as institutional honor codes, students' academic performance, and social factors like involvement in Greek organizations or collegiate athletics—can only account for "about 20% of the total variance" in student cheating (McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 2002, p. 376). Clearly, there is much about college students and plagiarism that survey-based research studies have not been able to access.

Other Quantitative Investigations of Plagiarism

By design, most quantitative survey-based research relies on participants to provide accurate, self-reported responses to a series of fixed questions. The ease with which survey data can be gathered and analyzed makes surveys a useful methodology for large-scale research studies. As I have argued, however, a survey's reliability can be compromised if the participants and/or researchers do not share a consistent understanding of the basic terms and concepts under investigation—and even well-operationalized surveys cannot access some important dimensions of a highly contextual performatively based phenomenon like plagiarism. To explore some of these dimensions of plagiarism, researchers have employed a several different quantitatively oriented research methods.

Task-Based Performance Studies

A number of researchers have studied students' constructions of plagiarism by analyzing students' performance on an assigned writing task. For example, Cherry Campbell (1990) asked 30 student writers (about half L1 students from a composition course and half L2 students from an ESL composition course) to read a chapter from an anthropology textbook and then write a brief paper based on ideas from the text and making references to it. Campbell analyzed the participants' essays according to how and where in each essay the writer had referenced the source text. Her analysis allowed Campbell to describe with precision some of the specific differences in how L1 and L2 writers employ and acknowledge source-based information in their writing (see Shi, 2004, for a similar study).

Casey Keck (2006) used a similar method to explore the differences in how L1 and L2 students made use of paraphrasing in their source-based writing. Keck asked over 150 L1 and L2 students enrolled in undergraduate-level composition or ESL courses to read a source text she

provided and then compose a summary of it. She analyzed the participants' summaries by identifying and categorizing their use of paraphrases, in order to assess and describe the extent to which the students' paraphrases of the source differed from the language and structure of the source's passages. Keck found that while the L1 and L2 writers had used a similar number of paraphrases in their summaries, the L2 students' paraphrases included significantly more source language than the L1 students' paraphrases had.

Miguel Roig (2001) used similar research methods in a series of studies that explored college instructors' standards for plagiarism and paraphrasing.[14] The first study presented 200 faculty members with a source text and six brief passages that paraphrased it. Respondents were asked to indicate which, if any, of the passages contained plagiarism. The second study asked over 100 faculty from a variety of disciplines to read a supplied text passage and write a brief paraphrase of it; Roig analyzed the paraphrases by looking for repetition of word strings from the source text. The third study employed a similar methodology as the second; it asked 100 psychology faculty to compose a paraphrase of a supplied passage of text. This time, half of the participants were given a complex source text, and the other half a simpler text on the same topic. Roig analyzed the results to determine whether the complexity of a source text affects the plagiarism rate in paraphrasing. Overall, Roig reported finding "wide differences in the paraphrasing practices of college professors, even within members of a single discipline" (p. 319). He noted "moderate disagreement" in terms of whether sample paraphrases included plagiarism, and found that nearly one third of the instructors' paraphrases had "appropriated some text from the original" (p. 307). Finally, Roig found that professors were much more likely to appropriate text when they were paraphrasing a complex rather than a more basic source text

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[14] I referenced several of Roig's findings from this study in my previous discussion on the challenges of paraphrasing.

(p. 307). These three studies led Roig to conclude, as I previously noted, that "a significant proportion of professors maintain criteria for correct paraphrasing that may be viewed by some of their colleagues as plagiarism" (p. 313).

Experimental Research Studies

Roig's (2001) study had examined whether the complexity of a source text affected professors' paraphrasing practices. Other researchers in psychology have examined what implications the credibility of a source might have. Specifically, Martin Bink and his coauthors (Bink et al., 1999) designed an experimental study to test their hypothesis that the credibility of a source might contribute to *cryptomnesia*—the inadvertent or unconscious plagiarism of words or ideas. Their experiment, which investigated memory processes, involved 84 undergraduate students as research participants. Half of these students were assigned to an experimental group, and the other half to a control group.

Bink et al. (1999) presented the experimental and control groups with two lists of information: suggestions for reducing traffic accidents, all of which had been generated by students in a previous study. Both groups received the same two lists. For the control group, the two lists were identified generically; one list was identified as the "brown" list, and the other as the "purple" list. In the experimental condition, however, the two lists were identified differently; for participants in the experimental group, one list of suggestions was identified as coming from professional traffic planners, and the other as coming from college freshmen. Study participants were asked to rate the effectiveness of each item on their lists. Later, after a distracter exercise, each participant was asked to give four *new* suggestions for reducing traffic accidents—ideas that had not appeared on the previous lists.

Bink et al. (1999) found evidence of plagiarism in the new suggestions offered by participants from both the control and experimental groups—in other words, participants from both groups had copied some ideas from the original lists even though they had been reminded not to. However, the authors found that more ideas were plagiarized from the list attributed to professional traffic planners than were plagiarized from the other lists. They reported that "participants consistently tended to plagiarise [*sic*] the more credible source of traffic planners more frequently than they plagiarised [*sic*] the less credible source" (p. 305).

Experimental research studies are notably important in disciplines that prize quantitative research methods. Bink et. al. (1999) grounded the results of their experiment in the literature of cognitive psychology, arguing that

> errors of unconscious plagiarism are important memory errors, and the mechanisms by which unconscious plagiarism occurs may be the same mechanisms by which patients in psychotherapy reach insights, consumers come to believe advertising claims, or people come to hold certain political beliefs. (p. 307)

The rigor of a carefully designed experiment enhances the validity of its authors' findings, and their well-crafted study of plagiarism makes valuable contribution to the scholarship of their field.

The construction of plagiarism on which Bink and his coauthors based their research appears to make their study more immediately useful for cognitive scientists than for composition scholars. However, a study by researchers in education applied a rigorous experimental design to a construction of plagiarism more familiar to those of us in Composition Studies. Steven Grubaugh, Richard Speaker, and Michael Tanner (1996) conducted an experiment to examine whether cloze testing could be reliable and valid method for detecting

student plagiarism. [15]   The authors asked almost 70 randomly-selected middle school, high school, and college student participants to write an essay. Ten days later, each participant was given two cloze tasks—one based on the essay that the student had written previously, and the other based on the essay of a randomly assigned peer. Grubaugh et al. reported a statistically significant difference in accuracy between the cloze of the participant's own essay and the cloze of a peer's paper. The authors concluded that cloze testing could be a useful method for detecting plagiarism, and they suggested that a threshold of 70% accuracy in exact word replacements in a cloze test would be a reliable, valid, and ethical standard for verifying the authorship of a student's paper.

<center>Qualitative Research Studies of Student Plagiarism</center>

Quantitative research methods such as surveying, text analysis, and experimentation have offered insight into some dimensions of college student plagiarism. Survey-based studies have located students' ideas about plagiarism against a broader terrain of issues related to academic integrity; text-analysis studies have detailed some of the variation and discrepancy associated with plagiarism and paraphrasing; and experimental studies have investigated several specific hypotheses regarding plagiarism. The quantitative scholarship has focused on examining various facets of the issue of student plagiarism, yet it has said more about frequencies and correlations than it has about what may be behind the phenomenon of student plagiarism. These studies simply have not revealed much about the richness and complexity of college students' experiences with plagiarism. They have not shown us *how* our students think about plagiarism,

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[15] Originally developed as a tool for assessing the readability of a passage, a cloze test is a fill-in-the-blank exercise in which a reader is asked to supply the correct word for every fifth word of a source text. Several other studies have explored cloze testing as a plagiarism detection technique, including Glatt and Haertel (1982), Torres and Roig (2005), and Standing and Gorassini (1986). Additionally, at least one commercial enterprise—Glatt Plagiarism Services (http://www.plagiarism.com)—bases its plagiarism detection analysis on cloze testing.

nor have they shown us how students understand and experience plagiarism within the context of our classes, our institutions, and our discursive practices. To better understand these dimensions of student plagiarism, several scholars have turned to qualitative research designs. Given plagiarism's elusive definition, and its entanglement of vested players (students, classmates, instructors, and authors, as well as the broader institutions that inscribe their ethics), qualitative methods have proven particularly attractive to researchers seeking to better understand the individually variable and context-dependent topic of student plagiarism.

Interviews and Text Analysis

Several researchers have used qualitative methods to explore the reasons behind student plagiarism. For instance, Patrick Love and Janice Simmons (1998) conducted a series of individual interviews with six first-year graduate students in a college of education. Each graduate student participated in an in-depth interview (lasting from one to four hours) during which the participant was asked to rank a list of academically dishonest behaviors according to how serious the participant felt the behaviors to be. Based on their analysis, Love and Simmons reported that a number of factors, both internal and external, contributed to or inhibited academically dishonest behaviors among their respondents. The authors mentioned that factors such as grade or time pressures, leniency among instructors, and a student's lack of interest in the topic made cheating more likely, and that a student's personal confidence, feelings of guilt or fear, and a sense of professional ethics served to discourage cheating.

Pat Currie (1998) also explored student plagiarism through a combination of interview and text analysis methodologies. Currie's discussion focused on Diana, an L2 writer in an English-language business school. Currie's analysis of Diana's writing assignments revealed that the student had plagiarized several papers. In the interviews, Diana explained that factors

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such as language challenges, trouble with the academic concepts taught in the course, and competing demands from her other classes had made it difficult for her to complete her work in English. To cope with these difficulties, Diana plagiarized several assignments, intentionally copying text in order to get through a course she was enrolled in. Currie used her discussion and analysis of Diana's copying to help us think about plagiarism in new ways. Currie argued that Diana did not set out to "violate Western cultural norms" but that she had copied "rather with the intent to learn, to keep her head down, and to pass the course" (p. 11). The results and implications of Currie's multimodal inquiry offered analysis and explanations that challenged the ethical, textual, and theoretical essentialism on which so much previous plagiarism research had been based.

Focus Group Studies of Plagiarism

While focus groups are a familiar research method for some academic disciplines (such as marketing or nursing), they are not a widely practiced strategy for composition research, and few focus group studies exploring college student plagiarism have been published. However, the nature of focus groups can illuminate the social and interpersonal dimensions of a topic in ways that more familiar methods, such as interviews and cases studies, cannot.

Hongyan Ma, Eric Yong Lu, Sandra Turner, and Guofang Wan (2007) reported on a focus group-based study of cheating and plagiarism that involved over 30 middle school students. Specifically, their study aimed to "[explore] the impact the Internet has on ethics by examining why young people are cheating and how the Internet might contribute to a culture of cheating" (pp. 71-72). The authors conducted a series of six focus group discussions, complementing the focus group sessions with a series of one-on-one interviews with parents and other adults involved in the middle school students' academic lives. As Love and Simmons

(1998) had reported, Ma et al. also found that a number of different factors influenced the students' choices and actions regarding academic integrity. Ma et al. mentioned that the students they met with felt that the internet had made plagiarism more convenient, and noted that a lack of punishment made plagiarism more frequent. The students, they wrote, "found that there was no immediate consequence for them if they cheat occasionally" (p. 69). The nature of the students' social environment also correlated with plagiarism and cheating; the authors observed that "the most common reason mentioned by the students in focus groups for engaging in academic cheating was the fact that others were doing so" (p. 69).

I know of only one other plagiarism research study that employed a focus group methodology. Through classroom observation, questionnaires, and follow-up interviews, Faun Bernback Evans and Madeleine Youmans (2000) hoped to learn about the "beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors concerning plagiarism" among L2 students enrolled in ESL writing classes at an American university (p. 50). Their initial research plan had been to explore the discourse on plagiarism by audiorecording one semester of class sessions and then conducting follow-up interviews with the students and the instructor. However, their recordings revealed that plagiarism "had barely been touched on" during the class (p. 51), so Evans and Youmans held a series of informal, hour-long conversations to allow students to discuss the topic in small groups. The authors reported that the conversation within these focus group discussions on plagiarism seemed to fall into one of seven different categories:

1. Plagiarism associated with legal issues.

2. Plagiarism associated with media.

3. Inability to distinguish between plagiarism and legitimate collaboration.

4. Plagiarism as an ineffectual long-term strategy.

5. Plagiarism as a necessary strategy to succeed in school.

6. Plagiarism as solidarity against sometimes draconian educational system and instructors.

7. Plagiarism as initiated by educational system and/or instructors (I have directly quoted these categories as they appeared on pp. 51-53).

Evans and Youmans (2000) framed much of their discussion of students' perspectives in these categories, giving their interpretation a grounded, bottom-up quality—a principle often central in the analysis of qualitative data. I found the authors' discussion of their study's findings to be clear and well-supported. They briefly introduced a topic and located it in one of their interpretive categories as well as in a broad disciplinary setting; then they contextualized the topic as it had come up in the group's conversation, and provided excerpts of the conversation that exemplified the topic as it had been raised in the conversation. The combination of the authors' analysis and their participants' own words lent transparency and credibility to their interpretations, and it facilitated the ability of their readers to engage with the topic.

Overall, Evans and Youmans' (2000) study supports my contention that focus groups can be a generative and appropriate method for research on student plagiarism, and that group conversation can lead to valid findings about how college students think about plagiarism, allowing composition researchers access to kinds of information unavailable through other educational research methods. In fact, as my subsequent discussion will show, each of the themes that Evans and Youmans (2000) identified from their conversations with L2 college students was plainly apparent in the constructions and representations of plagiarism made by the college students who served as participants in this dissertation study's interview and focus group discussions.

Conclusion

From the survey-based research on plagiarism, we can see that great variability exists in terms of how plagiarism is constructed within the academic environment. We see that a variety of factors can affect a person's habits and practices related to plagiarism. We also see how difficult it is to operationalize plagiarism in such a way that participants, researchers, and academic audiences can share a common understanding of the implications of a study. From task-based performance studies, we begin to understand how some of these different constructions of plagiarism are expressed in practice. We learn some of the patterns of difference in terms of how native and nonnative English speaking students use and reference sources in their English compositions. We also see great variation in the judgments that college instructors make about texts—variation that also appears in instructors' compositions. Experimental studies have allowed us to test some of our beliefs about plagiarism. Experiments have demonstrated a link between the credibility of a source and unintended plagiarism, and have suggested that student plagiarism can be reliably detected through cloze testing.

Qualitative research offers a different perspective, and we have used qualitative methods to study certain dimensions of plagiarism in more depth. Through interviews we see that students understand and negotiate the demands of academic writing in ways that may not be immediately apparent to us. Interviews have shown much about how particular students construct plagiarism, and we can see that a variety of personal, social, and academic factors influence their decisions and practices regarding plagiarism. The very few focus group studies that have looked at plagiarism suggest that there are some commonalities to students' understandings and experiences, and we can see thematic patterns emerge from their discussions.

As a discipline, Composition Studies has paid much more attention to the problems of plagiarism when it comes to second language writers than it has for native English-speaking students. A recent survey of two decades of composition scholarship, edited by a notable empirical researcher (Peter Smagorinsky, 2006), made this disparity quite clear. The book—a collection of review articles on areas of research interest within the field—mentioned only one study of plagiarism in its section on postsecondary writing. Its section on second language writing, however, revealed a much more vibrant area of inquiry: eleven separate studies of plagiarism and second language writers were noted.

Students' perspectives can and should inform our disciplinary theories and institutional policies on plagiarism, and some research studies have included student voices. However, as I have noted, much of the empirical knowledge we have regarding student plagiarism has been framed by the researcher's construction of plagiarism. We have too little scholarship that has explored college students' constructions of plagiarism through their own conceptual frames.

Our students are eager to be heard—some so eager, in fact, that they have invited themselves into our scholarship. Just two years ago, *The Writing Center Journal* published an article on plagiarism written by a group of students: Renee Brown, Brian Fallon, Jessica Lott, Elizabeth Matthews, and Elizabeth Mintie (2007). These students—all of them writing center tutors—witnessed one dimension of plagiarism on a regular basis. Their university had recently purchased a subscription to Turnitin.com, and the tutors found that an increasing number of students showed up at the writing center with questions and concerns about papers that Turnitin had flagged as plagiarized. The tutors wrote:

> We felt helpless to do anything for these students because we understood so little about
> Turnitin or their professors' literacy expectations and values. Were the students really

plagiarizing? Could Turnitin point the finger at them and cause them to fail the course?

(p. 8)

Their experiences with these "panicked students" (p. 8) led Brown and her colleagues to carry

out a plagiarism study of their own. The tutors conducted an in-depth investigation of the

plagiarism detection services provided by Turnitin.com. In addition to reviewing a number of

Turnitin's educational, marketing, and legal documents, the tutors examined the service's

plagiarism detection processes. With the assistance of their writing center director, who had

faculty-level access to Turnitin's originality reports, the tutors created and submitted a number of

papers, both original and copied, for Turnitin's review. Through careful analysis and discussion,

the tutors painted a disconcerting picture of how Turnitin fits and functions when it comes to

students' writing classes.

The studies I have discussed in this chapter can help us to think about what plagiarism

means to us as teachers, scholars, and writers, yet they have limited value in helping us

understand just what it means to our students. To learn that, we must seek out methods that can

allow us to approach plagiarism research in different ways. Specifically, we should look at how

student-supplied frames and constructions can help us think about plagiarism, creating a body of

scholarship more inclusive of students' voices than we have yet established.

I believe that phenomenological research methods offer the most promise for exploring

how students understand plagiarism. In the following chapters, I describe and present the results

of a multimodal investigation of college students' ideas about plagiarism. This study is the first

of its kind to examine college students' understandings of, attitudes toward, and experiences with

plagiarism through a combination of phenomenologically oriented interview and focus group

discussions.

CHAPTER FOUR:

A PILOT STUDY OF PLAGIARISM RESEARCH METHODS

As part of the development of the research methodology for this dissertation, I conducted a pilot study to examine the effectiveness of survey and focus group research methods for exploring college students' attitudes toward and experiences with plagiarism. The purpose of the pilot study was to help me determine whether surveys and focus groups could provide compelling answers to my research questions about student plagiarism. My pilot survey offered data about plagiarism's frequency, about the different acts that participants understood plagiarism to be, and about some dimensions of plagiarism's morality; and the findings of the pilot survey indicated that surveys of students could provide broad representations about specific facets of plagiarism. The findings of the pilot focus groups, by contrast, revealed much deeper perspectives about some of the less-structured dimensions of plagiarism. The pilot focus groups had represented student plagiarism with depth and complexity, and I felt that focus groups, more than surveys, were best suited to help me answer the questions I found to be most important in terms of our understanding of college student plagiarism.

I requested a full review of the pilot study by the campus's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB). After I made several minor modifications to its design, the pilot study received IRB approval. In the rest of this chapter, I describe the pilot study in detail. I explain and evaluate the survey and focus group methods I used, and I note some of the specific findings from each research method. I also comment on how conducting the pilot study informed and affected the design and implementation of the formal dissertation study's interview and focus group research methods.

The Pilot Survey

Design, Administration, and Data Analysis

The construction of the pilot survey required me to carefully consider what I wanted to know about college students and plagiarism. To avoid what I found to be a significant limitation of many previous plagiarism surveys, I did not provide respondents with a definition of *plagiarism*. Instead, I designed carefully worded questions about specific textual acts, expecting that their responses would make the students' constructions of plagiarism most apparent. Questions about downloading music and searching for papers on the Web raised issues of technology and intellectual property; questions about shoplifting and cheating on tests addressed the issues of theft and academic dishonesty; and questions about documentation practices and disciplinary expectations examined respondents' sense of plagiarism's contextual variability.

The survey itself (see Appendix A) was a Likert-style questionnaire, and its 65 questions were organized into six sections. The first section raised the topic of plagiarism and began to explore students' ideas and opinions about it. The second section inquired about student' understanding of plagiarism; their responses would provide the respondents' operational definitions of *plagiarism* by classifying it in terms of specific textual acts. The third section explored students' perception of the morality of plagiarism; it also asked students to relate plagiarism to several non-textual analogs (such as stealing a book or shoplifting a shirt). The fourth section sought to determine the extent and nature of college student plagiarism by asking respondents to note the frequency with which they engaged in particular plagiaristic acts. The fifth section helped refine my research methods by inquiring about respondents' level of comfort with regard to various modes of plagiarism research. Findings from this section were among the most important for the pilot study, as they directly informed the research design of the full-scale

dissertation study. A brief final section asked students to provide basic demographic

information.

I recruited survey participants by contacting several English department instructors to

request permission to visit their classes to conduct a brief 15-minute survey on plagiarism.

When I arrived at the classroom, the course instructor introduced me to the class and then left the

room. As part of the process of informed consent, I read aloud an overview of the survey, and

reminded students that their involvement in the study was both voluntary and anonymous.

Students who chose to complete the survey placed it in a common envelope and picked up a

debriefing form. Ultimately, 148 students from eight different first-year composition classes

completed the survey, providing a data set of almost 10,000 separate points.

The University's Applied Research Lab aided me in conducting a descriptive statistical

analysis of the survey data using the SPSS *FREQUENCIES* program. The frequency analysis

revealed the broad patterns of responses to the survey's questions, suggesting points of

intersection with and diversion from existing theories and data about student plagiarism.

Because this level of analysis proved sufficient for the purposes of the pilot study, I performed

no further statistical analysis of the survey data.

Findings and Discussion

The primary questions driving my research interests in plagiarism concern the ways in

which college students understand and experience it. In planning the pilot survey, I hoped that

carefully designed questions would allow me access to dimensions of students' perspectives on

and experiences with plagiarism that had not been explored by previous survey-based research.

Instead, however, the pilot study highlighted the limits of the knowledge about plagiarism that can be generated by standardized surveys.

Given my research goals, I found that surveys did not lead me to a better understanding of college students' perspectives on plagiarism. Primarily, the pilot survey data indicated that the college student participants regarded plagiarism in varied, sometimes self-contradictory ways. I found, however, that some of the survey findings could serve as useful starting points for my subsequent research. Below, I note several key themes from the pilot survey that the primary dissertation study would explore in greater depth through interviews and focus groups.

Confusion About Plagiarism: Most students believe that they have a good idea of what plagiarism is, yet when asked about specific textual acts, their replies suggest a range of perspectives. Nearly all of the survey respondents believe that they understand plagiarism well. When prompted, "I feel I have a good understanding of what plagiarism is," almost 95% of respondents marked *agree* or *strongly agree*. Responses to later questions, however, show that students are somewhat divided about whether particular practices constitute plagiarism. For example, while over 90% of respondents indicated that "submitting an entire paper written by another person as your own" is *possibly* or *definitely plagiarism*, fully one third of respondents reported being *not sure/undecided* whether "turning in the same paper for two different classes" constitutes plagiarism.

Questions About Collaboration: Students are broadly unsure about the extent to which collaboration is appropriate in the writing process. The survey respondents were unclear about whether collaboration or assistance in the writing process is appropriate. Thirty percent marked *not sure/undecided* when asked if "using a thesis statement that someone else suggested" is plagiarism, and 17% marked *not sure/undecided* when asked if "having someone else do the

proofreading and editing for a paper" is plagiarism. When asked, "if I work with a tutor to develop a paper, I can be accused of plagiarism," 34% of respondents—one in three—selected *neutral/don't know*.

Inconsistencies and Ambivalence Toward the Practice of Plagiarism: Most students report that academic integrity is important to them, yet many students have engaged in academically dishonest behaviors, and students appear ambivalent about condemning plagiarism. Ninety percent of the students I surveyed noted that academic integrity was important to them, and respondents overwhelmingly regarded plagiarism as a form of cheating. However, the students were reluctant to rebuke plagiarists; only about half felt that plagiarism is always wrong, and just over one third thought that students who are caught plagiarizing should be punished severely. Three quarters of the respondents noted that severe penalties would discourage them from plagiarizing, yet one third replied that they would consider plagiarizing on a paper if they knew they would not be caught—and almost half believed that they might plagiarize portions of a paper in the future. Finally, over two thirds of students reported that they had copied information or text from a Web site into a paper without including a citation, and the same number acknowledged having done so from a print-based source.

I planned my dissertation study to learn about dimensions of college students' perspectives on plagiarism that previous research studies had not accessed. I included survey-based research in the pilot study to assess how effectively standardized surveys could represent the complexity of students' ideas about and experiences with plagiarism. The pilot surveys provided useful information about the frequency of student plagiarism among the respondents. The surveys also described some of the varied acts that students believe are plagiarism, and suggested the breadth of students' opinions about the morality of plagiarism. Overall, however, I

found that the survey results provided too limited a picture of students' perspectives on plagiarism. The significant discontinuities apparent in the pilot data—both between students' certainty of their own understandings and their disagreement about the propriety of specific textual practices, and between students' ideas about plagiarism and the policies established by their own institution—raised important questions about students' experiences with plagiarism and about their understanding of the construct itself. Because of my interest in pursuing these questions in more depth, I set aside surveys as a research methodology for my dissertation study. Instead, I turned to conversational research methods to learn more about where students get their ideas about plagiarism, how their ideas are formed, and how their beliefs and experience with plagiarism influence their textual practices.

The Pilot Focus Groups

Rationale for the Methodology

Qualitative interviewing is a familiar research approach in Composition Studies, and traditional interviews can offer intimate, in-depth access to an individual's experiences and perspectives. While I knew that one-on-one interviews would let me learn about individual students' perspectives on plagiarism, I was also eager to understand how college students understand and experience some of the social aspects of plagiarism. I knew that a number of social science researchers had used focus group studies to examine socially constructed phenomena, so, in order to explore the potential of focus groups as a research method for learning about college students' perspectives on plagiarism, the pilot study included two focus group sessions. In addition to helping me shape the formal dissertation study, the pilot groups would hone my skills as a focus group moderator and suggest ways I could improve the efficiency and effectiveness of focus groups as a method for researching plagiarism.

The social nature of a focus group conversation is a unique strength of the research method. The interactive discussion of a focus group session can encourage people to participate by sharing their own ideas and perspectives, and this interaction may serve to prompt research participants to discuss their ideas and experiences in more depth and detail than they might in a one-on-one interview (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 299). Jenny Kitzinger (1995), an experienced focus group researcher, has explained that focus groups are "particularly appropriate when the interviewer has a series of open ended questions and wishes to encourage research participants to explore the issues of importance to them" (p. 299). Focus groups, in other words, are an especially useful method for soliciting participants' ideas about a topic through discursive and explanatory perspectives constructed by the participants themselves.

Additionally, by allowing researchers to observe the conversation and interaction among research participants, focus groups can bring to light ideas that might not be available through one-on-one interviews (Byers, Zeller, & Byers, 2002, p. 178). The way in which group members respond to each others' ideas, questions, suggestions, and disclosures can highlight the contrast between an individual's ideas about a topic and the broader social norms related to it (Wellings, Branigan, & Mitchell, 2000, p. 263). Focus groups can be an especially valuable method for learning about socially sensitive topics like plagiarism; they can offer a rich articulation of a topic's social contexts, and by exploring any ideological differences that may arise in the conversation we can better understand why some students might choose to plagiarize an assignment while others would not.

Design and Implementation

For a qualitative study, the number of research sessions, as well as the total number of participants, can vary widely. Many studies employ as few as four or five sessions (Kitzinger,

1994, p, 105), particularly if the overall research project employs additional methods of inquiry as well (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 300). As my pilot study was intended to be limited in scope, it included only two focus group sessions. Each pilot session lasted approximately 90 minutes, well within the recommended range of one to two hours (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 301). For the purposes of my pilot study, both the number and the duration of the focus group sessions proved appropriate and effective.

I recruited participants for the pilot focus group sessions through posters and class announcements. I planned to hold two focus groups, hoping to involve a total of between 10 and 20 participants. Ultimately, 12 students participated in a pilot focus group discussion.

Authorities on focus group methodology have suggested that each session include between 4 and 10 participants[16]. My pilot study endorsed this range. Ten students attended my first pilot focus group session I held, and 2 attended the second. Ten participants proved too many; it allowed several students to dominate the conversation while others remained silent unless specifically prompted to speak. Two participants, on the other hand, seemed markedly too few. While the conversation was more natural and inclusive than it had been with 10 participants, the smaller group did not display the diversity of perspectives and experiences which can foster a richer discussion and exchange of ideas.

I began the each focus group discussion by describing the research process and presenting the IRB-required Informed Consent information and materials. I noted that the discussion would be recorded, and I reminded participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty. After these prefatory remarks, I asked participants to introduce themselves with the pseudonyms they had chosen for the conversation. By requiring

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[16] Morgan (1998) has recommended a group size of 6 to 8 participants (p. 1); Krueger (1988), 7 to 10 (p. 18); and Kitzinger (1995), 4 to 8 (p. 301).

each participant to speak at the beginning of the session, the self-introductions to serve as an icebreaker. Their introductions also allowed me to match each participant's pseudonym to their voice, which would prove important for my transcription of the recorded session.

Discussion and Methodological Implications

As with the survey component of the pilot study, the primary goal of the focus group sessions was to allow me to explore the potential of the research method for investigating how college students think about plagiarism. The pilot groups showed that focus groups held promise as a research method for my dissertation study. Participants in the focus group discussions made comments, asked questions, and raised issues that directly address some of the ways plagiarism is theorized and discussed in the professional literature of Composition Studies.

Overall, the pilot study showed that the questions I found most interesting and important about college students and plagiarism were not fundamentally approachable through surveys. By contrast, the focus groups did prove effective at revealing some of the social and interpersonal dimensions of student plagiarism. The pilot study showed that focus group discussions with college students could provide the broad based and socially grounded perspectives on plagiarism that I was looking for.

However, while focus groups would reveal some of the social and interpersonal aspects of plagiarism, I recognized that they would preclude deeper consideration of some dimensions of student plagiarism. For instance, focus groups would necessarily limit the extent to which I could pursue questions about individual students' perspectives on and experiences with plagiarism. Therefore, for the purposes of my dissertation study I chose to complement the focus group discussions with a series of one-on-one interviews. Individual interviews would let me invite students to discuss their thoughts about plagiarism in greater detail than they could in a

focus group. Also, the absence of other research participants would permit the research study

access to an important dimension of student plagiarism: In the private setting of an interview, I

would be able to ask students to share the details of their own experiences with plagiarism. This

would allow for a better understanding of questions such as how students make decisions about

plagiarizing and how students' previous academic experiences may have shaped their thinking

about plagiarism. Overall, the pilot study made me confident that the combination of focus

groups and one-on-one interviews would allow me to present a rich, detailed picture of college

students' perspectives on plagiarism.

CHAPTER FIVE:

THE RESEARCH METHODS OF THE STUDY

I designed this study believing that students' perspectives on plagiarism must inform—

and might help us refine—our theories and practices regarding college student plagiarism. Much

of the professional discourse on plagiarism is based on our professional experiences confronting

it as teachers, evaluators, adjudicators, and perhaps even as students. Yet the voices of the

ultimate subjects of our knowledge—the students whose texts our policies and practices bear

down on—have been largely absent from our conversations. We have forged theories about

plagiarism, and designed instructional and institutional processes related to plagiarism, without

deeply exploring college students' ideas about and experiences with plagiarism.

I investigated college students' perspectives on plagiarism through a series of one-on-one

and small-group research discussions with undergraduate college students at a mid-sized public

regional university. I held nine individual interviews and six focus group sessions, meeting with

a total of 31 students. I employed a research design that combined individual and small-group

methods to allow me the opportunity to talk with students about plagiarism in two distinct

contexts: the private setting of an individual interview, and the semi-social setting of a focus

group discussion. Nine students participated in a private interview session, and 22 students took

part in one of the six focus group conversations.

In Chapter Five, I describe the design and implementation of the discussion-based

research methods employed in this study of plagiarism. I begin by explaining the recruiting

methods used to generate the subject pool, and I note various demographic and academic

characteristics about the students who ultimately served as research participants. Next, I detail

the design of the research sessions, explaining the structure and operation of the interviews and focus group and describing my role as interviewer and moderator of the research sessions. I draw particular attention to how a list of prompts and questions helped me to establish and maintained the thematic focus of the sessions while allowing the conversations to be shaped by, and responsive to, participants' constructions, representations, questions, and experiences. I end the chapter by discussing how the study negotiated the IRB review process. I explain some of the potential risks involved in the study, in terms of both its topic and its research design, and I describe the steps I took to limit these risks and minimize the potential harm that participants might be exposed to. Importantly, I address how the design of the study was informed by methodological findings from the pilot study's surveys and focus group sessions, and I point to data from the dissertation study's participants that shows the success of my efforts.

Overview of the Research Process

Discussion was not simply intended as a means to *collect* data for the study. Instead, conversation served to *generate* the data about students' perspectives on plagiarism. I anticipated that well-focused yet open-ended discussions with college students would reveal dimensions of their attitudes toward and experiences with plagiarism that composition research had not yet accessed. I was not disappointed. In the end, I found that the comments, questions, and experiences that participants addressed in the research conversations provided clear, complex, challenging, and revealing responses to the research questions that guided my construction of this dissertation study:

1. How do college students conceptualize plagiarism?

    (a) How do students define, construct, and represent plagiarism?

(b) Do college students address plagiarism through the same frames that academics have used to discuss it, or do their notions and discussions offer alternative ways for us to understand, explain, and respond to plagiarism?

(c) What beliefs, values, and experiences are behind their constructions of plagiarism?

(d) What do the ways in which students discuss plagiarism suggest about how they regard it? Do students speak about it freely and comfortably, or is it, for them, a sensitive or emotionally charged topic?

2. What questions do students have about plagiarism? What dimensions of plagiarism do students feel confident about, and what specific things about it are unclear?

3. What experiences have participants had with plagiarism, and how have their previous experiences shaped their ideas about plagiarism?

4. In what ways have issues and concerns about plagiarism affected their composing and research strategies?

5. What do students say about the ways their instructors and institutions understand and address plagiarism? What ideas do they offer for how we should address plagiarism?

The Research Participants

Recruitment and Scheduling of Participants

Per my IRB-approved research protocol, people eligible to serve as participants in this study would be currently enrolled undergraduate students at least 18 years of age. While several pilot study participants had been enrolled in a course I was then teaching, I excluded my current students from participating in the dissertation study itself, to preclude any conflicts of interest.

In hope of drawing in research participants from a variety of academic classes, majors, and levels, I employed a combination of recruiting methods, including class visits, newspaper advertisements, recruiting posters, and word-of-mouth.

Class Visits: I made 20 different class visits to make a brief recruiting announcement for the study. These visits allowed me to introduce the research study to approximately 400 students, and over two-thirds of the participants reported that they had learned of the study through such a visit. Most classes I met with were lower-division English composition courses, yet I also visited several literature classes and two writing-intensive communications media courses.

Newspaper Advertisements: With a weekly circulation of 11,000 copies, I anticipated that the campus newspaper could play an important role in my recruiting efforts, so I placed a series of recruiting announcements in the campus paper. Despite a number of editing and typesetting errors, the advertisements eventually brought two participants into the study. An additional two participants remembered seeing one of the ads but also mentioned that I had made a recruiting visit to one of their classes.

Recruiting Posters and Word-of-Mouth: Recruiting posters and word-of-mouth were also useful recruiting strategies. I placed 50 posters announcing the study in eight different buildings on campus; five participants reported that they learned of the study through one of the posters. Finally, I mentioned the study, both formally and informally, to students throughout the recruiting process; this word-of-mouth accounted for the few remaining students who constituted the subject pool.

As an incentive for participation, students taking part in a focus group were offered a $5 gift card for the university's bookstore, and students who served as interview participants

received a $10 gift card. Although I felt these were only token amounts, several participants noted this compensation as the primary reason for their involvement in the study.

To allow me to control the size of each research session (one participant for each interview and four to eight participants for each focus group session), I asked potential participants to contact me to arrange their involvement in the research study. Students who learned of the research project through a poster or newspaper advertisement were asked to telephone or email me to learn more about participating in the study, and students with whom I spoke directly (during a class visit or individually) were invited to complete and return an interest form. When an interested student contacted me, I explained what their involvement in the research process would require. I answered any questions they had about the study, and I reviewed the study's eligibility criteria. Follow-up emails and phone calls helped me schedule each participant's research session.

Over 60 different students contacted me about the study, yet only about half of them ultimately participated in a research session. I excluded a handful of interested students based on the study's participation requirements (at least 18 years of age and a currently enrolled undergraduate student). Twenty students who had contacted me did not respond to my follow-up emails or phone calls regarding their participation, and five students who had been scheduled to participate in the study failed to show up for their scheduled research session, despite the reminders I sent out on the day before each session. Overall, the recruiting and scheduling processes resulted in 31 students serving as research participants.

The Subject Pool

The pool of research participants in this study was broadly representative of the undergraduate student population at the university where the research was conducted.

Participants represented all four undergraduate levels and 15 different academic majors.

Roughly half of the students in the study were affiliated with the university's most popular

majors—elementary education, criminology, and communications media. Twenty-two

participants were female, and nine male. The age range of participants was predominantly

traditional; with the exception of four students, all participants were between 19 and 22 years

old. (Table 1 provides a demographic summary of the research participants.)

Table 1: *Summary of Research Participant Demographics*

Number of research sessions:	15 sessions: 6 focus groups, 9 interviews
Number of research participants:	31 participants: 22 females, 9 males 22 focus group participants: 16 females, 6 males 9 interview participants: 6 females, 3 males
Age range of participants:	Age range: 18-42 years old focus group age range: 18-42 years old interview age range: 19-39 years old 27 of 31 participants were 19-22 years old 2 participants (one 39 and one 42 years old) were significantly older than the rest of the participants
Academic levels of participants:	All undergraduate levels represented by participants: 4 freshmen 10 sophomores 9 juniors 8 seniors
Academic majors of participants:	15 different disciplines (includes double majors): Communications Media (7) Criminology (5) Psychology (5) Elementary Ed.; English; Undeclared (3 each) Business/Bus. Mgt.; Child Dev./Family Relations; Journalism (2 each) Art Education; Economics; Fine Arts; Nursing; Pre-Law; Public Relations (1 each)
Cultural classification of participants:	Ethnicity: Caucasian (31 participants) Nationality: American (31 participants) First language: English (31 participants)

A number of plagiarism research studies have been designed to focus on a particular population of students. For instance, Deckert (1993) examined what L2 students in Hong Kong thought about plagiarism, and Minett (2001) explored the plagiarism perspectives of Central European graduate students. While I did not intend my research to target a culturally homogeneous group of students, to my disappointment the study's final subject pool did not represent the ethnic, cultural, or linguistic diversity typical of many college campuses. All of the study's participants were Caucasian, all native-born American citizens, and all spoke English as their first language.

Minority and international students were not deliberately excluded from serving as research participants in this study. In fact, I placed recruiting posters in several locations where minority and second language students were over-represented in the student population. However, given the relatively small number of participants (31 students out of an undergraduate population of about 12,000) and the homogeneity of the undergraduate population at the university (minorities comprise only about 10% of the undergraduate population), the limited diversity of the study's subject pool accurately represents the majority of the institution's undergraduate student body, and future scholarship will be able to build on this dissertation by incorporating its research methodology into studies that target specific populations.

Design of the Research Study

Structure of the Research Sessions

The research study involved a series of individual interview and small focus group discussions about plagiarism. The research conversations were held on the campus of our medium-sized, moderately selective public university, and all took place over a two-week period near the end of the academic year.

The study involved a self-selected convenience sample of 31 college students who had agreed to talk about plagiarism in a focus group or an individual interview. Based on the interest and availability of the study participants, and within the range of the study's IRB-approved design, 15 separate research sessions were held (six focus groups and nine interviews). I chose a research methodology that combined one-on-one and small-group discussions so that I would have the opportunity to talk with students about plagiarism in two distinct contexts: the private setting of an individual interview and the semi-social setting of a focus group conversation. I felt both methods to be important, since ideas about plagiarism are formed and held socially and collectively as well as individually. Nine students chose to participate in an individual interview, and 22 students chose to take part in a small (from 2 to 5 participants) focus group discussion. Appendixes B and C provide a demographic profile of the students who participated in each focus group and interview research session.

Scheduling the one-on-one interviews was a straightforward process: I arranged to meet each participant in one the campus's private study rooms at a mutually convenient time. However, because the private study rooms could not accommodate a small group, setting up the focus groups proved more complicated. The groups required a publicly accessible meeting room on campus that would be comfortable and convenient for students and that would offer enough privacy to ensure the confidentiality of the session. I found the ideal solution in the library's instructional classrooms; these were centrally located, offered sufficient privacy, and could be reserved throughout the day and evening.

I arrived at the meeting room 30 minutes before each session's starting time, arranging up the room so that the participants and I would be seated around a central table and setting up and testing the audiorecording equipment. As they arrived, I asked each participant to choose a

pseudonym for our session by selecting a nametag I had prepared ahead of time. When all the scheduled participants were present, I posted a "Do Not Disturb" sign on the door to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the research session.

At the beginning of each interview and focus group session, I gave each participant a folder that contained several study-related documents and forms:

1. A *Participant Information Sheet* that asked for basic academic and demographic information;

2. Three IRB-related documents: a *Informed Consent Form*, which listed detailed information about the study; a *Voluntary Consent Form*, which students signed and returned to me to indicate their consent to participate; and a *Debriefing Form*, which offered participants additional information and resources to help with their questions or concerns about plagiarism;

3. An anonymous survey slip asking how the student had learned of the study; and

4. A gift card to the university bookstore, provided as an incentive for participation ($5 for each focus group participant and $10 for each interview participant).

While I explained each document in the folder, participants completed their paperwork, reserving a portion of the *Participant Information Sheet* until the end of the research session.

After I reviewed the IRB protections and ensured that participants had completed their initial paperwork, I switched on the recording equipment and began the conversations that form the heart of the research study.

The Role of the Moderator in the Research Sessions

In addition to designing the research study, I served as the moderator of the interviews and focus groups. The basic duties of a focus group moderator involve managing the operational

aspects of the sessions. As moderator, I explained the research process to the participants, attended to the dynamics of the conversations, and tended the recording equipment. I also monitored the participants' apparent level of comfort during the research sessions, intervening in the conversations as needed to provide a check against unintended disclosures.

An important component of the focus group methodology is the latitude a moderator has in terms of her involvement in the group process (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 301). Qualitative focus group research does not require a moderator to adopt a disinterested, hands-off stance in the session. Instead, a moderator can serve as an active participant in a focus group discussion, steering the focus of conversation toward those aspects of the topic that seem most significant within each group. A moderator can focus the group's conversation in several ways: "by introducing and interpreting topics, by acknowledging responses to them, and by eliciting and labeling disagreement" (G. Myers, 1998, p. 88). My most important role during each discussion was to attend carefully to the responses and questions raised by the students. These participants' comments, and the ways in which they expressed them, would allow me to construct a representation of their thoughts about plagiarism—the primary research goal of this study.

Establishing the Focus of the Research Discussions

My primary responsibility as the study's interviewer and the moderator of the focus groups was to establish and maintain the thematic focus of the research sessions while monitoring and responding to the particular dynamics of each distinct conversation. My involvement in the conversations was guided by a list of IRB-approved prompts and questions I had prepared ahead of time.

While phenomenological research aims to be open to participants' constructions of the topic under consideration, it is incumbent on the researcher to establish the focus for the research

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sessions. To establish the central focus of the research conversations, I developed a set of prompts and questions based on the study's overall research goals. These prompts and questions were evaluated and approved by the institution's IRB as part of their review of the study. (see Appendix D for a list of the prompts and questions I prepared for the interview and focus group discussions.)

In designing the prompts and questions I planned to raise during the conversations with students, I attempted to embody a *naïve* stance toward plagiarism (see Kleiman, 2004; see also Ashworth et al., 2003). By using ideologically neutral language, I aimed to set aside—to *bracket*—much of the preexisting discourse on plagiarism. This bracketing would help me to understand participants' ideas about and experiences with plagiarism through their own terms. I decided not to provide a baseline definition of *plagiarism* to frame the research conversations. Instead, I planned to open each session by having participants write down their own definitions for *plagiarism* and then asking them to talk about their definitions. As much as possible, I planned to cast my subsequent prompts, probes, and follow-up questions in participants' own words. Therefore, while I would begin all of the sessions in the same way, I expected that each research discussion would ultimately form and follow its own discursive path through the construction and exploration of plagiarism.

The prompts that provided for thematic continuity across the research sessions fell into four primary categories. The first category addressed participants' understanding of plagiarism. These questions invited participants' definitions of plagiarism and asked for their thoughts about it. Follow-up questions and probes explored themes such as the roots of participants' ideas about plagiarism. Sample prompts from this section include the following:

- Please discuss what you know about plagiarism. How do you define it? What do you think about it?

- Should consequences for plagiarism vary by "type" of plagiarism? In other words, are some kinds worse than others?

- Do you think it is ever okay to plagiarize? If so, under what circumstances?

The second category focused on participants' beliefs of how plagiarism plays out among their peers. Initial questions targeted their sense of the frequency and causes of plagiarism for fellow students. Follow-up prompts asked participants about any direct knowledge they had about plagiarism among their peers. Participants who indicated that they had first-hand knowledge about student plagiarism were asked to describe the situation through non-identifiable details and to comment on their thoughts about and responses to the situations they had described.

- How widespread is plagiarism? In other words, what percent of students would you estimate have plagiarized?

- Do you know anyone who has plagiarized?

- What has happened to people you know who have been caught plagiarizing?

The third category of prompts and questions considered students' sense of plagiarism in its instructional and institutional contexts. Participants talked about ways in which teachers and schools address student plagiarism on both preventative (instructional and/or cautionary) and punitive levels, responding to scenario-type prompts as well as to other participants' stories and ideas.

- What should a professor do if she suspects a student has plagiarized? What if she has proof of the plagiarism?

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- Do you think schools do enough to discourage plagiarism? If not, what should they do differently?

- What do you think the consequences of plagiarism should be?

The final category in the research conversations explored participants' own experiences with plagiarism. This is a theme I was able to address in much more detail in the interviews than I could in the focus groups, because the institution's IRB had directed me to ask focus group participants to discuss specific acts of plagiarism—including their own—in the third person. Because of this constraint, the focus group conversations tended to address broad, abstract dimensions of plagiarism rather than specific thoughts about particular experiences the participants had had with plagiarism. At some point in each focus group, however, I did distribute a brief form on which participants noted whether or not they had plagiarized in college and/or in high school. To protect their privacy, participants completed and submitted the forms anonymously. In several groups, I quickly scanned the responses in order to incorporate them into the group discussion; in other sessions, however, I did not review the responses until after the session had ended. (Appendix G summarizes participants' responses to these anonymous surveys.)

In contrast to the more general questions I had been asked to raise in the focus groups, the level of privacy afforded by the one-on-one interviews permitted me more latitude to explore the details of individual students' plagiarism. Therefore, the prompts and questions for the individual interviews incorporated several direct questions about students' experiences with plagiarism. Specific interview prompts included the following:

- Have you ever plagiarized? If you have plagiarized, what were your reasons for doing so?

- How do you go about plagiarizing? What textual practices did you engage in?

- What are some of the sources of your plagiarism? Paper file, Internet, library book? How do you choose them?

- Were you ever caught when you plagiarized? Describe what happened.

An additional line of inquiry within my study considered the research methodology itself. At the end of each focus group and interview, I asked each participant to write brief response to several final questions on the *Participant Information Sheet*. These questions asked how comfortable the student had felt during the research session, and whether the student's comments and replies during the discussion had been truthful.

This study's research design precluded the uniformity that is so important to surveys and structured interviews. Indeed, the unpredictability of focus group and interview conversations is what makes them so appropriate as phenomenological research methods. Therefore, my intention was not that each participant address every question on the list of prompts. Instead, as different ideas came up in each research session, I considered how the group might pursue them—for instance, by asking the speaker to elaborate on her point, or by putting her idea before the group to elicit other participants' thoughts about it. The prompts guided me as I moderated each research session, allowing me to focus the discussions while permitting the study's participants to shape the inquiry.

The IRB Review Process

The issues involved in college student plagiarism make it a sensitive topic, both institutionally and interpersonally. Therefore, as with the pilot study discussed, I requested a full review of this study by the university's IRB. Although an expedited review process is appropriate for most human-subjects research in Composition Studies, I felt that this study

demanded a higher level of scrutiny due to the sensitivity of plagiarism as a topic and the social nature of the focus group component of the research design.

Focus Groups and Sensitive Topic Research

Plagiarism is a manifest violation of academic integrity as well as of discursive conventions, and it carries—in policy if not always in practice—severe penalties. Rebecca Moore Howard (1995) has noted that "all forms of plagiarism, including patchwriting, are located on a juridical continuum on which expulsion from college—the academic death penalty—sits at the extreme end as a potential punishment" (p. 789). Given this context, I approached my research into plagiarism as sensitive, too. While discussing acts of plagiarism would not expose research participants to physical harm, I anticipated that the research might lead to some level of social or interpersonal risk, particularly in the focus groups. Accordingly, I requested a full IRB review for the research study, rather than for the expedited IRB review more typical for Composition Studies.

Even in the controlled setting of an institutionally sanctioned research project, asking students to discuss plagiarism has the potential to expose them to negative consequences. First, research participants might find plagiarism an uncomfortable topic to discuss. In fact, a participant in one of this study's focus groups commented that plagiarism is "a bit of a taboo subject," reporting that "people don't want to readily out if they have done anything close to it or not—because it is illegal" (Lacee, FG 03). In addition to the social implications of the topic, talking about plagiarism also has institutional implications. A breach of confidentiality with regard to the study's data could lead to significant harm for a participant, since even an unsupported accusation of plagiarism may lead an instructor to regard a student's work with suspicion.

The social nature of focus groups makes some people question their suitability as a research method for sensitive topics. As Wellings et al. (2000) have explained,

> Expressing individual opinions in a group setting involves a greater degree of social risk than expressing them face-to-face with a researcher, especially where an attitude held is known to be at odds with that of the group or wider society or where there is anticipation that a behavior will be disapproved. (p. 262)

Focus groups can provide insight into topics that are both important and socially stigmatized; as such, many researchers have found them to be both appropriate and necessary for sensitive social research. In fact, focus groups can offer participants a level of social comfort when they are discussing a sensitive topic:

> Group work can actively facilitate the discussion of taboo topics because the less inhibited members of the group break the ice for shyer participants. Participants can also provide mutual support in expressing feelings that are common to their group but which they consider to deviate from mainstream culture. (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 300)

Discussion and Management of Risk

Two dimensions of this study held the potential to expose participants to harm: the risks associated with participation in the study itself (the focus group and interview conversations), and the risks associated with the disclosure, whether inadvertent or malicious, of participants' responses outside the setting of the study. I anticipated that the level of risk associated with the study itself would be minimal; while participants would be asked sensitive questions, they would not be compelled to respond to any question that made them feel uncomfortable. However, the risks associated with a possible breach of confidentiality would pose a greater threat for participants.

I minimized the risk of an inadvertent breach of confidentiality by the strict use of pseudonyms for all participants and by following careful data management processes. Although some preliminary interactions required me to use students' real names, I asked all participants to use a pseudonym during the research sessions. I also ensured that no study-related documents link their pseudonyms to the students' names or identities; their true names were only disclosed on participants' IRB-required *Informed Consent Form*, which each student placed directly into a common envelope. Both before and after the research sessions, I followed standard data management procedures to maintain control over the research study's documents and recordings. These actions made an inadvertent breach of confidentiality unlikely, and minimized the potential for harm should any breach occur.

The risks associated with a malicious breach of confidentiality, however, were beyond my control—there was no way to prevent a participant from revealing the content of a focus group conversation once the session ended. I told participants that I could not guarantee their complete privacy and confidentiality given that the group included other students; and, as part of the informed consent process, I asked participants to agree to refrain from discussing the conversation outside the focus group itself. Once the research conversations began, I provided additional reminders that the students would not be expected to discuss anything they did not feel comfortable sharing in the presence of the others in the group.

I extended an additional level of protection to the study's focus group participants by asking them to provide anonymous written responses for the more sensitive questions I planned to raise during the conversations. In addition to providing an additional layer of privacy (so that participants would not be asked to disclose aloud any details of their own experiences with plagiarism), written replies to sensitive questions would serve as a check against

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overdisclosure—a phenomenon in which focus group participants get caught up in the moment and share more than they might have intended (Morgan, 1998, p. 50). Given these protections, I am confident that the students who consented to participate in the study did so with a full knowledge and keen awareness of the potential risks inherent in the research process.

The pilot surveys and focus groups I had conducted allayed many of my concerns about how students would respond to the primary research study. Ninety-four percent of the pilot survey's respondents replied that they had felt comfortable responding to the questions on the survey, and over 60% indicated that they would feel comfortable discussing plagiarism in a focus group of peers. Furthermore, almost 45% of the respondents noted that they would feel comfortable talking about their own plagiarism (assuming that they had plagiarized) in a one-on-one interview with a researcher. The replies of participants in the two pilot focus groups were similar. No participants in the pilot focus groups showed signs discomfort or distress. Rather, the participants seemed comfortable, confident, and in control throughout the discussion, and they did not appear to regard plagiarism as a highly sensitive or stigmatized topic. Once each session warmed up, the participants did not demonstrate the kinds of reticence, hedging, or approbation that would suggest they regard plagiarism as taboo. Indeed, they seemed genuinely interested to talk about plagiarism, in large part based on their own curiosity and questions about plagiarism.

After completing the pilot study, I felt confident that the formal dissertation study could move forward with minor modifications to the initial IRB-approved research protocol. Therefore, in preparation for the dissertation study, I requested IRB approval for a renewal and extension of my original protocol. My application noted two primary revisions to the research design. First, I excluded surveys from the study, having determined their limited applicability to

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my emerging research questions. Second, I extended the focus group interview methodology to include a series of one-on-one interviews. Minor design changes allowed the dissertation study's focus groups and interviews to draw on the previously approved set of questions and topics, and, as before, my request received IRB approval upon the completion of several small methodological revisions.

Given the sensitive nature of research topic, I solicited feedback about participants' level of comfort throughout the research process. The *Participant Information Sheet* also included several questions about the study's methodology, which participants responded to at the end of their interview or focus group session. Most participants in the dissertation study—28 of the 31 students—reported feeling *very comfortable* discussing plagiarism during the research session. Three students—each of whom participated in a different focus group—replied feeling *somewhat comfortable* during the session. Finally, all 31 participants in the study replied *yes* when asked if adequate steps had been taken to protect their privacy, and each of them responded *yes* when asked if all of their comments and responses in the session had been true.

The *Participant Information Sheet* ended with an opportunity for participants to write down any additional thoughts or suggestions they had about the design of the research study. Students offered the following comments:

- "I thought this was a well constructed focus group." (FG 01)

- "Thank you for making the session as relaxed as possible. I'm glad I was able to help out." (FG 03)

- "Good job, Kurt." (FG 04)

- "Thanks for your help! It's appreciated!!" (FG 05)

- "Possibly with such a small group, it may have been uncomfortable for the members to know who did & did not plagiarize." (FG 06)

- "This topic is interconnected with social issues. Neat!" (FG 06)

Overall, these responses and comments suggest that the research methodology met its goal of establishing a safe and largely comfortable environment in which the participants could engage in a frank discussion about the sensitive and potentially uncomfortable topic of plagiarism.

Conclusion

The research study mapped out by this chapter became realized during the hectic final weeks of an unusually warm spring semester. In 15 separate research sessions—6 focus groups and 9 interviews—I met with 31 different students to talk, listen, and learn about plagiarism as they understood and experienced it.

As with our classes, some of the research discussions seemed to take flight, and we felt at the end of our 90-minute session that we had just scratched the surface of our topic. One or two sessions, however, flew like the Spruce Goose; the conversation felt plodding, mechanical, and forced, and our discussion never really lifted off on its own. Still, this was fine: The really vibrant research conversations explored particular dimensions of plagiarism through interesting, compelling, in-depth exchanges, and the less dynamic discussions still provided an intimate if less engaging look at the participants' constructions and representations of plagiarism.

Two weeks of late-semester fieldwork brought more than two years of preparatory research to fruition. The study I had planned, designed, and piloted left me with over 17 hours of recorded conversations about plagiarism. The next chapter describes the process by which I began to make meaning from the many, many words that participants had shared with me.

CHAPTER SIX:

DEVELOPMENT OF THE THEMES AND TOPICS FROM

PARTICIPANTS' DISCUSSIONS OF PLAGIARISM

Chapter Six begins where the data collection ended. I start by reviewing the study's

phenomenological research orientation. Next, I offer a few comments about the process of

transcribing the recordings of the research sessions, and I explain several decisions I made about

the transcription. I then address the development and construction of the coding system that

helped me to approach the data. To demonstrate the highly grounded nature of my analysis, I

describe in detail the process by which I identified, consolidated, and refined a coding system of

themes and topics based on the research discussions. Consistent with the principles of

phenomenological research, I looked to the data itself—the transcripts of the research session—

to find the patterns that would help me to understand the landscape of plagiarism as it was

experienced and represented by the research participants themselves.

The rest of Chapter Six presents and explains the coding system that served as the

analytical and interpretive lens through which I came to understand the participants' perspectives

on, ideas about, and experiences with plagiarism. The coding system is embodied in a list of 36

distinct topics from the research conversations, each of which I have located into one of eight

broad themes. Each topic represents a specific aspect of plagiarism, and each theme draws

together a number of conceptually related topics. Taken together, these themes and topics

provide a comprehensive ideological map of the participants' perspectives on plagiarism as

demonstrated in the research conversations. These themes and topics represent a descriptive

"first pass" through the data, and they lay the groundwork for my subsequent discussion of the participants' construction and representation of plagiarism.

A Phenomenological Approach to Data Analysis and Interpretation

Review of the Study's Phenomenological Orientation

This study's phenomenological orientation sought to examine plagiarism as it is understood and experienced by college writers. As I have mentioned, phenomenology posits that meaning is constructed by, and dwells in, individuals, rather than in a priori truths or categories (see Davis, 1995, and Schwandt, 2000). Methodologically, phenomenological studies aim to understand how research participants understand the topic. The research methods used in this study sought to understand college students' understandings of plagiarism by inviting them into conversation. The research sessions offered a safe, professional, and nonjudgmental environment in which students could share their thoughts, ideas, questions, and stories about plagiarism.

The research conversations addressed plagiarism as a compositional and performative act—as a practice with textual, pedagogical, and institutional dimensions. The study did not position plagiarism as inherently inappropriate; to do so would have grounded the inquiry in a pre-existing interpretive framework, undermining the phenomenological objective of the research. Instead, it sought students' perspectives on plagiarism without assuming that students and their instructors start with the same set of beliefs and presumptions (Ashworth et al., 1997, p. 187).

The fifteen research sessions had been structured around a common set of prompts which helped establish the thematic and topical focuses of the discussions (see Appendix D). As the study's interviewer and focus group moderator, I allowed each conversation to follow its own

path through the discursive terrain. I asked open-ended questions and follow-up probes, basing these on participants' previous comments, questions, and stories. As much as possible, I framed my questions in the language that the students used in their own constructions and representations of plagiarism in the research sessions. The completion of the series of interviews and focus groups marked the end of the study's data generation and collection processes. The recordings of the interview and focus group sessions averaged 70 minutes long; in all, the 15 research sessions had generated over 17½ hours of wide-ranging discussion about plagiarism.

Transcription of the Research Conversations

To facilitate my analysis of the interview and focus group conversations, I prepared a full transcript of each research session. I had initially planned to transcribe only those moments in the conversations that seemed most analytically interesting, yet as I reviewed the recordings it became clear that complete transcripts would lead to a much richer understanding of the participants' constructions of plagiarism. In preparation for the transcription and analysis of the research conversations, I reviewed the audiorecordings of the each session, listening for topics that came up in the conversations and attending to more general features of the conversational flow. I performed all transcriptions myself, which afforded me another opportunity to review the research conversations in depth. This also helped me begin to understand the themes and patterns present in the discussions.

For some studies, it is important to record linguistic markers such as pauses, stammers, and mispronunciations in the transcripts. Within the broad scope of this study's conversations, however, discursive features such as false starts and interruptions represented the normal workings of the participants' thinking about and responding to questions. Therefore, in order to present participants' ideas most clearly, I generally normalized the discussion as I transcribed it,

correcting most errors of grammar and usage and removing some pauses and overlapping statements. While I recognize the importance of representing participants' discourse accurately, I felt that extensive transcriptional notations would muddy the presentation and discussion of the participants' ideas. Occasionally, however, I did make note of some of the paralinguistic features apparent on the audiorecordings, such as when participants' hesitations and self-corrections seem to add a layer of meaning to their discussion of plagiarism.

The recordings of the research conversations are represented by a set of full transcripts which contains over 160,000 words. The focus group transcripts averaged 12,250 words and the interviews averaged 9750 words (see Appendix E for more detailed information about the recordings and transcripts). When I completed the transcription process, I turned to the development of the coding system that would assist me in analyzing the research data embedded in 350 pages of wide-ranging discussion about plagiarism.

Construction of the Interpretive Framework

Development of the Preliminary Coding System

As interviewer and focus group moderator, I had established the focus of the research conversations. The questions and the scenarios I offered for participants' consideration and response grew from my research interest in plagiarism. They were grounded in my beliefs and assumptions about college students and plagiarism, and heavily influenced by the disciplinary literature. However, as I began the process of analysis and interpretation, I set aside the list of questions and topics that I had raised in the research sessions and turned away from the professional perspectives on plagiarism that had informed the design of this study. It was important that my interpretation of students' perspectives on plagiarism be anchored in what the study participants themselves had said about it, rather than framed by ideas based on my own

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experiences as a teacher, a scholar, or a researcher. An a priori analytical framework would have undermined the phenomenological objectives I had for this study. Instead, I turned to the transcripts themselves, and developed an analytical system for coding the conversational data based on themes and topics prompted by the research participants' own words.

I began my analysis of the interview and focus group discussions by reading through the full transcript of each research session. As I read, I noted specific comments, questions, ideas, and snippets of conversation that seemed important and/or revealing with regard to participants' construction and representation of plagiarism. I labeled each passage with a working code—a word or phrase that was prompted by something a participant had said. I did not create a full taxonomy of these initial codes; instead, my goal was to understand the range of ideas that had come up in the research conversations. Each initial code represented a topic, idea, theme, or question that had been raised in the interviews or focus groups, and each code was grounded in a textual anchor—a clear and specific textual example of the idea as it had been addressed by a research participant. The preliminary list of codes represented my first look at what the participants had said about plagiarism; it included over 400 distinct questions, constructions, representations, experiences, and ideas that had come up as college students talked about plagiarism in an interview or focus group. Below, I present samples of the some of the preliminary transcript-based codes.

Samples of Transcript-Based Codes:

- Citation as hard work (the difficulty of doing the citation work; the difficulty of avoiding plagiarism; citation as tiresome; citation as disruptive to the writing process)
- College courses (academic major courses vs. liberal studies / general education courses)
- Concepts participants related to plagiarism (stealing, cheating, lying, etc.)
- Factors related to plagiarism: time/time pressure, procrastination, stress, etc.

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- Faculty practices (in class, in their own writing, in their teaching)
- Famous plagiarists (stories students have heard about plagiarism involving journalists, politicians)
- Plagiarism in art and graphics
- Plagiarism's effect on the purposes of college ("why we're here")
- Spark Notes/Cliff Notes
- Specific language used around plagiarism (terms & words that students used when talking about plagiarism)
- Students' feelings (angry, happy, sad, confused, etc.)
- Students' reasons for participating in the study
- Universality (everyone plagiarizes/all writing is plagiaristic)
- What matters to teachers (e.g., in papers, role of writing, etc.)

To ensure that the interpretation and analysis of the interviews and focus groups would be grounded in the study participants' discussion and construction of plagiarism, I based my initial analysis solely on the codes prompted by the transcribed discussions.

However, I recognized the importance of locating the dissertation's research within the professional and disciplinary discourses on plagiarism. Because my initial coding had thoroughly grounded the analysis in participants' explanatory and interpretive frames, I felt it would be appropriate to return to the literature, and to my research questions, so that I could show how participants had explored the discipline's constructions and theories about plagiarism. Below, I present some of these research and literature-based codes.

Samples of Research and Literature-Based Codes:

- Do schools do enough to discourage plagiarism? What should they do?
- How widespread is plagiarism?
- Plagiarism is wrong because it creates a false impression.
- The academy is a discourse community.
- The purposes for using sources vary by culture.

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- Will anti-plagiarism software decrease the likelihood of plagiarism?
- Writers may treat electronic and print-based sources differently when it comes to matters of referencing and citation.

As I coded the transcripts, I found that many of the ideas addressed by the professional literature on plagiarism had received little attention in the research conversations. By contrast, the transcript-based codes offered a rich, well-developed presentation of the themes and topics explored in the interviews and focus groups. Accordingly, I based the subsequent analysis of the transcripts on the codes that represented the themes and topics that marked participants' perspectives on plagiarism.

I consolidated and condensed the list of 400 initial codes by eliminating redundant entries and ideas. The process of refining and arranging the working codes continued until each topic statement was clear, specific, and unambiguous. To confirm that each code accurately represented a distinct topic from the research conversations, I returned to the transcripts to ensure that each topic code could be solidly supported by several distinct textual anchors.

As I continued to analyze the transcripts, I found that many of my topic codes addressed specific dimensions of broader ideas about plagiarism. I grouped similar topics together into thematic families, confirming my classification and categorization of the topics by reviewing them as they appeared in the context of the conversations. At the end of this process, I had established a highly refined, tightly constructed interpretive structure of themes and topics.

The coding system itself consists of 36 topics arranged into eight themes (see Table 2). Each topic represents a specific issue addressed by the participants in the study, and each theme represents a group of conceptually related topics. In essence, the coding system provides a comprehensive overview of the research conversations. It serves as a detailed conceptual map of plagiarism as it was addressed and understood by the thirty-one students who participated in this

research study. These themes and topics in turn helped me to understand and approach

participants' constructions and representations of plagiarism as I began to write about it. The

rest of this chapter presents and elaborates the study's coding system by identifying each theme

and briefly explaining each distinct topic in it.

Table 2: *Themes and Topics in Participants' Construction and Representation of Plagiarism*

Theme	Topic
Conceptualizing Plagiarism	Defining Plagiarism The Diversity of Classification A Continuum of Severity[17] Issues of Intent Questions, Confusion, and Uncertainty The Construct and Construction of Plagiarism Variation in Expectations, Rules, Conventions, and Practices The Inevitability of Plagiarism
The Nature of Plagiarism	Plagiarism and Propriety Cheating, Plagiarism, and Academic Integrity The Ethics of Plagiarism Plagiarism in Social Discourse How Plagiarism and Plagiarists are Regarded
Plagiarism and Intellectual Property	Authorship and Originality Plagiarism and Property Rights
Source Use and Citation	Practices and Conventions of Source Use and Citation Citation Styles, Systems, and Formats Documentation and Common Knowledge
Matters of Composition	Issues of Voice and Style Collaboration and Assistive Plagiarism Students as Authors Plagiarism Concerns in Composing
Plagiarism in Practice	Plagiarism Stories and Lore First-Person Accounts Factors Affecting Plagiarism The Roles of Technology The Paper Trade Non-Textual Plagiarism
Issues of Instruction	Learning and Teaching About Plagiarism Pre-College Experiences, Knowledge, and Teaching Instructors' Practices and Policies Imitation and Creative Plagiarism
Policing Plagiarism	Roles and Responsibilities Plagiarism Detection Confrontation and Accusation Institutional Policy and Procedure

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[17] My use of the phrase "continuum of severity" was prompted by its use in Pincus & Schmelkin (2003).

The Thematic and Topical Representation of Plagiarism

Conceptualizing Plagiarism

"Conceptualizing Plagiarism" describes participants' thoughts about what plagiarism is. This family of topics is the largest of the study; it includes eight distinct topics that represent various dimensions of participants' constructions of, and questions about, plagiarism. It addresses topics such as the definition of plagiarism; the classification of acts of plagiarism; the role that intent plays in determinations and judgments about plagiarism; and the variability that participants noted in terms of expectations and practices related to plagiarism.

Defining Plagiarism: At the beginning of each focus group and interview session, I asked participants about their definitions of plagiarism. "Defining Plagiarism" represents the lexical and syntactic dimensions of participants' definitions of plagiarism, as well as their discussion of the issues related to defining plagiarism.

The Diversity of Classification: Definitions alone cannot convey a rich, contextualized understanding of plagiarism, so "The Diversity of Classification" addresses the variety of textual and performative practices constructed as plagiarism. The topic represents participants' discussion and classification of specific textual acts and compositional practices with regard to plagiarism, and it indicates the questions and issues participants explored with regard to variation and instability within the category of plagiarism.

A Continuum of Severity: Within the interview and focus group discussions, participants represented plagiarism as a continuum-based concept. This topic covers comments and

questions related to the ordering or ranking of various acts and practices in terms of their impropriety—in other words, discussion about how kinds of plagiarizing are worse than others.

Issues of Intent: "Issues of Intent" represents the idea of intentionality as it played out in participants' discussions of plagiarism. Questions of intent figured prominently in the research conversations. Many participants represented plagiarism as an internally differentiable category on the basis of a writer's intent; this topic addresses matters of intentional and unintentional plagiarism, as well as the role of mistakes and misunderstandings as they pertain to the determination of plagiarism.

Questions, Confusion, and Uncertainty: In many of this study's research sessions, participants mentioned their confusion and uncertainty about plagiarism and plagiarism-related issues. "Questions, Confusion, and Uncertainty" identifies excerpts from the conversations in which students asked questions or expressed their confusion. Participants asked questions about the definition of plagiarism, described confusion about citation practices, and noted uncertainty about plagiarism policies.

The Construct and Construction of Plagiarism: The predominant focus of the research conversations was on students' ideas about what plagiarism is. However, participants in several of the research conversations made comments that directly address the conceptual underpinnings of plagiarism. "The Construct and Construction of Plagiarism" identifies passages in which participants addressed the construction, and the constructed nature, of plagiarism, both on an abstract level and in terms of the ways in which institutions respond to it.

Variation in Expectations, Rules, Conventions, and Practices: The research participants described a great deal of variability in terms of expectations and practices related to plagiarism. Students encountered several levels of inconsistency, variation, and differential practices.

Students mentioned variability between instructors, departments, and institutions, and also described their belief that different standards apply to students than do to their instructors or to notable public figures.

The Inevitability of Plagiarism: A number of participants commented that colleges would never be able to fully eradicate plagiarism. Several participants remarked that everyone has likely plagiarized, whether deliberately or unintentionally, while others asserted that plagiarizing is inherent in human nature. Several students also pointed out that composition itself is inherently plagiaristic, as it all reflects what has come before it. "The Inevitability of Plagiarism" marks participants' comments that represented plagiarism as being both universal and unavoidable.

The Nature of Plagiarism

"The Nature of Plagiarism" is a broad theme that considers participants' thoughts about plagiarism. The previous theme, "The Construction of Plagiarism," explored *what* participants understood plagiarism to be. By contrast, this theme explores *how* participants understood it to be—it represents their discussion about the inherent and constructed qualities of plagiarism. The five topics within this theme address questions of propriety, academic integrity, and ethics in terms of the representation of plagiarism and plagiarists.

Plagiarism and Propriety: An important thread in the interviews and focus groups explored students' ideas about the nature of plagiarism. "Plagiarism and Propriety" signals ideas related to participants' discussion of plagiarism's impropriety. Many participants indicated that they believe plagiarism to be wrong, and explained the basis of their beliefs. Students addressed plagiarism's impropriety as a matter of unearned credit; related plagiarism to notions of honesty,

forthrightness, and representation; and commented on plagiarism's effects in terms of the purposes for, and goals of, a college education.

Cheating, Plagiarism, and Academic Integrity: In the research conversations, I asked students to talk about plagiarism in terms of broader issues of academic integrity. Participants explored plagiarism as a form of cheating, and shared their views on the importance of honesty and integrity—both for the academic environment and in terms of their future professional lives.

The Ethics of Plagiarism: Beliefs about personal values played an important part in participants' discussions of plagiarism. "The Ethics of Plagiarism" addresses participants' discussion of the ethical and moral terrain of plagiarism, exploring issues related to morals, values, personal character, and professional ethics.

Plagiarism in Social Discourse: Both the focus groups and interviews explored the nature of plagiarism as a topic of conversation. "Plagiarism in Social Discourse" represents participants' discussions about how students talk about plagiarism, in terms of both the content of their conversations—what they say about plagiarism—and the interpersonal dynamics of their talks—the discursive representation of plagiarism.

How Plagiarism and Plagiarists are Regarded: Throughout the research sessions, the study participants made comments that demonstrated their attitudes toward plagiarism and plagiarists. They made some direct characterizations of plagiarism in response to my questions about it, yet they also made representations about plagiarism in responses to questions unrelated to the construction of plagiarism. This topic also represents participants' ideas about plagiarism's frequency, and their ideas about students who plagiarize.

Plagiarism and Intellectual Property

The theme "Plagiarism and Intellectual Property" comprises two topics related to intellectual property and the rights of authors. It addresses participants' thoughts about authorship in terms of notions and values related to primacy and originality, and represents the research conversations' exploration of authorial and property rights.

Authorship and Originality: The research conversations explored issues of authorship on several levels. "Authorship and Originality" represents participants' comments and questions related to the establishment of authorship, and their discussion about the role and importance of originality and original genius (often raised as they discussed issues of citation and referencing). Participants also questioned how ideas of authorship and acknowledgment play out in public arenas.

Plagiarism and Property Rights: "Plagiarism and Property Rights" represents topics related to intellectual property, the rights (both legal and financial) of authorship and ownership, and matters of copyright and fair use. The conversations considered the boundaries of the protections afforded by property rights, and explored students' own negotiations of questions of intellectual property.

Source Use and Citation

"Source Use and Citation" represents participants' discussion of using, referencing, and documenting sources in their writing. The three topics within this theme address academic conventions and expectations regarding source use; issues related to citation systems and formats; and questions about requirements for citing common knowledge.

Practices and Conventions of Source Use and Citation: "Practices and Conventions for Source Use and Citation" represents several facets of source use that came up in the interviews

and focus groups. Participants shared their ideas about what instructors want from their students' source-based writing, and explained their reasons for incorporating sources and source information into their academic writing. They also addressed questions of the related to instructors' source-use requirements. Participants explained some of the ways that they use sources (including other students' essays), and talked about how questions of source use affect their composing processes.

Citation Styles, Systems, and Formats: "Citation Styles, Systems, and Formats" addresses students' discussion of techniques and conventions related to citation and documentation. Several research sessions explored the specific citation systems used by academic writers to reference and document their sources. The conversations explored the relationship between referencing errors and plagiarism, and several students shared their experiences with having been prosecuted for plagiarism on the basis of citational misunderstandings and mistakes

Documentation and Common Knowledge: As participants talked about source and citation issues, the idea of common knowledge came up in the research conversations. "Documentation and Common Knowledge" represents issues of citation and referencing as it pertains to general information and familiar wording. Students considered what counts as common knowledge, and questioned the need for attribution and quotation for well-known sayings that a writer might use in a paper.

Matters of Composition

"Matters of Composition" represents topics related to the conventions and practices of student writing. The four topics in this theme explore issues of voice and style; raise questions about students working together and helping each other; describe students' presentation of

themselves as authors; and address how students' questions and concerns about plagiarism affect their processes and products of composition.

Issues of Voice and Style: The research conversations explicitly addressed questions of voice and writing style when talking about plagiarism and writing from sources. Participants shared their experiences about how voice plays out when they write with sources, and offered their ideas about what college instructors expect from student writing in terms of voice and style. Students also considered the role that issues of voice play in plagiarism.

Collaboration and Assistive Plagiarism: The topic "Collaboration and Assistive Plagiarism" addresses matters of writers working together. The primary issues participants discussed related to assistance in writing—on questions and considerations that arise when students solicit, respond to, and fulfill requests for help with a paper. This topic notes their discussions of the difference between assistance and plagiarism, and their consideration of the line between the appropriate and inappropriate collaboration.

Students as Authors: The interview and focus group conversations addressed various dimensions of plagiarism that I had not anticipated. One such theme concerned students' discussion of works that they had composed (both academic and creative). These ideas are represented by the code "Students as Authors." Several students noted that they have posted some of their own work online; participants also referenced their own writing as they answered my questions about the source of their feelings toward plagiarism.

Plagiarism Concerns in Composing: "Plagiarism Concerns in Composing" represents the ways in which students noted that issues and concerns related to plagiarism affect how they write. Participants reported that concern about plagiarism can disrupt students' writing practices; they also noted that a writer's composing processes can be affected by previous accusations of

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plagiarism, as well as by source-use requirements and disciplinary expectations for documentation.

Plagiarism in Practice

The theme "Plagiarism in Practice" describes some of the performative aspects of plagiarism; its six topics represent discussions about plagiarism-as-enacted. Some topics address stories about plagiarism—stories that students reporting hearing, as well as stories that some of them told during an interview or focus group. Other topics explore issues related to plagiarizing, considering some of the factors that affect students' decisions about plagiarism and taking particular note of the roles that technology plays in plagiarism. This theme also represents conversation about the underground economy of composition—the buying and selling of papers. Finally, it addresses several issues about plagiarism with regard to non-textual media and production.

Plagiarism Stories and Lore: The interview and focus group conversations prompted students to share a variety of stories about plagiarism. "Plagiarism Stories and Lore" refers to participants' anecdotes and assumptions about plagiarism that they did not present as grounded in their own first-hand experiences. These stories reference several different aspects of plagiarism: some reference potential sources for college papers; others concern institutional policies and definitions; and some repeat common assumptions about plagiarism. The discussions also noted plagiarism stories the participants heard their instructors tell—many of which seem to focus on the ease with which plagiarism can be detected and on the severity of the penalties for it. Several students in the focus groups and interviews also shared thoughts and stories about the plagiarism (and plagiaristic composing practices) of famous authors and politicians.

First-Person Accounts: "First-Person Accounts" addresses students' admissions, descriptions, and depictions of their own plagiarism. The topic was developed in detail by some of the interview participants, yet several students in the focus groups also discussed their own acts of plagiarism. Participants' first-person descriptions of plagiarism experiences provide some of this study's richest information about college students' ideas about plagiarism. Some of their accounts represent the multidimensionality of student plagiarism, and others detail the factors and thought processes that figure into students' decisions to plagiarize. Some participants shared stories of unintentional plagiarism; others described specific strategies and techniques for plagiarizing, or discussed participants' involvement in other students' plagiarizing. Research participants who did not describe any first-hand experiences of plagiarism also offered novel perspectives about plagiarism as they detailed the reasons behind their processes, decisions, and values regarding composition.

Factors Affecting Plagiarism: "Factors Affecting Plagiarism" describes a number of academic, personal, and cultural matters that participants represented as relating to college student plagiarism. Participants talked about the nature of a course and the general class atmosphere and instructional style. They also addressed plagiarism relative to the perceived value and importance of a course, as well as to the nature and value of its assignments. Participants noted that decisions about plagiarism may be rooted in a student's personal values and beliefs, and in a student's position within the academy. Others addressed the relationship between plagiarism and membership in various social and academic peer groups.

The Roles of Technology: "The Roles of Technology" addresses the impact that computers, electronic databases, and the Internet have had on practices of plagiarism. Students suggested that the Internet can facilitate plagiarism. Yet participants also noted that technology

can be used against plagiarism, and some described their experiences with anti-plagiarism software such as that used by Turnitin.com.

The Paper Trade: The interviews and focus groups also explored some of the issues involved in writing papers for hire. "The Paper Trade" represents discussion of the buying, selling, borrowing, and ghostwriting of essays. Participants addressed the underground and commercial trafficking in student writing. Some mentioned the costs involved in papers-for-hire, and others described their thoughts about, and experiences with, online paper mills. Many participants talked about being asked to write papers by other students, and they shared their thoughts and experiences about this.

Non-Textual Plagiarism: Research participants raised a number of ideas about plagiarism and plagiaristic issues as they relate to non-text-based practices. "Non-Textual Plagiarism" represents participants' comments and questions involving images, art, and media. Students questioned the practice of different television networks producing such similar TV shows; others considered the availability and use of online music and images. Finally, several participants described how issues of non-textual plagiarism, copying, and imitation play out in non-textual disciplines and media such as art and photography.

Issues of Instruction

Many of the study participants' comments and questions addressed matters of instructors and instruction. The theme "Issues of Instruction" presents students' descriptions of the ways that they have been taught about plagiarism and related issues. Its four topics address teaching and learning about plagiarism, considering participants' pre-college exposure to plagiarism issues as well as the plagiarism policies and teaching practices of particular instructors. This

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theme also explores how compositional practices of copying and imitation can serve creative as well as pedagogical ends.

Learning and Teaching About Plagiarism: Many study participants sensed that there were significant gaps in the teaching they had received about plagiarism. "Learning and Teaching About Plagiarism" indicates students' ideas about the instruction they had had on plagiarism. Several participants mentioned that their instructors never really explained plagiarism to them; others described exemplary teaching about plagiarism, and offered suggestions for how instructors and institutions can do a better job of helping students learn what plagiarism is and how they can avoid it.

Pre-College Experiences, Knowledge, and Teaching: As the participants discussed college plagiarism, a number of issues came up that related to their experiences with plagiarism in elementary, middle, and high school. "Pre-College Experiences, Knowledge, and Teaching" addresses what participants said about what they had learned about plagiarism, citation, and source use before coming to college. They talked about differences in conventions and practices between high school and college, and offered widely divergent perspectives on how effectively their high school courses had prepared them for writing in college.

Instructors' Practices and Policies: Study participants talked about specific rules and procedures that their instructors have had concerning plagiarism. "Instructors' Practices and Policies" represents the classroom-level discussions about and experiences with plagiarism that students recounted. Some discussion focused on students' ideas about their instructors' practices for reading and grading papers; participants also noted how different instructors' reading strategies make it more or less likely that plagiarism will be detected. Comments from the focus groups and interviews reflect a wide variety of policies for responding to plagiarism; students

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describe having had instructors who seem very strict regarding plagiarism, as well as instructors who do not seem to regard it as a big deal. The conversations also noted the leeway that instructors' plagiarism policies could have, and some students described and questioned individual instructors' responses to plagiarism that they thought had violated institutional policies that promise due process for students.

Imitation and Creative Plagiarism: Our conversations indicated that the research participants did not regard all forms of copying to be inappropriate. "Imitation and Creative Plagiarism" flags passages in which students describe some of the pedagogical, generative, and creative uses of copying, imitation, and mimicry. Participants noted that practices of imitation and copying could be valuable strategies, both for learning and for creating new and original works. Some participants, however, questioned the appropriateness and legality of such techniques.

<center>*Policing Plagiarism*</center>

"Policing Plagiarism" represents issues related to the detection and prosecution of plagiarism. Its four topics explore the responsibilities and techniques for detecting and responding to plagiarism. This theme addresses several participants' experiences of having been accused of plagiarism. It also includes participants' questions and recommendations regarding the ways in which college instructors and institutions address and respond to student plagiarism.

Roles and Responsibilities: "Roles and Responsibilities" addresses questions of responsibility related to issues of plagiarism. Participants considered several instructor-level responsibilities regarding plagiarism, including what instructors should teach about plagiarism and whether they have an obligation to verify the provenance of their students' papers. The conversations also addressed institutional responsibilities, primarily in terms of establishing,

publicizing, and enforcing plagiarism policies. Finally, several comments explored the responsibilities students have regarding plagiarism—specifically, what they should do if they suspect or know that another student has plagiarized.

Plagiarism Detection: Students in the interviews and focus groups addressed several issues related to the detection of plagiarism. They mentioned the difficulty of detecting plagiarism and noted several strategies students have used to escape detection and/or punishment. They also discussed the role of technology in plagiarism detection, and considered questions about the appropriacy and ethics of computer-based plagiarism programs. A number of participants mentioned having used the popular plagiarism-detection program Turnitin.com, and some described in detail the troubling and confusing experiences they had had with Turnitin.

Confrontation and Accusation: "Confrontation and Accusation" presents participants' thoughts on how instructors should raise and respond to suspicions and questions of student plagiarism. The topic also includes participants' stories of having been accused of plagiarism.

Institutional Policy and Procedure: Several participants noted a distinction between instructor-level and institution-level policies regarding plagiarism. The topic "Institutional Policy and Procedure" frames the conversations regarding college-wide policies, procedures, and responses. Participants generally addressed questions of institution-level policy. Students discussed thoughts and questions about institutional plagiarism policies, and offered critiques and suggestions for policy and for prevention.

My goal for this chapter has been to represent the richness of my initial analysis of the research conversations and the fullness of my commitment to the study's phenomenological orientation. From my first reviews of the recordings, it was clear that my early suspicions had

been right. Indeed, college students had important things to say about plagiarism. When given the opportunity to speak about it, they had a lot to say.

The study participants talked about plagiarism through many, but not all, of the lenses that professional academics have used in addressing it. They explored plagiarism's definition, addressed the nature of its "crime," and explained how they understood plagiarism in terms of their own values and beliefs, both personal and academic. Participants discussed what it means to be an author, and considered some of the rights and responsibilities involved in the construction, representation, and acknowledgment of authorship. They described their understanding of the differences between paraphrasing and plagiarizing, and showed where and how they drew the line between legitimate collaboration and inappropriate assistance. Participants shared stories about their negotiations of the academic conventions for referencing and citation, and raised questions about the variability they experienced in terms of the academy's understanding and expectations about plagiarism, attribution, and source-based writing.

The participants also addressed plagiarism through several lenses that the professional literature has not examined very extensively. They looked at plagiarism through their own authorial eyes, by talking about work that they had written. They showed the moral and ethical topography of plagiarism to be more complex than we have imagined. They mentioned a variety of experiences involving suspicions and accusations of plagiarism; students shared still-painful stories of having been falsely or unwittingly branded a plagiarist, and described the implications and effects that these experiences continued to have on their composing processes.

Chapter Six has presented plagiarism as the study participants explored and addressed it in their interviews and focus groups. Chapter Seven now takes up their constructions and

representations about plagiarism; it examines and explains in detail just what these students had

to say.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

THE PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF

PARTICIPANTS' CONSTRUCTION AND REPRESENTATION OF PLAGIARISM

The phenomenologically oriented analytical process I described in Chapter Six served its intended purpose well: It allowed me to see the broad themes and specific topics that comprised the study participants' understanding of plagiarism as they had presented it in the research sessions. The chapter illustrated the breadth of participants' constructions of plagiarism by providing a detailed conceptual map of the interview and focus group discussions. Now, in Chapter Seven, I take up the content of the research conversations. I move away from a descriptive representation of the topics and themes that came up as the participants talked about plagiarism, and into a more interpretive and explanatory analysis of what these college students said about their experiences with, and understandings of, plagiarism.

When I completed my analysis of the themes and topics that marked participants' discussions about plagiarism, I began to look at what the participants had said in terms of these themes and topics. Because my initial coding model had so thoroughly grounded the analysis in participants' explanatory and interpretive frames, I felt it would be appropriate to return to the literature, and to my research questions, so that I could show how participants had explored the discipline's constructions and theories about plagiarism. Therefore, in order to clarify my presentation of participants' constructions and representations of plagiarism, I developed a new representational model of the research conversations around which I have structured this chapter. As will become apparent, most of the dimensions of plagiarism that structure my discussion in this chapter align closely with the thematic model I presented in Chapter Six. As before, I

address students' perspectives on plagiarism through a series of broad themes and specific topics. In this chapter, however, I have slightly revised and reorganized the themes and topics from Chapter Six.

I revised my initial analytical model with two goals in mind. First, these changes would allow me to frame my presentation of students' ideas and experiences more clearly in terms of my research questions; second, they would help position my discussion more clearly against the broad issues that mark the discourses of plagiarism within Composition Studies.

Table 3 presents the themes and topics that structure my presentation and discussion of participants' construction and representation of plagiarism.

Table 3: *Structure for Discussion of Students' Construction and Representation of Plagiarism*

Theme	Topic
Conceptualizing Plagiarism	Defining Plagiarism The Difficulty of Classification Variation in Expectations, Rules, Conventions, and Practices The Inevitability of Plagiarism
Collaboration and Assistive Plagiarism	Questions About Collaboration and Assistance Appropriate and Inappropriate Assistance The Paper Trade
The Nature of Plagiarism	Plagiarism and Propriety in the Academic Environment The Ethics of Plagiarism Issues of Intent Variation in Instructional and Disciplinary Constructions of Plagiarism
Authorship, Acknowledgment, and Intellectual Property	Originality, Authorship, and Students as Authors Credit and Collaboration Plagiarism and Property Rights
Source Use, Citation, and Matters of Composition	Conventions and Practices Regarding Source Use and Citation Citation Styles, Systems, and Formats Common Knowledge and Familiar Phrases
Issues of Teaching and Learning	Learning and Teaching About Plagiarism Issues of Voice, Style, and Influence Generative Plagiarism: Copying, Modeling, and Imitation
Factors In and Decisions About Plagiarism	Plagiarism, Validation, and the High-Stakes Academic Environment Contributing Factors in Student Plagiarism Factors in the Research Participants' Plagiarism Decisions Deciding to Plagiarize Deciding Against Plagiarizing
Policing Plagiarism	Plagiarism Detection Accusation, Confrontation, and Responding to Plagiarism
Institutional Policy and Procedures	The Consequences of Plagiarism Suggestions for Policy Recommendations for Institutions

Twice in the chapter, I interrupt my discussion with an extended excerpt from a research session. Each of these narratives—I have labeled them caesuras—provides a concentrated representation of a student's experience being accused of plagiarism. These caesuras allow me to offer a more focused look at two students' lived experiences with plagiarism, and I present their stories in the hope that we can learn from their encounters.

Conceptualizing Plagiarism

The primary goal of this research study was to examine plagiarism as it is constructed, represented, and negotiated by college students. My discussion begins by discussing plagiarism as it was understood by the research participants. This chapter opens as my theoretical overview did: by examining plagiarism's definition. Unlike the studies cited in the review of literature, though, here I offer an examination of plagiarism's definition from the point of view of the students I met with in interviews and focus groups.

Defining Plagiarism

Participants' Written Definitions of Plagiarism

As I have already discussed, many studies have employed survey-based research methods to examine students' attitudes toward and experiences with plagiarism. Ashworth et al. (2003) have noted that "the usefulness of studies of this nature is lessened by such presuppositions as that the *meaning of plagiarism is unequivocal*" (p. 262). They wrote that this "assumption of consensus does not deal with the question of precisely how plagiarism is understood by students, within the broader question of how they live their studentship. It sets aside the possibility that there may be quite idiosyncratic conceptions" (p. 262). The authors' claim is supported by the research conversations I held for this dissertation study; the interview and focus group

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discussions made it clear that, for this study's college student participants, plagiarism's meaning is anything but unequivocal.

This dissertation began with an examination of some of the ways that the term plagiarism is defined by researchers, teachers, and theorists. My discussion of the research sessions will begin in the same way: by reviewing the definitions for plagiarism that participants wrote down at the beginning of each research session. Although the focus of this dissertation is to explore plagiarism as it was represented through the interview and focus group conversations, a brief discussion of participants' written definitions of plagiarism can serve as a benchmark against which the consideration of the richer conversational constructions of plagiarism might be understood.

As I mentioned in Chapter Two, the definition of plagiarism has been the site of much debate, and scholars have employed a range of terms when writing about plagiarism. However, there is a striking degree of lexical alignment in the definitions of plagiarism that participants wrote down at the beginning of each research session (Appendix F lists each participant's written definition for *plagiarism*.) Phrases such as *someone else's*, *another person's*, *as your own*, and *yours* were present in all 31 definitions, showing that for each participant in the study the construction of plagiarism required the separable ownership of work, words, and/or ideas. However, by discursively framing plagiarism in different ways, the 31 written definitions suggest four different ideological stances toward plagiarism:

1. Plagiarism is an act of *using* someone else's work (17 of 31 definitions).

2. Plagiarism is an act of *copying* someone else's work (6 definitions).

3. Plagiarism is an act of *claiming* or *taking credit* (5 definitions).

4. Plagiarism is an act of *stealing* or *taking* (3 definitions).

Several participants' definitions characterized plagiarism as *intentional* and/or *deceptive* ("purposefully and disrespectfully using," "attempting to pass off," "solely for your benefit"). Six addressed issues of *citation* and *referencing* ("without citing," "citing incorrectly," "author is not identified"), and 14 mentioned *acknowledgment* ("credit," "acknowledgment," "recognition"). As I pointed out in Chapter Two, a researcher found that that the words *taking* and *stealing* were frequently used in college instructors' definitions of plagiarism (Roy, 1999, p. 58). My research with college students, however, reveals a substantial divergence: Only 3 of my dissertation study's 31 participants' written definitions referred to plagiarism as "taking" or "stealing" someone else's work. The predominant construction of plagiarism within students' written definitions represented it as an issue not of *theft* but of *misrepresentation*; two thirds of the participants' definitions described plagiarism as involving false claims of authorship ("calling them yours," "claiming it as your own," "attempting to pass it off as your own," "without giving due credit"). Yet despite differences in terms of their construction of plagiarism, all 31 written definitions presented plagiarism in a relatively clear and easy-to-understand manner—and all were broadly in line with the definitions of plagiarism that most college students are likely to have encountered.

The plagiarism definitions that students offered in the research discussions were consistent with their written definitions. As students shared their definitions for plagiarism, it became clear that many of them defined the word in similar ways. A focus group exchange demonstrates such an alignment:

> KEVIN (FG 01): Pretty much using someone else's words, ideas, thoughts, writings as your own—presenting that as your own work, and not giving them credit.
> DAMION (FG 01): Mine was next to identical, saying pretty much the same thing: using it as your own, solely for your own benefit, with no, even, recognition of someone else's ideas that you stole. If you're just taking and don't give credit, that's just [UNINTELLIGIBLE]. Tell them that it's not yours.

CANDICE (FG 01): I put, "Using the ideas, words, or images of others as your own, without citing or referencing." And I put, "Or citing incorrectly."
AMANDA (FG 01): Mine's the same as everybody else's.

However, several study participants found the definition of plagiarism to be unclear:

HILDA (FG 06): I want to know exactly what the definition was for plagiarism, because everyone thinks of it differently….

Carrie explained that confusion about plagiarism was part of her reason for participating in the study:

CARRIE (FG 06): I wanted to see how a focus group works, and also maybe get a better definition of plagiarism—a better idea of what it is. More difference. Because it's not real defined for me.

A number of participants reported that they had never been taught much about plagiarism:

DAVID (INT 05): I think that when you get to this point, people do assume that you know what plagiarism is. And from my personal experience through high school and elementary school, I can't ever remember being taught that much about what plagiarism is. I don't know if you can give a specific definition to it, but I can't ever remember being taught the parameters of it.

Other students, however, have heard plagiarism defined with impossible precision:

BOBBY (FG 06): In high school, there was a clear-cut definition that teachers always said, and students passed on—like, if it's this many words [HILDA (FG 06): yeah] then it's considered plagiarism. So I've always been kind of shaky with that—I didn't know really what was what.
KURT (FG 06): How many words were you taught?
BOBBY (FG 06): I think it was three. [HILDA (FG 06): yeah] Yeah, I think it was three.
FRANK (FG 06): I'm surprised. Three words being the limit—I'm just surprised. I probably do that incidentally—just because, say, the title of the book is three words. Like, they use…? I didn't know it was that little. I'm surprised.
BOBBY (FG 06): Yeah, I agree. Seems like there's little room for error; that's kind of dangerous.
FRANK (FG 06): Like they can—so, like, if it—there is like a defined version of three words? Our professors must overlook over it quite often.

Hannah recalled being taught that there are times when even a single word would require a writer

to provide a citation:

> HANNAH (INT 09): I think even if you use a word—like, that's a unique element; I'm
> not sure, though.

Many study participants insisted that intent matters in the definition of plagiarism (in

contrast to most plagiarism definitions offered by composition handbooks and institutional

policies). As David and Erik each explained,

> DAVID (INT 05): I would define it as—the most important thing is these first three
> words: purposefully and disrespectfully using the thoughts and ideas of another
> person as your own. Because I feel that if the ideas are coming from you and it
> just happens by chance to coincide with somebody else's ideas, that you shouldn't
> be punished for that. And—it's just unfortunate that sometimes it happens that
> way, but I don't know how you can distinguish between purposefully and
> accidentally using someone else's thoughts.

> ERIK (INT 01): I think if you accidentally use someone else's ideas, or you forget to cite
> something, I don't think you should be punished for that. I mean, everyone
> makes mistakes—everyone makes accidents, but if you know that you're doing it,
> that's when it's wrong.

Useful definitions of plagiarism can be hard to nail down. Rebecca Moore Howard

(2000b) has argued that the term *plagiarism* is "unwieldy, unstable, and insidious" (p. 488).

Ultimately, all college writers need to learn and negotiate each of their instructors' own

definitions for plagiarism—a point which Jared noted:

> JARED (FG 02): The true determinant of what plagiarism is is going to be your
> professor. You can argue that, but they're going to determine it, you know what I
> mean? Its legislation is going to change from class to class.

The Difficulty of Classification

In spite of having written clear definitions for plagiarism (see Appendix F), over one

third of this study's focus group participants reported being unsure whether they had plagiarized

in high school or college. This suggests that even accurate, transparent definitions of plagiarism

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may fail to provide enough guidance for college writers to confidently navigate conventions and expectations of source use.

Rebecca Moore Howard (1999) pointed out there are substantial differences in the compositional and textual practices that individual audiences classify as plagiarism:

> The 20th-century plagiarist potentially engages in any one of a disparate set of textual activities. He or she may (1) purchase, download, or copy a term paper; (2) copy text without supplying quotation marks; copy text without identifying the source; use ideas from a source without acknowledging the indebtedness; or (3) talk about a source while using language clearly derived from it (p. 96)

Indeed, many of the interview and focus group participants expressed questions and confusion regarding the specific textual practices that constitute plagiarism. As Stephanie explained,

> STEPHANIE (INT 07): I think it's unclear to what degree—to how broad plagiarism is. For example, I could get one core idea out of a paragraph of my research, and I can put that core idea in, but if two of those words matched two of the words in this one sentence, is that plagiarizing? And I think that's very unclear—like, how specific is plagiarism?

Shelley, by contrast, seemed quite confident about the textual boundaries of plagiarism. She described having learned about plagiarism most clearly from the Advanced Placement (AP) classes she took in high school:

> SHELLEY (FG 03): From day one, we learned what plagiarism was, what it wasn't, and what happened if you were caught plagiarizing. It's always been if you use somebody's ideas, or their wording. If you copied down somebody's words exactly, that was plagiarism; if you just did a thesaurus look-up and changed the words but they still meant the same thing and were still in the same order, that was still plagiarism; and if you cited it, that's fine, but if you just said that it was your own, or if you didn't say anything about it—if you didn't give credit to who wrote it—then that was plagiarism. Even if it was [only] a sentence.

The research participants described particular difficulty with the notion of rewording as plagiarism:

LACEE (FG 03): I think a lot of people don't know that just taking a sentence that
someone else wrote and changing some words up and rephrasing it—like with a
thesaurus—is plagiarism…. It's one of the more common manipulations that the
people think that they can get away with…, because they don't think it's classified
as plagiarism. My roommate did that before…, and I showed it to her, and she
was like, "Oh, crap!," because evidently she has been doing this for years….

Students also considered whether the reworking of someone else's ideas would be

classified as plagiarism. Shelley raised this question in her focus group:

SHELLEY (FG 03): I don't know if [this is] actually plagiarism, [but] my one friend,
she—it was the night before a paper was due, it's 15 pages long—didn't even read
the book. She was stressing out—like, she's just been having a bad week, didn't
read the book—and we were sitting there, [and] she's like, "What am I gonna
do?" And I'm like, "Well, what other people have taken the course that you could
talk to and [ask], like, 'Hey, what should I write about?'" And she says, "Well,
you know, I'll call this person." And that person was like, "Oh, yeah, I think I
might still have that paper." She wasn't going to copy the paper and just turn it
in, but she was going to use the ideas from the paper to write her own paper—
like, do it in her own words. But I don't know if that's—if that's plagiarizing?
But—cause she didn't read the book, but….
BRANDY (FG 03): Pretty much, yeah….
LEIGH (FG 03): I—I'd classify that as, yeah [laughs].
BRANDY (FG 03): If you didn't read the book, then there's no way any of that came
from yourself; it's all somebody else's ideas.
REGINA (FG 03): I agree—it's not outright stealing, but it's taking somebody's ideas.
Like you said, they don't come from yourself if you didn't read the book, so….

Jared fully understood that schools often regard the reworking of someone else's ideas to

be plagiarism, yet he strongly disagreed with such a classification:

JARED (FG 02): If I'm in a jam for a paper, I'll cut and paste from a reputable Web site
the information I want, delete out a lot of the opinionated stuff—the facts and
what not—reword it, and I'll put my own analysis of that stuff in. Sometimes I'll
cite it and sometimes I won't, depending on [brief pause] what kind of mood I'm
in.
KURT (FG 02): Do you think of that as plagiarism?
JARED (FG 02): Umm—I'd be a lot more careful if I do it here. The last time I did that
was when I was in a study abroad program, and…. I mean, I—I don't think of it
as plagiarism, unless I'm—if I have the word-for-word which someone put, I
think that's plagiarism, but I think if it's me rephrasing that. And I think that you
are supposed to cite it, even if you reference their work. I mean, now, I wouldn't
just cite it—I go crazy about it, I'll cite everything, just in case, you know what I
mean? You'll list the author as a reference.

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GINA (FG 02): That's what even some of my teachers tell us specifically—like, if you just take someone's ideas and just reword it, it's still plagiarism—yeah. So I just make sure to cite everything.

JARED (FG 02): I don't really agree with that. I mean, I—I know that it's considered plagiarism so you have to cite it, but I don't think of when using someone else's ideas; it's cause—you can, theoretically, not, uhh, look at someone else's ideas and have the same idea, and—[then to] be accused of plagiarizing, and have never even read that person's thoughts. We all have similar ideas; we're all thinking the same things.

A common question raised by the research participants concerns the recycling of one's

own previous work—a point largely unaddressed by the scholarly discourse on plagiarism.

Students seemed confused about why schools might regard this as plagiarism:

AMANDA (FG 01): I've heard that if you turn into a paper for one class, and then use that same paper and turn it in for another class, that's considered plagiarizing yourself. Why is that? Cause you're just taking your own stuff and using it again. I mean, I don't—I don't think that's plagiarizing if it's your own words. Is that considered plagiarism? In the technical definition?

All three participants in Jared's focus group agreed with him that, on this issue,

institutional policies seem to go too far:

JARED (FG 02): I think a lot of times [with] plagiarism, they go too far—the school goes too far. I know with [my general literature] class I wanted to read a book that I was reading for my history class…, and the teacher said I could read the book until I mentioned that it was required for my history class; then he said I wasn't allowed to—that was plagiarism, that was doubling up on work for two different classes. Meanwhile, who's to say that I wasn't going to read that book anyway for this English class, and then all of a sudden randomly be assigned it for my history class? I think it's pretty stupid that—they're two completely different assignments, two different types of work: one was a test on the book, and one was giving a speech about the book. I don't understand why. What if the teacher had assigned the same book in two different classes—then that's not plagiarism, but because it was my choice to read whatever I wanted, it was? That was pretty stupid.

DESIREE (FG 02): That's dirty.

GINA (FG 02): Yeah—that makes it sound like you're just, like, plagiarizing from yourself.

JARED (FG 02): Yeah, exactly. I don't understand, like, that it—wh—yeah. It was—it was really ridiculous.

DESIREE (FG 02): Yeah, just a bit.

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Many composition scholars regard plagiarism as a socially constructed concept, and one of this study's objectives was to explore some of the socially negotiated dimensions of college students' constructions of plagiarism. This study's focus group methodology allowed me to observe and take part in conversations during which students discursively established some of the boundaries of plagiarism. The following excerpt shows participants discussing whether the use of online crib notes should be classified as plagiarism:

> DAMION (FG 01): Out of curiosity, plagiarism, in your opinion—in anybody's opinion—do you think it covers, say, the use of something like *Cliff Notes* and *Spark Notes*? I mean, I'm sure there are plenty of people who have gone to these [sources] after they have read a book, just so they could at least understand it a little better. But the people that don't even read the book, and just go to it—do you consider that plagiarism? Anybody?
>
> AMANDA (FG 01): So you're saying that they don't read the book, [but] they just go there to get the gist of the book and then write a paper off of that? Or they go there and steal the information?
>
> DAMION (FG 01): I'm—I'm saying that I had a roommate one year who had to choose the book he was allowed to read from a list, and he chose, in his infinite wisdom, *Atlas Shrugged*. Genius. Needless to say, he didn't even start it; he just basically went to *Spark Notes* or *Cliff Notes* or something [and] read the entire thing. Basically, he knew the book [enough] at that point to finish his paper. Which I don't know if I would—I mean, I don't think he went word-for-word from the notes that he got, but he took ideas from this book and just kind of threw them out there and said, this seems to be the general opinion of this book, so I'll just make it my opinion, too. I don't know if that's necessarily plagiarism, or just terribly dishonest [laughs].
>
> AMANDA (FG 01): Yeah, I'd go with dishonest; I don't know that that's really plagiarism.
>
> KEVIN (FG 01): Was it like a summary of the book, or is it like ideas about….
>
> DAMION (FG 01) [interrupting]: Well, it's—usually, *Spark Notes* or *Cliff Notes* is a chapter-by-chapter…
>
> KEVIN (FG 01) [interrupting]: *Cliff Notes*—I've seen those before, but they're usually just—like, they summarize a chapter.
>
> DAMION (FG 01): Yeah, they summarize the chapter, and then occasionally—like, I know *Spark Notes*.com does it—they will have character summarizations. And actually it's not just a summary, it's like a general analysis of—of how this person felt during the….
>
> KEVIN (FG 01): I say if they use that part…
>
> DAMION (FG 01): I've gone through it a number of times just to help me with books I've read.
>
> KEVIN (FG 01): I know I've looked up on *Cliff Notes* before.

DAMION (FG 01): You try reading a Faulkner book and understanding it all
KEVIN (FG 01) [talking over DAMION]: It was just—it helped me along with chapters in some hard books….
KURT (FG 01): Would you feel comfortable taking ideas for a paper from *Cliff Notes*?
KEVIN (FG 01): Well, they would never really—because I read the books, and then I went to those to help me understand them, and it was usually kind of like the same thing. I don't know—I know what I looked at, and I don't remember it having like opinions or analysis.
DAMION (FG 01): I think if you've read the book it's different, because you are just reading analysis to compare them to your own—and maybe it'll open your eyes to, "Oh, yeah, that does make sense." But just going to it to get a general idea of a book you didn't read then writing your paper….
KEVIN (FG 01) [interrupting]: I'd call that more cheating than plagiarism.

As their exchange shows, participants in this focus group discussion were actively constructing and exploring the social and textual boundaries around cheating, plagiarism, and academic honesty.

A final dimension of participants' discussions about the classification of plagiarism explored the materiality of intellectual property. For example, in his focus group Frank asked if buying a paper would entitle the purchaser to claim a work as his own. The participants laughed as they considered the implications of Frank's question about the severability of authorship and intellectual property rights:

FRANK (FG 06): You wonder, too, if buying something would be considered plagiarism—because if the person who's selling it is accepting money, then they're accepting the fact that you're using it, too. And I always wondered if that would really be plagiarism.
LARRY (FG 06): It's the idea it is. Are you doing your work—your own work?
FRANK (FG 06): And you pay for it, so in a way…..
CARRIE (FG 06): Do you own it now? Is it your work that you paid for? [laughs]
BOBBY (FG 06): Is it your idea? [laughs]

Variation in Expectations, Rules, Conventions, and Practices

Just as there are many ways of understanding and classifying students' textual and performative acts in terms of plagiarism, there is substantial variation in terms of how plagiarism is operationalized, enacted, and addressed in the academic environment. This study indicates

that students must navigate significant discrepancies in issues related to plagiarism. Participants

reported variation in definitions, conventions, and expectations regarding plagiarism, as well as

in instructional practices and responses to it. They described encountering these differences

between instructors, among departments, and across institutions.

Variation in Citation Conventions and Expectations

A number of participants addressed how citation expectations and conventions differ

across the academy. Julie mentioned that instructors from disciplines other than English seemed

to adopt a somewhat relaxed stance toward the use of standard academic referencing systems:

> JULIE (FG 05): I find that a lot of the times, unless you're in an English class of some
> sort, that some of the professors kind of go easy on you; they're like, "Well, just
> as long as you kind of give an idea that it's not your work, and cite it to the best of
> your ability, we won't take points."

Stephanie offered an explanation for such varied expectations toward citation:

> STEPHANIE (INT 07): Certain disciplines are more cutthroat on specific citations. For
> example, an English major: if you're going in for research writing and you don't
> cite something in the right form, you're screwed, because this is what you want to
> go into, and it's more [like] you need to know [it], not you should know. It's
> [that] you have to know this if you want to succeed—whereas in something like
> psychology, I can cite it eight and a half million different ways, but if I had the
> names of the researchers and the year it was done, I'm pretty set; they're going to
> know where to go.

The conversations also revealed differences regarding citation between high school and

college. Erica described getting into trouble on her first college paper which she had written

according to the citation conventions she had learned in high school:

ERICA (FG 04): I wrote it as I would have in high school, according to the high school formats that I had learned. And of course, I got the paper back, and I was like, oh my God—red marks everywhere, and always through my citations. And it's because I hadn't done them properly…. In high school—even in honors English—we were taught one format; I think it was probably MLA. We were taught that, and then [told to] do this. And so, when you get thrown into a college environment straight out of that, it's sort of like, "Oh, and by the way, here's APA, Chicago, MLA; and here's MLA updated," and—you have to remember all those, and each class wants something different…. I don't think—I honestly don't think high school prepared me to write college papers.

Several students reported that such different expectations regarding citation can lead students to violate academic conventions and principles, knowingly or not—and some participants acknowledged that such violations can lead to accusations plagiarism:

KURT (FG 04): Why do you suppose that some students don't put in citations?
WENDY (FG 04): A lot of students just go crazy when it's like, "cite it with MLA," "cite it with APA." Like, you just have so many different professors who want you to do different things [KAYLA (FG 04): right], and it's so hard to keep it straight sometimes. I think that's why [KAYLA (FG 04): um-hmm].

HILLARY (FG 05): For my major I have to use APA, but for my writing classes for English, it's MLA, and they all have different rules, so it's kind of hard to find the difference between the two, without mixing them up.
JULIE (FG 05): Yeah—or else having help. Because if the professor or the teacher doesn't exactly tell you, it's—there's just a fine line. I try to do it right, but still sometimes things come up where, like she said, it's an accident—like, you don't mean to plagiarize, but if you just don't do it right….

Wendy commented, "It would be so much easier if there was a universal set standard of what kids are taught in high school, on how to cite papers and stuff like that" (FG 04). She may not recognize that the varying citation practices of different disciplines correspond to significantly varying ideological and epistemological perspectives; her statement, however, suggests a way we might help her understand.

Variation in Plagiarism's Consequences

In addition to variations in expectations and conventions regarding citation, the participants described significant variation in terms of how plagiarism is addressed and responded to, even within the same department. Kayla talked about how she had been docked points for incorrectly formatted citations on a paper she wrote as a freshman. I asked if her instructor had permitted her to correct her errors and resubmit the paper to get some points back, as Erica had been able to do at another school. She replied that she had not:

> KAYLA (FG 04): I don't think that there's consistency, because I know some professors here that would let you redo your whole paper if you needed to. I mean, a citation's something very small—it wasn't a very big paper, and so she just said, "No, you can do it correctly the next time." But I know some professors here that would let you redo something right away, if you wanted to.
> WENDY (FG 04): I think it's a lot about personality, too. Even within one department— even within, say, the English department, where this is their forte. Some of them are just as different as night and day. You know, some of them maybe wouldn't dock you points, and would just try and teach you the right way, where others would just rip you apart and not let you turn it in again, even if it was a big paper.

Participants addressed one dimension of plagiarism's variability that I had not anticipated: They felt that the conventions and expectations regarding plagiarism that regulated their behavior as college student writers did not seem to apply to the source use and referencing practices of non-students. Participants in several research sessions raised thought-provoking questions about some of the ways they had seen others—both within and outside the academy— handle matters of source use and citation. In one focus group, all three participants described seeing professors violate basic principles of copyright and attribution:

> KURT (FG 04): Where else is there inconsistency or difference around plagiarism? What are places that you guys have seen where, in some settings, a practice is called plagiarism and we're told no, you don't do that, and in other settings we are told yes, it's okay to do that?

WENDY (FG 04): At work. [laughs] I work in the English department, and I make
photocopies for professors. Some of them, they will just print—literally off line,
you know—just print anything off line, and say, "Make 50 copies of this"—and
you know that's what they pass out to their students to talk about that day. Now if
a student were to do that? Say you had to give a presentation and you thought
"Oh, look at this—this would be good for that," and you pass it out to the class?
[KAYLA (FG 04): that's true; ERICA (FG 04): yeah] Your professors are going
to be like, "What are you doing?" [laughs]

KAYLA (FG 04): Yeah. I work in the college of business, and professors in there give
you stuff to run off all the time. I've never even thought of that. They give you, I
mean, anything—just to give you to copy, to give to their classes, and the title—
nothing's on it; it's just some subsection of something that they liked, and they
hand it out…. I see it all the time.

ERICA (FG 04): And even copying out of books, you know? The nursing department,
especially…. "Oh, this is a textbook that our students don't really have access to;
I like this picture, [so] copy this." And then they put that in the class notes they
have us buy from the local copy shop…, and it's never cited wherever these
pictures are from. You know they aren't from your coursework.

KURT (FG 04): But one of the things we'll say when we do that is that this is fair use—
this falls under the particular umbrella called academic fair use.

ERICA (FG 04): But if a student were to use these pictures, or these notes they pass out
to us, we'd get in [laughing] so much trouble, fair use or not.

A student in another focus group questioned the citational practices of a notable political

pundit—and suggested that way plagiarism is treated in the wider public setting may have

implications for college students' practices:

KURT (FG 01): So, part of Candice's definition is that it's plagiarism if something is
cited incorrectly….

AMANDA (FG 01): Well then, why doesn't the—oh, what's her name? She's a crazy
conservative; she has this book about how to talk to a liberal if you must.
[KURT: Ann Coulter?] I think that's her name. She has a book out—she has a
couple of books out, and she cites stuff wrong all the time. I've read Al Franken's
book, and he's gone through [her] book page by page, and listed every single
mistake that she's done. But people don't care, and they let her write books, and
she's still getting paid lots of money to write her crazy books. So—if famous
people aren't getting punished for plagiarism, then what—what's going to keep a
freshman from not plagiarizing?.... So it—you were saying that it's, it's a
sensitive subject, but I—I think it's more accepted in a "hush-hush" kind of way.
Like, everybody—people who do it, and you know they do it, you're just like,
well, that's their choice, their problem—if they get caught, we'll make a big deal
about it.

The Inevitability of Plagiarism

A number of scholars have suggested that plagiarism is unavoidable. Some, such as

Harold Bloom (1973), have argued that writing is *inherently* plagiaristic because an author

cannot fully break from the influence of the great writers of the past. Others have addressed

plagiarism's inevitability as a matter of academic integrity; as Diekhoff et al. (1996) suggested,

"Cheating on homework and papers…will always be a fact of academic life" (p. 501). Like

these scholars, many of the college students who participated in my dissertation study regarded

plagiarism to be an inevitable—and even universal—fact of academic life.

Several participants, including Laura, felt that nearly every college student had probably

plagiarized at one time or another, whether intentionally or not:

> LAURA (INT 04): I would say—maybe this is overstepping my bounds, but I would
> probably say almost every student at every college campus has plagiarized at least
> once in their life. Maybe without even realizing it, or trying to do it. Like when
> you don't understand how to cite things correctly, that's plagiarism, too—so I
> would say every student.

Molly's anecdote illustrates how easy it can be for a student to plagiarize without intending to:

> MOLLY (INT 03): I wrote a small paper one time about something we had talked about
> in class, and I just completely forgot to put in citations…. I got it back and it said,
> "Cite sources." Maybe it's because my brain was somewhere else, but, I mean,
> that's plagiarism.

In her focus group, Candice—an art education major—explained that many artists consult

references as they work. Their references—physical, real-world examples of objects or scenes—

can provide inspiration and can help an artist's work look more realistic. Candice pointed out

the difficulty fully accounting for all of one's artistic references influences. Damion extended

this idea, and his comment itself seems to be an unacknowledged reference to Harold Bloom:

CANDICE (FG 01): I think it's almost impossible to always reference something, that you are inspired by things that you see every day, and other works, and—I think it's the same thing with reading, and being inspired by other people's style, listening to music and being inspired by that. You can't always—it's impossible to always reference something.

DAMION (FG 01): I think you can always fall back on the idea that nothing's original anymore.

Hannah, by contrast, explained that plagiarism's universality may not be a matter of accident, inattention, or discursive inevitability. Instead, she suggested that students may turn to plagiarism in response to "just having so much work to do, and then not thinking that they can finish everything on time." When I asked if she felt that such plagiarism occurred among all types of students—affecting both good and weak alike—Hannah replied:

HANNAH (INT 09): Yeah, I think so—because everybody's vulnerable sometimes, and they might give in to the urge and just do it.

Some participants, including Frank, asserted that plagiarism is an inevitable fact of human nature:

FRANK (FG 06): If you are certain that you won't get caught, most people will cheat. It's not a happy thing, but—it's just one of those odd things: if you think you can 100% get away with it, at least in my world, I've seen most people do it.

Other participants did not regard plagiarism as a universal aspect of human nature. Erik, for instance, explained that a person's character—"the part that is instilled upon you from your childhood, the values that you have"—would determine whether someone would plagiarize. Given that statement, I asked Erik if he felt that schools could have any effect on student plagiarism. He answered:

ERIK (INT 01): To an extent they can, with the policies and the punishments. But at the same time, there are always going to be the people that are going to do it even [though] they know it's wrong, or if they don't know it's wrong. I mean, you can't eliminate something like that…. I think you can limit it…, but you can never fully get rid of something like that.

If Erik had written up this idea about plagiarism in a paper written for a college course, he might easily have been accused of plagiarizing himself if his instructor had been familiar with Eric Prochaska's (2001) assertion about the plagiarism's inevitability. In an article published in *Writing on the Edge*, Prochaska stated, "We must accept this fact: some people cheat. On term papers and in life. And we cannot stop all of them all of the time" (p. 75).

Collaboration and Assistive Plagiarism

Questions of collaboration and assistance are a familiar part of the discourse and literature of Composition Studies. One dimension of the issue concerns the boundary between appropriate and inappropriate help—an issue more concerned with the performative boundary of plagiarism than with its textuality. Marilyn Randall (2001) has pointed out that a determination of plagiarism requires judgments that extend beyond a text—judgments that involve "a conjunction of social, political, aesthetic, and cultural norms and presuppositions" (p. 4). Several of the students I talked with, including Leigh, regarded such judgment with some skepticism:

> KURT (FG 03): Do professors in different disciplines have different ideas about plagiarism? Or do individuals respond differently? Leigh, you're nodding.
> LEIGH (FG 03): I have a class right now, for instructional design, and I've never thought—well, the professor came out and said, "If there is an idea or a booklet already out there, that's fine for you to use, and make improvements." Which I thought was very—odd, because I've always [been told], "Don't work off other people's work; don't work off other people's ideas." So I mean, maybe—maybe some professors do have different ideas about it. And then I had another professor who really doesn't understand the concept of cheating in college. Because he says, "You're out of high school, and all your life you're going to need help—and you ask your colleagues for help, and that's not considered cheating." But if you get help off of a student, that's plagiarism—cheating. So, I mean, I guess professors do have different ideas about it.
> KURT (FG 03): I don't—I don't understand.

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LEIGH (FG 03): The last comment? I have a professor who thinks that since college is the last stage of your life before you're out into the real world, and the rest of your life you're going to be asking people for help, and integrating ideas as your own—somebody else's—why can't you do it in college? Like, he really has a problem with cheating issues in college…. He just thinks that professors shouldn't come down as hard on people for sharing ideas with each other, basically—because the rest of your life, you're going to be sharing ideas with people in your work.

KURT (FG 03): You look skeptical.

LEIGH (FG 03): For myself, I wouldn't want to share a test that I worked hard on with somebody. And, at the same time, I probably wouldn't feel comfortable asking somebody beside me for an answer on the test because I wouldn't know for sure in my head if it was right or not. So that's the only reason I've ever been skeptical about that. It's just—I've had him for a lot of classes, [and] he's always said that, and I've always thought, well, the person beside me doesn't study at all—that's not really sharing [laughs]; that's like me giving them all my answers, you know?

Questions About Collaboration and Assistance

As I mentioned, the pilot survey I conducted indicated that many students are unsure about the extent to which collaboration is appropriate in the writing process. Nearly one in three respondents were unsure whether using a thesis statement suggested by someone else was plagiarism; half that many were unsure whether having someone else edit your paper was plagiarism; and over a third were unsure if they could be accused of plagiarism if they worked with a tutor to develop a paper.

The participants in the dissertation study also expressed questions and confusion about the idea and role of collaboration in writing. Eric described how collaborating with a classmate had led to an accusation of plagiarism when he was still in elementary school:

ERIK (INT 01): I remember it; it was sixth grade, and my teacher assigned us—it was an individual thing, but she said we could work with each other. And me and a friend of mine did all—we used all the same research and everything, and wrote stuff. And [our teacher] saw that we had used the same research, and she said that that was plagiarism on us. I didn't think that that was, because she had said we could help each other out but that we just had to write our own individual papers and everything. Like—the papers were different, but you could clearly see that the research was the same.

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In fact, one participant mentioned that his desire to learn what other students thought

about collaboration and plagiarism was what had led him to participate in the research study:

> FRANK (FG 06): I'm kind of interested in seeing what other people think about
>   plagiarism, because we do a lot of idea sharing in higher education, and, to a
>   certain extent, I feel that some of that is plagiarism—although it's not word-for-
>   word, it's just the ideas. So I want to see what people think about that.

Appropriate and Inappropriate Assistance

Frank's last statement leads into a more in-depth consideration of the boundaries that

students construct between appropriate and inappropriate assistance. As the following focus

group excerpt shows, participants in the research study actively explored the borders of propriety

around plagiarism. Erica described having been asked to write a friend's paper for her. She

bluntly refused, saying, "Do you really want my grade on your paper? No." However, Erica

explained that she now responds to requests by offering her help with editing. I asked the other

students in her focus group to consider the appropriacy of editing assistance:

> ERICA (FG 04): I will edit people's papers for them. [KAYLA (FG 04): um-hmm]
>   Like, I'll take my little pen and be like, punctuation, punctuation, punctuation,
>   spelling, punctuation, punctuation, word choice, fragment, you know—I do that
>   for people, but I won't rewrite it for them.
> KURT (FG 04): So you are—obviously, it sounds like you work from a highly ethical
>   place [ERICA, interrupting: Isn't that good for a nurse?], and you consider editing
>   a paper for somebody a fine practice [ERICA (FG 04): that's fair and legal]. Do
>   you guys agree?
> KAYLA (FG 04): Kind of.
> WENDY (FG 04): Definitely. I mean, it's not writing it for them—you're just looking at
>   it, being, like, "I was looking at your paper, and you've got some punctuation
>   problems with it, you know? Let me show you where."
> KURT (FG 04): At what point does helping somebody edit a paper, or working
>   collaboratively on a paper, cross some line of propriety?
> WENDY (FG 04): When you start writing words. I mean, it's different if you're just
>   fixing a transition, you know—
> ERICA (FG 04) [interrupting]: Like, you need to connect these sentences so it's more of
>   a—
> KAYLA (FG 04) [interrupting]: Or, like, rearrange something—
> WENDY (FG 04) [interrupting]: Exactly—or maybe if you think they have too much of a
>   passive voice, maybe reword it—

ERICA (FG 04) [interrupting]: It's—it's still their ideas, [KAYLA (FG 04): exactly] if you're doing that. But it's when you start doing the thinking for them, and writing your thinking: that's when it crosses the line.

KAYLA: Right.

In her interview, Hannah brought up a boundary she felt less certain about:

HANNAH (INT 09): I'm sure people have asked other people what they thought and what they should write in a paper, and then copied what they had said. But I don't know if that's plagiarism—just helping out.

I asked students to describe their sense of when appropriate assistance crosses the line.

Julie replied:

JULIE (FG 05): I would say—when you are peer reviewing, you—I learned in one of my classes that when you peer review, you kind of circle or highlight or bring to the attention of the author, you know, this could be changed a little bit, you know, it's kind of lengthy, or wordy, you might want to switch it around—as an example. Or you might want to fix this punctuation, or this doesn't make sense, or this is kind of out of place in this paragraph, or in this section of your paper. However. If you start rewriting the paper for them in a place—say, oh, I don't like this, I'm just gonna rewrite the whole thing, this whole little section, maybe it could be three sentences—it's no longer their work anymore. You take things out, alter them, but—highlighting, changing a word here or there, that kind of stuff is just helpful for them to see. I mean, peer reviewing doesn't mean they're going to keep what you say…. You have to leave it up to the author, or else you're going to have to give the credit to the person who actually wrote it—the peer reviewer. So I think that that's crossing the line, when you change the author's words.

Hannah addressed her sense of the line between appropriate and inappropriate assistance when I asked her about the role of collaboration in writing.

KURT (INT 09): Some people believe that it's wrong to get help from other people when you're working on a paper, because that's plagiarism…. What are your thoughts about that?

HANNAH: I don't think so, because they're willingly giving you comments about it, and you can use them or you don't have to—I mean, you don't have to use them. They're just helping you out….

KURT: One of the things I'm trying to do is kind of figure out where the outer limits are. [So] when does help writing a paper cross the line from okay into not okay?

HANNAH: When they sit down and type it up for you, or they give you word-for-word what to put.

KURT: How much word-for-word?

HANNAH: Like, a paragraph; they just recite everything….

Brandy described that concern about the integrity of her own authorship affected her decisions about helping her peers with their papers. She explained that her control over her own writing would be compromised if she worked closely with another student's paper before completing her own assignment:

> BRANDY (FG 03): A lot of people in my classes will ask me to edit their work. Everybody has to peer edit everything in every class, and everybody always asks me to peer edit. And it's like, I can't edit your work until I'm finished with mine—because if I read yours, I could probably type your paper exactly. After you leave, I could type your paper, because it'll just stick in my brain. So I always have to wait until I'm finished with everything that I'm doing, or else I'm gonna be writing other people's work. [laughs]

For these students, questions about the appropriate boundaries of collaboration and assistance persist, even in an atmosphere in which papers are passed from student to student.

The Paper Trade

Many people regard the Internet as the primary and uncontrollable source that student plagiarists consult when looking for papers to submit as their own. Indeed, many writing teachers have searched for and found suspect papers online. Extensive electronic networks surround contemporary students, providing ready access to papers on a wide range of topics. Yet in the same way, many students are surrounded by extensive *interpersonal* networks—groups of classmates, friends, and social colleagues, many of whom are themselves students who fully understand the pressures of college writing assignments. Fraternity paper files are perhaps the most familiar example of an illicit "student-helping-student" paper exchange. And, in fact, some research has found a correlation between plagiarism and membership in a fraternity or sorority (Storch & Storch, 2002). But the trafficking in college assignments is not limited to Greek Row, and students hoping to crib a paper can turn to a widespread underground economy in college writing. As the interview and focus group participants made clear, the campus paper trade is

alive and well. It makes regular (even if uninvited) visits to our students, and for some of them it

presents interpersonal, definitional, and ethical challenges whose complexities muddy the lines

of propriety and integrity.

Peer to Peer Paper-Writing

The research conversations indicated that some college students regard their peers as

potential sources of papers—for prewritten essays as well as for custom-written assignments. In

fact, the three members of one focus group session laughed as each of them described having

been asked to write a paper:

> KURT (FG 04): Have any of you three ever been asked to write a paper for somebody
>   else?
> WENDY (FG 04): Yes [laughs]
> ERICA (FG 04): Yeah.
> KAYLA (FG 04): Yeah, actually.
> KURT (FG 04): All three?! [KAYLA, laughing: yeah] Tell me about that…. Kayla,
>   you're first.
> KAYLA (FG 04): I'm first? Uhh—in one of my classes, I had class with my friends, and
>   this friend liked to go on—he's a very social person, did the work last minute.
>   And I'm the type of person, I like to get things done right away, and my paper was
>   done, and he asked me to do his for him. And I did, he—gave me, like, what he
>   needed, but I found, like, the rest of his information for him. Umm—I did his
>   paper for him. So I did that. Don't know if I'm plagiarizing or he is. I didn't
>   plagiarize the work, though [laughs]; there was just a different name on top.
> WENDY (FG 04): Umm, mine? [laughs] Well, any time you meet someone new, you
>   know, one of the first—you know, especially at college, one of the first things you
>   ask people is oh, you know, what's your major, or something. And whenever you
>   see English, they're like, oh, good, you can help me write my papers [all three
>   participants laughed]. Like—no, I have enough papers to write, thank you.
>   But—I know—especially this year, it seemed like it's happened so much more.
>   Like, a lot of my—my guy friends, that live on my floor, you know, they're into,
>   like, their English 121s, their English 202s—they're like, Oh, I'm having—I need
>   help with this paper. Which is fine, you know, I'll go help them, but I'm not gonna
>   sit there and write the paper for them. I don't care how much money they're
>   giving me, I'm not going to do it. [KAYLA and ERICA laugh] I don't have that
>   kind of time on my hands....
> KURT (FG 04): And you've been asked, ERICA, to write a paper.
> ERICA (FG 04): I haven't done it [laughs].

Questions about papers for hire are often presented light-heartedly—yet, as the following

focus group excerpt shows, such framing makes it hard to tell if a student's request is serious:

> KURT (FG 06): How many of you have ever been asked by someone to write a paper for them?
> HILDA: Oh, yeah.
> BOBBY: Yeah. Yeah, I think—more jokingly, though, than serious. Well, maybe if you would agree, they might take you up on it, but I think they start out as like, "Hey, why don't you just write this for me?" And then, you know, usually you're just, "No, I'm not writing that," and they say, "Ohhh, I'm just joking." But—
> HILDA [interrupting]: But you know, if you were to go "yes," they'd be like, "Alright…."
> BOBBY: Yeah—you know if you said "yes," they be like, "Alright—well, now what?"

From time to time, however, students *do* say "yes," and their explanations indicate that a

number of factors figure into their decisions. Because Kayla had mentioned writing a paper for a

classmate, I asked her to talk about her reasons for doing so:

> KAYLA (FG 04): It was a really good friend of mine. I had the time to do it. It's never happened again. He asks me to all the time; now he does it as a joke, just to see if I would go through and do it again. Umm—but he didn't have the time, and I was in the same class, so I knew exactly what the structure had to be. And—it was just, like, a list of everything that we needed to do until we graduate. And so I got his list, and typed it up for him. Just—I was trying to help him out, I guess. He was a really good friend of mine. [laughs]

Several research participants discussed their involvement in other students' plagiarism. Like

Kayla, both Candice and Laura talked about having written papers for friends—Candice for a

boyfriend, and Laura for a friend whose house she was staying at. Their explanations highlight

some of the obligative dimensions of the paper trade:

> CANDICE (FG 01): I wrote a paper for my ex-boyfriend. A couple [laughs]. I was a freshman here, and he was going to a different school. He couldn't type very fast, and all he'd do was complain about it, so I'd get sick of it, and be like, "Just read it over the phone and I'll type it," because I'm a fast typer. And then when he'd read it to me, it'd be—like—terrible. And because he wasn't there with me, and I didn't know about half of the right way to help someone with a paper, I'd end up pretty much basically rewriting it. It was wrong, but I wouldn't do it now….

> KURT (INT 04): Has anyone ever asked you to write a paper for them?

LAURA (INT 04): Oh, my gosh—and I have [laughs]. When there's money involved, like, I'll—I mean, I can't even afford to buy groceries, you know? I'll pretty much do anything [laughs].

KURT (INT 04): What's the going rate?

LAURA (INT 04): I mean, I—it's for friends, you know? I am not going to charge them a hundred dollars for it. But—I know that are essays online for—well, I've seen them for like two hundred dollars…. I mean, I haven't really done it that long. I stayed with a friend in Jersey last summer, and she wasn't charging me rent; so I'm not going to charge her for her paper being written. It was only like a three-page paper, so it wasn't really that big of a deal. She's just not too swift, so—it was easy for me to write; it wasn't that hard….

KURT (INT 04): Were there any steps that you took to make it look like her paper instead of yours?

LAURA (INT 04): No [laughs]. I just wrote it [laughs]. I told her—I'm like, "Listen, this is my writing, you know what I mean? Obviously, yours is going to be different." She was like, "I don't really care; this professor doesn't really read it anyway." So I'm like, "Okay." After that, you know, I'm not going to get in trouble for it [laughs]; it's not going to be like, "You wrote her paper, so you're going to be kicked out of our school that you don't go to." They'll be like, "Ehh...okay."

Commercial Paper

Another topic of discussion in the interviews and focus groups concerned the commercial side of the paper trade. For many writing instructors, Web sites such as "Schoolsucks.com" and "The Evil House of Cheat" represent the face of Internet-abetted student plagiarism. As one online paper mill puts it, these sites allow students to "Download Your Workload."[18] While most study participants knew such resources existed, few students described much experience with them. In fact, as they discussed it, the participants generally came across as highly unsophisticated consumers of the aggressively self-promotional commercial paper trade.

Unlike most students I spoke with, Julie had not even realized that such enterprises existed. Hillary, by contrast, knew them because she had been sort of spammed by one of them:

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[18] In the spirit of its enterprise, I offer this quotation without proper attribution.

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JULIE (FG 05): I've heard that there are Web sites—I don't know this to be true, but—that you can actually go to and—I don't know, they'll write your papers or something like that. I've seen it in some [Instant Messenger] profiles; at the bottom there will be links that say "buy your paper," or "have a paper written for you," or something to that effect….

HILLARY (FG 05): One actually popped up to me. I was researching for one of my classes—I think it was for an English class—and I was just researching for, like, I don't know—I think I did my paper on, umm… one time, I did it on the Holocaust, and, like, there are, I guess there's lots of papers written about the Holocaust or something like that [JULIE (FG 05): yeah], so. And it came up that you can buy your paper, or you can buy someone else's work here—something like that. And I was just like, what?! And I hurried up and got out of the lab because I didn't want to have to be involved in something like that. I don't want to risk my future, just for one stupid paper that I could write myself, or, you know, get help with. I think it's ridiculous; why would you waste money to buy a paper, or buy somebody else's work? I would never do that [laughs].

Some paper-writing Web sites invite students to contribute their own writing—even if the ultimate purpose for the papers they submit is unclear. Erik described having been paid for an essay he had submitted to a Web site:

KURT (INT 01): Have you ever visited one of the Internet paper sites? Call them paper mills or term paper mills?

ERIK (INT 01): Yeah. Actually—well, I don't know if it's—I'm not sure what it is; it's a site called "researchthis." I don't know what their goal is; I think it's just to provide a database for teachers to look up, or just a general research database where—they don't—the site just started up like last year, and they don't have anything that you can look at, but they pay you to turn in papers so they can build this research database of all this stuff.

KURT (INT 01): What are they paying for papers?

ERIK (INT 01): Anywhere from ten to, I think, seventy dollars.

KURT (INT 01): How did you learn about the site?

ERIK (INT 01): I think it was a random pop-up that I got. I don't really remember it; I just kind of stumbled across it, and it was like, "Hey, we're paying for papers," and—broke college kid, need money [laughs]….

KURT (INT 01): You sent papers to them?

ERIK (INT 01): Yeah, I did. I got paid twenty dollars for one, and I've sent them other ones, but they didn't accept them.

KURT: What's your sense of what they plan to do with the papers?

ERIK (INT 01): I got the sense of, they were just collaborating a database to hold it all; I didn't think it was gonna be like, well, here's all this catalogued, so if you need a paper, just check this out and—and you can buy it from us, or download it, or anything like that. But I thought it was just like an institutional kind of thing— like they wanted to get a database of research done by individuals. And it seemed like it was specifically geared toward college students. So I know—I know there are professional databases, so maybe this is something new that they're trying, with works of students that aren't quite professional, but have had a good educational career.

KURT (INT 01): Would you send a paper to a site like—I don't even know if it's online anymore, but, schoolsucks.com?....

ERIK (INT 01): See, now that's—that's a lot tougher, because…. I don't think I would, just because I know that not all professors are going to check for this. If I knew it would be a paper that a professor would be able to check out and verify that it was plagiarized, and it wasn't the student's work, then I would; but if it were—if it were something that might not be easily traced, then I would have to think about it, and probably—cause that wouldn't be right, because then you're—you're giving someone an easy way out. It's not just they found an easy way out, it's that you've handed it to them, basically.

KURT (INT 01): And that's not something that you're comfortable with?

ERIK (INT 01): No. No, I wouldn't—I wouldn't be comfortable with doing that.

The Nature of Plagiarism

Two decades ago, Barry Kroll (1988) surveyed college freshmen in order to learn what reasons the students would give when asked why plagiarism is wrong. As I previously noted, although Kroll rightly acknowledged that "we know very little… about why our students think plagiarism is wrong" (p. 204), I believe the more valuable question we can ask students is *whether* plagiarism is wrong. The distinction is crucial, because the question "Why is plagiarism wrong?" establishes a discursive boundary that positions plagiarism and plagiarists on the wrong side of the academic tracks. The phenomenological underpinnings of this study required that I try to bracket—to set aside—previous assumptions and beliefs about plagiarism and propriety. The temporary suspension of my assumptions and beliefs about plagiarism would allow the interviews and focus groups to concentrate on exploring the *participants'* constructions and discussions about plagiarism without any of us having to worry about the train.

Plagiarism and Propriety in the Academic Environment

One of the primary purposes of the research conversations was to learn how college

students think about plagiarism in terms of the academic environment. We already know what

many professionals have to say; some of their perspectives were summed up by David Leight

(1999), whose study reported that college textbooks present plagiarism in terms of four

metaphorical categories:

1. Plagiarism constitutes stealing and is therefore morally wrong;

2. Plagiarism is an ethical problem in which the plagiarist violates an unwritten code of
   conduct for students;

3. Plagiarism is a "borrowing" in which "credit" is left undelivered; and

4. Plagiarism is a failure to intellectualize like a member of the academy. (p. 221)[19]

Their interview and focus group conversations indicated that this study's participants constructed

plagiarism in similar ways. Some students represented plagiarism as a legal matter, while others

framed it as an issue of academic integrity. Most participants described plagiarism as involving

notions of honesty, equity, and fairness. A number of students addressed plagiarism's

institutional propriety directly, mentioning several specific effects it can have on the academic

environment.

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[19] In Leight's (1999) text, these items appear in text; I have presented them as a list to highlight the separate categories.

Questions of Legality

Many people regard plagiarism as a crime. However, as Susan Stewart (1991) has explained, plagiarism is not legislated by general property laws; instead, it is regulated by the codes of the academic community (1991, p. 24). Nevertheless, many interview and focus group participants characterized plagiarism as a legal matter. Erik reported that several of his instructors described plagiarism as illegal:

> ERIK (INT 01): Pretty much every English course I've taken has said something about plagiarism…. Like, the legal aspects of it: it is an illegal thing; it's a crime.

Damion's definition of plagiarism, shared in his focus group, included the word *stole*: "…with no recognition of someone else's ideas that you stole" (FG 01). In using this word, his definition ascribed a legal dimension to plagiarism. I asked Damion to talk a bit more about his characterization of plagiarism:

> DAMION (FG 01): It—it's just extremely unethical, and not moral, to take something that someone else has spent more time than you even know on, and call it yours just because you found it and you can just reprint it and call it your own. It—it's just—you're basically, you're almost stealing someone's hard work, in a way.

Julie also regarded plagiarism as theft. Her perspective became clear as she talked about being a songwriter: "I write my own music, and I write pieces that I take seriously, and I just don't think it's right to—in essence, I think it's stealing" (FG 05). Hoping to locate a boundary of Julie's sense of propriety regarding intellectual property, I asked if she downloaded music or computer programs. She replied no, saying, "I just don't think that's right." Julie then explained that she regarded such downloading as illegal:

JULIE (FG 05): And I think it's wrong, too, because it is stealing. So, no, I don't do that. The whole thing with Napster? At first, I didn't know that that was really stealing; I thought that the artist had agreed to that, to get their music out there…. I didn't realize how wrong it was; I didn't realize that the artist didn't agree to it…. I think now, since it is a big deal with artists, that it is stealing. So as far as writing, I think it's the same thing: someone put a lot of effort and energy into something, so I think—as a person, disregarding consequences—that it is wrong, because I feel like it is stealing.

Unlike Julie, Hannah did not feel that downloading was wrong. She explained that artists would still be paid for their work because people who downloaded their CDs or DVDs would subsequently purchase the ones that they like for the extra features. Her economic justification broke down, however, in her response to my question about copying computer programs. Hannah laughed, noting that "everyone" copies software, and pointed out that "some people really can't afford the real program—they're $200.00, usually" (INT 09). Hannah justified her position by saying, "Well—you bought it originally, or someone bought it originally, so I don't think it's too bad."

Hannah did note that plagiarism was somewhat related to copying or downloading programs, music, or DVDs: "It's still stealing, but it's kind of like there isn't a real victim—like someone's not directly being affected by it." I asked her who the victim might be in plagiarism:

HANNAH (INT 09): It's the person who wrote the article—but they're probably never going to know that you plagiarized against them, and never going to find out. So I don't think someone should really care if people plagiarize their words just for papers for class. It would be different if you plagiarized for something you were going to get paid for, because they would probably want something—they would probably want money for that, too.

Plagiarism, Cheating, and Questions of Credit

On a policy level, plagiarism is much more frequently addressed as an issue of academic integrity—essentially, an ethical or moral violation—than as a matter of textuality or representation. The participants in this study clearly understood this characterization of

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plagiarism. In fact, notions of academic integrity figured prominently in participants'

constructions of plagiarism.

Most of the college students I spoke with regarded plagiarism as a kind of cheating—as a

violation of valued academic principles of honesty, representation, fairness, and integrity. Erik

explained why he felt plagiarism was a matter of cheating:

> ERIK (INT 01): If you cheat on a test, then you're not doing as much work as everyone
> else; you're getting out easier. And plagiarism is the same way: you're not doing
> as much work, you're not writing as much as everyone else, and you're trying to
> find the easy way out.

For a number of participants, questions of academic integrity extend to matters of citation

and referencing. This connection is clearly seen in Molly's discussion of an incident that had

happened in one of her upper-division criminology classes. Molly mentioned that about half of

the students in the class had gotten in trouble because they had submitted papers without

including any citations. I asked if she considered such omissions to be a form of academic

dishonesty:

> MOLLY (INT 03): Yes; yes, I do. I mean—you know, you gotta do it, no matter what.
> So, yeah, I do think it's cheating. Because it's not honest; it's not your honest
> work.

Yet Molly did not believe that the students who had neglected to provide citations had intended

to be deceptive. In fact, she described their intentions as having been more lazy than malicious.

She felt that these students had taken the laid-back atmosphere of the class to mean that they

could avoid the work involved in citing their sources. "They don't think it's a big deal," she

explained.

For Molly, however, citation is a big deal. She recognized the mechanics of citation as

complicated. Indeed, she described the process of tracking and citing source information as

disruptive to her writing process, and speculated that that may be a reason why some students

fail to reference their sources in their papers. However, for Molly, correct citations are important

because the credit provided by accurately acknowledgement and referencing is essential to the

production, distribution, and reception of knowledge. She explained,

> MOLLY (INT 03): You have to give people credit for what they've done. If nobody
> gave anybody credit, we wouldn't really know who—I mean, some people do
> some pretty amazing things, and find out some really very important information,
> and they should be given credit for that. And if we didn't do that, it would just
> be…. I mean, you couldn't really say whether things were true or not true, you
> know?

Beyond addressing the importance of citation, Molly had difficulty in explaining the

reasons behind her construction of plagiarism as wrong. It was clear that she regarded

plagiarism as a bad thing. What was less clear, however—to Molly as well as to me—is why she

felt this way. As I have previously noted, Ashworth et al. (2003) pointed out that students "need

to possess not just a clear understanding of what constitutes plagiarism … but also to understand

why it is imbued with its particular status" (pp. 261-262). As the following exchange shows, the

particular *nature* of plagiarism's wrongness is, for Molly, somewhat unclear:

> KURT (INT 03): In an academic context, why do you think this university characterizes
> plagiarism as academic misconduct?
> MOLLY (INT 03): Because it's lying, basically [laughs]. I mean, it's cheating, like we
> just discussed. And you—you just can't go off in the world claiming that other
> people's stuff is your own, or just not giving people credit for what they've done,
> and the hard work that they've done.
> KURT (INT 03): And in your mind is plagiarism misconduct?
> MOLLY (INT 03): Yeah.
> KURT (INT 03): Same reasons?
> MOLLY (INT 03): Yeah, I just—I don't know, like…. [sighs] Maybe it's like…. I don't
> know—I don't know how to explain it any differently than I just did…. It's—it's
> just wrong…. [sighs]
> KURT (INT 03): You've had criminology theory, and things like that. Where do you
> think your sense of the ethics of plagiarism comes from? In other words, why for
> you as a person is it wrong?

MOLLY (INT 03): Because I just—personally, I—I mean, I'm just—I've been brought up not to lie, not to cheat, and not to steal, you know? Golden rule, treat people as you would have them treat you. And that's, you know—it's something that my parents instilled in me. And I agree with it. I just—you know, if you're not going to do it honest, don't do it at all. Because it's not fair to other people.

Many participants in this study represented plagiarism as violating principles of fairness, credit, and representation. Stephanie characterized plagiarism as unfair and wrong on an interpersonal level:

STEPHANIE (INT 07): You should not be receiving credit for things that you cannot do. If you cannot do something, you need to be proactive, and get the help…. Don't just copy someone else's works, because you're never going to learn from it…. I get very angry; I don't think it's fair that people who actually work for their credit end up further behind people who just happen to know the right people—the people who would give them this information that would help them to plagiarize.

Erik described plagiarism as being unfair to the student who submits a plagiarized paper:

ERIK (INT 01): I just—I feel that if I'm going to get the grade for it, then I should have to put in the work. And it feels that much better when you know that you've put in this time, and the effort, and then you get to see the results and the rewards from it. I don't want to go through life cheating my way just to get ahead; I've always been taught that if you want something, then you work for it. And that's a value that I cherish…. So I've never really thought like, "Oh, here's the easy way out." I mean, maybe if you find an easier way—like you find some work that's really helpful to you—then that's good, but don't copy it down just to get done. Just use that to help you, not to finish it for you.

Plagiarism and Institutional Authority

Marilyn Randall (1991) has asserted that plagiarism matters so much on an institutional level because, "like successful forgery, it *undermines institutional authority* by soliciting a false set of presuppositions with respect to the values appropriate for *judging its conformity to aesthetic norms*" (p. 530; all italics added). Even though Randall was discussing literary (belletristic) plagiarism—hence her reference to "aesthetic" norms—her argument remains valid in terms of academic (college student) plagiarism: in an academic context, plagiarism undermines institutional authority by falsifying the basis on which students' writing is judged.

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As the interviews and focus groups made clear, a number of participants agreed that plagiarism matters to institutions for reasons of authority and judgment. For instance, when I asked her focus group why they thought the university considered plagiarism to be a form of academic misconduct, Carrie responded:

> CARRIE (FG 06): Because they want to know how good you are at this subject—what you know about the subject, not what you copied and pasted [laughs] from what that guy knew about it. So as part of—of assessing your ability.

Laura explained her understanding of plagiarism's institutional harm in this manner:

> LAURA (INT 04): Because it's an educational institution, and plagiarism is cheating, and it is unfair, and it is something that should be handled because it's not doing its job as an institution…. Not that it's the university's fault that these people are plagiarizing, but, I mean—these people aren't learning, and this is an institution of learning.

For Kayla, one effect of plagiarism is that it undercuts the pedagogical premises of a learning environment:

> KAYLA (FG 04): I think professors want you to do your own work. They want you to go out there and find information, and be able to comprehend enough that you can give it back to someone else in your own words, or in your own thoughts and ideas about it, instead of just saying, this is what this person said about this, and no one would even have an idea of what you feel about something like that….

For Susan, part of the institutional problem is that plagiarism can lead to unearned credit for work not done:

> SUSAN (INT 02): All the people that are out there that are really struggling—like doing their studies, and taking the time to just learn the material, and not cheating?… Considering others that are out there striving really hard to do the best that they can—it's an undermining of the whole system.

A number of students characterized the problem as being that a cribbed paper displaces the learning that a student gains by doing the work herself:

ERICA (FG 04): You know, you go to college and university hopefully with the intent to learn something, and these assignments are usually given to you not just as busywork, but for you to learn something. So if you don't do the assignment, you don't learn it….

WENDY (FG 04): Yeah, especially with you being a nursing major…. The way I see it, say I'm a patient going into a hospital, and you're working on me…: I don't want a nurse working on me who plagiarized a paper on how to treat me. I don't want somebody in there who plagiarized a paper, who cheated their way through college. I want someone to really know what they're doing.

Another argument that Marilyn Randall (1991) made about plagiarism is that when it does undetected it "reveal[s] the circularity of the self-invested authority of institutional legitimation" (p. 530). Several study participants expressed concern that plagiarism would signal a diminution of institutional authority that would, in turn, subvert the legitimation that they sought through higher education. Both Frank and Mark described how student plagiarism could harm the value of their own education:

FRANK (FG 06): A lot of people go to school for a job—like, the [piece of] paper. But I'm paying to be educated, and I'm paying to be around other people that think. If they're plagiarizing, they're not thinking, [and] it's hurting me a little bit, just a wee bit. Yeah, it's wrong; it's why we're here.

MARK (INT 08): If someone gets a bachelor of arts degree, I want him to get it because he did the work, and because he went through the steps. Because if he didn't, then what does that bachelor of arts degree mean? If he can get it without doing the work, and I get it from doing the work, that cheapens my degree as well.

Erica's explanation of her construction of plagiarism summed up its impropriety on a number of levels:

ERICA (FG 04): Like I said before, you are here to learn, and if you don't learn it, you're hurting yourself, so that's an intellectual wrong. You're hurting other students by putting them at a disadvantage for your dishonesty, so you're hurting somebody else. And, to be honest, I was brought up better: you don't lie, you don't steal, you don't cheat. And, at the very least, you don't do anything that you wouldn't want your kids doing later on when you finally have kids.

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The relationship between plagiarism, ethics, and morality has been an issue of debate among composition scholars. For example, Edward White (1999) has called plagiarism a moral issue toward which teachers need to adopt a moral stance (p. 206), while Rebecca Moore Howard (1995) has claimed that plagiarism does not necessarily involve questions of morality (p. 788). Most of the students I spoke with would side with White. For example, when I asked David if he saw plagiarism as occupying a moral or ethical ground, he replied, "Oh, definitely; I think that it's more a moral and ethical issue than it is a literary issue."

Participants' Moral Constructions of Plagiarism

Many participants represented plagiarism as a moral or ethical transgression. I asked Stephanie about her personal sense of plagiarism's ethical terrain:

> STEPHANIE (INT 07): It's very touch and go. But for in extreme, extreme extreme extreme circumstances, if you're willing to plagiarize, you have little to no ethics. You have no values. At least not the values that necessarily I consider to be the most important.
> KURT (INT 07): Which are what?
> STEPHANIE (INT 07): Respect. Honesty. Compassion. Compassion doesn't tie in, but respect and honesty do…. If you cannot respect yourself, then no one can respect you. If you've not been honest with other people, you can't expect people to be honest with you, therefore you lose the respect.
> KURT (INT 07): How do you see plagiarizing as disrespect of yourself?
> STEPHANIE (INT 07): You are cheating yourself out of the accomplishments you could have made—of things you could have learned from actually doing the grunt work.

In their focus group, Carrie asserted that plagiarism says a lot about a person's character, and Bobby extended her idea by suggesting that plagiarizing can not only reveal someone's character but that it can actually reshape it:

> KURT (FG 06): For you, on a personal level—do you see plagiarism as an ethical issue?
> CARRIE (FG 06): Character. [HILDA (FG 06): um-hmm] It speaks about your character, and, your, you know, your ethics.
> KURT (FG 06): Well, what does it say?

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CARRIE (FG 06): What if you're willing to—you know, I'm willing to bend the rules if I can get an A. So if I'm willing to bend the rules to get an A, that could be floated over to other areas of your life: I'm willing to tell a lie, if it gets me in the foot of this door, or gets me higher up on the ladder. I just—I think it says a lot about your character.

BOBBY (FG 06): I think it could affect your character later, as well, because if you find success in cheating, and taking other people's ideas, then you might just continue to do that, because you might continue to find success in it.

Jared represented the immorality attached to plagiarism as a matter of social conditioning—a novel perspective among the research participants. The other participants in Jared's focus group did not seem receptive to his assertion that plagiarism's impropriety is socially constructed. As the following excerpt demonstrates, Gina did not engage with the provocative idea that Jared had raised. Her follow-up statement seemed like an attempt to realign the ideological focus of our discussion by locating plagiarism in what she seemed to regard as an uncontestable and undifferentiable terrain of legal impropriety:

JARED (FG 02): We think it's wrong because we've been told that since third grade…. And the reason we don't do it is because we have been yelled at since we were kids not to copy work, not to do it off the Internet and all that, how to cite sources…. I mean, what are ethics and morals? Ethics and morals are what you are taught. They're, they're not natural—not things we were born with, and they are things that are taught from your religion or from your family values, your community, society. And what this society says is right and wrong differs greatly from other societies. That's why we think it's wrong…. I know this school doesn't officially look at religious doctrine, but it does, because—I mean, this is a Judeo-Christian, Christian, Protestant nation, and our morals are based off of those ideas and those morals. So that's where this university gets its morals of plagiarism: from those Judeo-Christian values.

GINA (FG 02): Hmm—I don't know. Like by law, stealing things, that's illegal, and if you apply it to words and other peoples works, it's just—by law, it's illegal.

Regardless of the origin and nature of its harm, participants seemed to agree that plagiarism represented a breach of ethics that could have serious implications for a college student's future, both educationally and professionally:

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STEPHANIE (INT 07): I believe if you're in college, you need to hold yourself to a standard where honesty is the only policy. And, if you are willing to do something as low as, like, writing a paper, how are you actually going to survive when you hit the "real world"? You can't cheat writing all of those reports; you have to do all of the work yourself.

Hillary and Julie, who both planned careers involving children, described plagiarism as the type of infraction that would prevent them from obtaining the necessary clearances required to teach:

KURT (FG 05): Is plagiarism one of the things that would keep you from teaching?

HILLARY (FG 05): Oh, yeah. I'm sure that it would….

JULIE (FG 05): I'm sure. I've never seen it written down, but I'm absolutely sure that it would.

HILLARY (FG 05): I'm sure that would affect my job. I mean, I wouldn't want to hire someone if they plagiarize, or if they got in trouble for it…. That would make me rethink even if they were the best candidate for the job.

Plagiarism and Religion

Ethics, morality, and values came up frequently in the research conversations, and the discussion occasionally turned to religion. When I asked Susan about the origins of her sense of authorship, she mentioned that it had been shaped by her religious upbringing:

SUSAN (INT 02): We were raised in the church; I was raised in the church, and through scripture—it wasn't something that we had to do, but pretty much from a very young age we knew what Moses said, Noah, Christ, the disciples, God. And we were able to quote the scripture, and we would be able to see what book it was from, what chapter was from, who said it, why they said it—and we could quote that. And maybe that's where it really comes from, if you want to go all the way back to the origin of the sensibility…. I mean, I've never really thought about it before. But now, you led me to go back, and back, and back. I would say that's a good point.

KURT (INT 02): But so it wasn't just—it wasn't just, "Know your Bible," it was, "Know book and chapter and verse," also?

SUSAN (INT 02): Yeah—that was important. If you're trying to teach somebody something, or you want to share something with somebody—especially [something] scriptural—when you have this religious belief, one of the whole points is to share it with somebody else. Well, I'm not going to take on Jesus Christ's words as my own, you know? [laughs] Well, when did that Jesus say that? Where did Jesus say that? So it was important to know that in Matthew, as Matthew wrote it, that he heard Christ say this specific thing. It was—things are quoted in the [scripture]. All of the New Testament quotes the Old Testament, and so and so forth. Yeah—you need to know that so you can share it. So people don't think you're pulling it out of your butt.

Laura, too, addressed the influence of her Christian faith, though in a more complicated

way:

KURT (INT 04): Do you—do you feel a sense of, like, a moral compromise, or ethical compromise?

LAURA (INT 04): I mean, I think that—whatever. I'm a Christian, and in that, like— obviously, like, maybe [sighs deeply] analogizing it to sinning, you know what I mean? Everybody sins, you know what I mean? And it's not like I'm coming into it being like, "Oh, well, God's gonna forgive me anyway, so I'm gonna do this anyway," you know? Like, people sin; that's our nature, you know, and—but it's—to me, it's by the grace of God, because he forgives me, you know? And— I'm not [laughs] trying to be perfect, you know? And—and—and this, it's like— it's not like I'm going into it trying to be perfect, either. I realize that I'm gonna screw up, and have my battles throughout the day, but….

KURT (INT 04): You used the word "sin" earlier, I think. Right at the beginning.

LAURA (INT 04): I don't—well, I—I said that [KURT, speaking over LAURA (INT 04): You said, "I don't think of it as a sin"] I didn't think plagiarism necessarily is a sin. I mean, I think sins are—are more physically and emotionally damaging than knowledge in itself.

KURT (INT 04): so back then—45 minutes ago—you were using it in a less specific religious term than you are now?

LAURA (INT 04): Yeah. I think so….

KURT (INT 04): One or two Web sites came up that described why plagiarism is wrong in terms of biblical commandments.

LAURA (INT 04): I can [laughing] play that game…. Pretty much, I believe that, like – [laughs] anything that anybody can think of, right or left wing, could be related back to the Bible; it all depends on like the context of their reading it, and how they're extracting it from the Bible…. You know, I don't think that—I mean, maybe God's like, "Okay, Laura, you really don't have to do this; I'm giving you this opportunity to learn, so why don't you take it?" But I don't think he's gonna, like, send me to hell for plagiarizing one paper.

Based on their study of college instructors' perceptions of academic dishonesty, Pincus and Schmelkin (2003) found that college faculty regard acts of academic dishonesty on a "continuum of severity" (p. 206). The authors reported that college instructors view acts such as "purchasing a term paper to be turned in as one's own" or "having someone else write a term paper for you" as substantially more serious than acts such as "copying material without utilizing quotation marks" or "copying material without proper footnotes or citations" (p. 204). Like these instructors, the college students with whom I spoke regarded plagiarism as an internally differentiable category. In fact, most of this study's participants represented issues of intent as being central to the construction of plagiarism.

A number of participants referenced intent in their definitions for plagiarism. In their separate interviews, David, Stephanie, and Mark did so quite directly:

> DAVID (INT 05): I would define it as—I defined it on here [(DAVID looks at his information sheet)] as…. The most important thing is these first three words—purposefully and disrespectfully using the thoughts and ideas of another person as your own.

> STEPHANIE (INT 07): Plagiarism, in my opinion, is a deliberate action where one basically copies another person's works, does not credit that person, and passes it off as their own work.
> KURT (INT 07): Do you think that's a pretty standard definition?
> STEPHANIE (INT 07): I meant to look it up before I came here, but I forgot. Is it standard? I know the basic thing is, if you copy somebody else's material and you don't credit them, that is in fact plagiarism. The only thing is, I just think it has to be a deliberate action.

> MARK (INT 08): There is a difference between intentional and accidental plagiarism. For instance, if you mis-cite something, or you use a paraphrase that is close to the original wording, that could be plagiarism. That would be an accidental case of plagiarism, you know, not something you intended: unintentional plagiarism. Whereas if you take somebody else's paper, put your name on it, and hand it in, that's a completely different type of plagiarism.

By contrast, many academics' and institutions' definitions of plagiarism set aside questions of intent:

> When students present the work or thinking of others as their own, it's called plagiarism, whether their intention was to compensate for academic-performance anxiety, steal someone else's ideas and get away with it, or take full credit in all innocence for what became their ultimate opinion. (Connors & Glenn, 1999, pp. 37-38)

Public law—at least in the United States—would side with students, even if academic conventions do not. To be classified as a crime, plagiarism requires "appropriate legal evidence of intention to deceive" (Randall, 1991, p. 526)—a caveat specifically excluded by many instructors' and institutions' formal plagiarism policies.

The difficult with intent, of course, is that a writer's intentions are not transparently encoded in her text. So even when undisputable evidence shows the unambiguous repetition of text, the determination of whether the textual repetition constitutes plagiarism often requires a judgment call regarding other, extra-textual factors. As Stephanie explained,

> STEPHANIE (INT 07): I think a lot of it will come back to the student's credibility, necessarily—if it's something obvious, like it's word-for-word an entire paragraph … versus it's word-for-word for a sentence.

However, basing determinations of plagiarism on factors such as "credibility" can be problematic, as Jared pointed out:

> KURT (FG 02): Many people think that if a student intends to plagiarize, you ought to regard it in one way, and if the student plagiarizes accidentally—
> JARED (FG 02): How do you judge intent? Through reputation?… Obviously, sometimes there's a whole paper…. [But] that's why I was asking: I don't know. I mean—you can't do it based on intent, because then you are getting into reputation, and all that kind of nonsense. You just have to look at facts.

Stephanie would likely disagree with Jared about whether questions about plagiarism should

consider a writer's intent. As she explained, the consideration of intent would likely work in her

favor if she were ever questioned about plagiarism:

> STEPHANIE (INT 07): I would never plagiarize, but if I were to plagiarize, I probably wouldn't get caught, because my paper would not be one of the ones that would be entered into the system—because they would be like, "No, Stephanie isn't like that." And I don't think it might get checked. I think it really just depends on the bias of the professor.

Many participants asserted that an instructor can reliably judge a student's intent by

talking with the writer. Both Julie and Hillary felt that such conversations would reveal whether

a student's plagiarism was deliberate or unintentional:

> JULIE (FG 05): There's a lot of things that you can pick up by talking to someone who's plagiarized. You can tell if they really didn't mean to, or if they were, you know, caught in the act.
> HILLARY (FG 05): Yeah; that's something big, because it's better than just going and accusing them—because really, they may have not meant to [plagiarize], but they may have meant to.
> JULIE (FG 05): Yeah—and if they didn't mean to, you'll see it. If you talk to this person, you'll understand that maybe they're really confused about what they did.

Julie and Hillary's exchange shows their strong sense of confidence in the link between

credibility and intent. However, their position requires judgments that, as the following section

will show, can be both subjective and unreliable.

Variation in Instructional and Disciplinary Constructions of Plagiarism

According to Miguel Roig (2001), "The absence of a general operational definition for

paraphrasing leaves plenty of room for disagreement as to when a paraphrase might be

considered an instance of plagiarism" (p. 320). Jared made a comment in his focus group that

underscored Roig's problematic point: "I think each teacher has their own way of judging

whether or not something's plagiarized." Jared explained:

JARED (FG 02): There's not, like, a standard—every paper a student at this school writes doesn't go to the Dean and he doesn't read it and say [if] this is plagiarism. It goes to the teacher, and there are fifteen English 101 classes, and each teacher is going to have a different judgment on what plagiarism is.

Hillary found all the variation to be confusing and frustrating:

HILLARY (FG 05): I guess if you don't cite it right, then you're plagiarizing—is that how it goes? I don't know. Like, if I make one mistake, then I'm plagiarizing. How do I know what the teacher thinks plagiarizing is? And it's—it's kind of hard. That's why, I guess it's such a tough topic. Because you don't know what your teacher is thinking. I'm guessing my English teacher expects a lot more than my sociology teacher, or my politics teacher—but how do you know what they're wanting from you?

Erik pointed out differences not just in terms of how instructors make judgments about

plagiarism, but also in terms of how different instructors respond to student plagiarism:

ERIK (INT 01): I mean, it's a gray area—with, like, paraphrasing, that one person might say that it's plagiarism, one person might say just watch yourself, and watch how you're paraphrasing.
KURT (INT 01): Have you had instructors hold different ideas about that?
ERIK (INT 01): Yeah—yeah. I've had instructors that are very strict about it; if it's anywhere close to it, then that's it; that's plagiarism, you're gonna lose the grade…. But then I've also had people that are just real laid back with it—like, this is what it is, and you know you shouldn't do it, so just be careful of what you do, but they're not gonna hold you real hard to it if you make an accident.

I asked participants to talk about the different messages that they get about plagiarism

from instructors in different disciplines. Their responses showed that students in different

departments face a wide range of differing values and expectations toward plagiarism. Amanda

described these differences as being grounded in what each discipline values about student

writing:

AMANDA (FG 01): Well, of course, the English Department is going to be a lot more hardcore about plagiarism, but…. In the Communications Department, it's not so much what you say in your paper, it's the length. Or they look for specific words to make sure that you used the language correctly. It's not a big deal at all in the Communications Department.

Erik suggested that the perspective on plagiarism embodied by his courses in the business department reflected the expectations, conventions, and values that business students would encounter when they graduate from college:

> ERIK (INT 01): My impression of it thus far, through the Business Department, is that they're real strict, especially with written policy. If it's written down, and it's there, then you're responsible to know it. And if you break it, then you broke it; it's real strict about what can and can't be done. And I would imagine that the business world would be the same way—because that's what your professors are getting you set up to enter into.... So why wouldn't they have the same rules and requirements as in the field?

Kayla and Erica discussed their experiences with different departments' stances toward plagiarism:

> KAYLA (FG 04): I was an education major before [transferring into criminology], and I had taken three classes—and plagiarism was never brought up. Except in the syllabus, you know, that said, you can't do this or your grade will be affected. My criminology courses, it's hard—like, they stress it so much. I remember my professor last semester—if we used anything from our class notes, we had to write, in our citations, that we used our class notes; and I didn't even know that was plagiarizing, because I thought, you know, you write your own notes. But we had to cite our lecture notes, and it was just—they're really strict, all of my classes; it's been enforced, you know—you must use citations, and you must use quotes. I know I know it's really strong in the Crim Department….
> ERICA (FG 04): Official Nursing Department policy is that it's not tolerated.
> KURT (FG 04): Is there unofficial?
> ERICA (FG 04): Well, I don't know. I mean, I'm just a sophomore nursing student, and we have to turn in these papers for one of my nursing classes every once in a while, where we review another article—and we have to basically, in 250 words or more, first summarize the article, and then, in another 250, compare it to something you've learned in the course. And I know that with the summary, it's really easy to just—you know, just pull copies out of the article. Or even review another article that reviews another article. It's very easy to do that, and I don't think anyone has been called down for plagiarism this year.

Authorship, Acknowledgment, and Intellectual Property

Originality, Authorship, and Students as Authors

Questions of plagiarism are, at their base, questions of authorship. In fact, a number of composition theorists have argued that the problem plagiarism presents is its fundamental

disruption of authorship. Plagiarism has been characterized as "authorship run amok" (Howard, 200b, p. 486), and plagiarists have been described as "essentially failed or false authors" because they "are seen to have transgressed or left unfulfilled the cultural functions authorship defines for them" (Randall, 2001, p. 20). While the participants in this research study did not address the "author function" in those terms, the interview and focus group conversations were replete with representations about what it means to attach one's name to a particular text:

> MARK (INT 08): I mean, if I took one of Shakespeare's plays, wrote my name on it, and say, "Here, publish it"—that's just morally not right, as well as illegal. I don't see why anyone should give me credit for putting my name on *Romeo and Juliet*.

The Importance of Authorship

Several participants represented the concept of authorship as being based on ideals of originality, inspiration, and individual genius (ideas addressed by authorship theorists including, among others, Woodmansee, 1984; Ede & Lunsford, 1990; and Howard, 1995). These values were central to Susan's understanding of authorship. As the following excerpt makes clear, Susan strongly endorsed the importance of referencing and citation in scholarship. Despite the fact that Susan felt found the implementation of citation conventions to be somewhat disruptive to the process and flow of writing, she insisted that the values behind these practices are a necessary component of academic writing:

> SUSAN (INT 02): I think we get so caught up in citing references that it detracts from what we're actually writing…. But for the plagiarism law itself, does it restrict us now? I think it's necessary.
> KURT (INT 02): Why? How?

SUSAN (INT 02): Why? I think that people should get credit where it's due. I think if it's worth being repeated, that people should be aware of the source. Albert Einstein—you know, if nobody knew that he was the one who came up with the "E Squared"? Well, who was the genius—what else did he come up with? How would we know? "Oh, it's just something that kind of fell out of the air; somebody would pick up on that thought maybe, and through generations we've made it come this far, and look what we've created today"? That's all crap; Albert Einstein figured it out all by himself, in his own little lab with his own brain, and people have taken advantage of it ever since then, and come up with incredible things. But it all began with his original theory, and he should have that credit. Nobody should be able to take that from him; he did the work, he had the thoughts, and that God-given ability.

Another dimension of Susan's sense of authorship related to her sense of herself as an author. She described wanting credit for her own work in much same way that she wanted Einstein to get credit for his:

SUSAN (INT 02): I love to write, and I like to be original in my own work. I would like somebody to be able to say, "Susan wrote this, and it's good stuff; I want to borrow it." I want—you know, I do care if they credit it to me. I have my own original thoughts, and maybe someday these will be something that somebody else can use—a philosophy or a theory that somebody else wants to draw from. And so, just knowing that for myself, I certainly want to do that in return; I want to reciprocate.

I asked Susan if she knew how she had developed such a strong belief about the importance of authorship and acknowledgment. Her reply reached back to her childhood, where the conventions of academic referencing were paralleled by the discursive exigencies of growing up in a big family:

SUSAN (INT 02): I come from a large family. Very large, as—there's six children, and my mom and dad. And even our extended family was quite large—six generations living…. And, as children, it was really important to remember who said what [laughs], because if you repeated something that maybe somebody took offense to, you could say, "Well, that—I'm just quoting; so-and-so said it." We had to know who did what, who said what.

Students as Authors

Many research participants talked about themselves as writers. Like Susan, they framed their thoughts about plagiarism in terms of their own academic and personal writing. David said that his skill and pride as a writer keeps him from plagiarizing:

> DAVID (INT 05): I'm not trying to sound vain or anything, but I think that I'm a good writer, and I am too proud of my writing, and too respectful of other people's writings, to try and use their own stories and thoughts as my own.

Shelley described having posted several of her papers online, questioning whether students have plagiarized from those. Yet as she talked about this, she revealed a kind of double standard between her academic and personal writing:

> SHELLEY (FG 03): I have a couple of my papers on the Internet, and I always wonder if somebody isn't copying everything that I wrote—because I'm not well known. They're research papers; even if somebody copied and pasted it—it has citations in it—a professor would never know. Also with poetry and stuff like that? I never post any of that on the Internet, because I know somebody will take it and use it as their own.
> KURT (FG 03): Why do you hold poetry back but put papers on?
> SHELLEY (FG 03): Because poetry's more personal; that would hurt me more if somebody used it. But papers? They are just there; I wrote them. If somebody did take one, I would just be hurt because I spent a lot of time on it. But if somebody took my poetry—that's experience…..

Students in different focus group represented the same duality regarding notions of authorship:

> GINA (FG 02): I write a lot—I write poetry and short stories and stuff. And if people were to take that, or to take a line that I thought up, and put it, like, in their own poem, and say that it's their own, I would be really upset, because it's something that I did. And, so it—that's why I, personally, try not to plagiarize as much as I can.
> JARED (FG 02): It's much different when it's something you care about than when it's something you really don't…. It's the difference between an English paper plagiarism and plagiarizing from someone's art; it's like you're stealing part of them.

Yet in spite of these dualities and emotions around being plagiarized, student writers sometimes fail to provide proper credit, even when they have every intention of proving appropriate acknowledgment of their sources:

> JULIE (FG 05): I'm a songwriter, and I feel it's important to get and give credit to the person who's writing or speaking or anything. And I know that a lot of the times people don't get their credit because, as a student, I'm not so sure…. Formatting. I'm not always sure about formatting. It's not that I don't give credit to the writer or author, it's just that I'm not always sure how, because everyone does things differently. So I thought that by participating in this I could kind of learn what I'm expected to do so that I can provide the same thing for other authors that I kind of want for myself.

Credit and Collaboration

With its notions of "credit" and "indebtedness," the discursive economy of academic writing requires that judgments be made about authorship. When collaboration figures into the equation, the determination of authorship becomes dicier, and questions of authorship must be settled before academics can grant credit properly.

Collaboration makes the establishment of authorship much more complex. Some professionals have guidelines that specify who must be credited. For instance, Susan mentioned the film industry, whose crediting practices—*the credits*—ensure that everyone who contributed to a work be acknowledged:

> KURT (INT 02): One of the things that happens in psychology is that people work together in labs, or educational settings or things like that. People work together to develop knowledge. For instance, professors will ask students—their research assistants or something like that—to go out and assist with the research for an article that the instructor may be working on.

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SUSAN (INT 02): They should be given credit. They should be. I don't care if it—you know, at the end of a movie, you see all the credits rolling. You're wondering, what the heck is a gaffer? But it doesn't matter; he did his job, he was there. And he, he contributed; and without the gaffer, umm, what would have happened? So you gotta have a gaffer. So Bob Duncan, or whatever the guy's name happens to be—he needs to be there, he needs to be acknowledged. And that's what it really comes down to, is acknowledgment for somebody's expertise and opinion, and something that they've really devoted a lot of time and concentration into, so that they actually know what it is they're talking about. And then for somebody, some Joe Blow just to come by and use it as though it were their own? Who's just a schmuck, rolled out of bed, didn't even wipe the sleep out of his eyes, and, and just borrowed this: "I'm just gonna borrow this": what did he contribute? There's no collaboration there. He picked it up, he said, "Yup, that'll work," he threw it in there, it's done: there's no collaboration there.

In the academic world, where validation and valuation are attached to authorship, the

clear and consistent determination and apportionment of authorship is imperative. As I have

noted, the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th ed.) articulates

guidelines for the delineation of authorship in professional scholarship (see APA, 2001, p. 395-

396). Student writers, however, often feel as though they must work out questions of authorship

on their own. Several participants discussed the apportioning of credit for collaborative

academic work. Larry's question about this generated two strongly opposed perspectives:

LARRY (FG 06): My question is in group work. I've been in a couple of groups where I've been the main driving force, or one of them—and there was one case in one of my classes where one of the kids never showed up, and he didn't do anything. And it came to a couple days before, and he was like, "So, are we getting together to work on it?" And it's like—are WE?! And, I let him sign his name to the paper—I wouldn't put it on there….
FRANK (FG 06): That happens all the time [LARRY and HILDA (FG 06): yeah]—the inequity in, the group workloads.
KURT (FG 06): Frank, you said we do a lot of idea sharing in higher ed. So can you guys talk for a minute about where you see the line between appropriate sharing and inappropriate sharing? For you, is part of it on equity?

FRANK (FG 06): I don't know if there is—like, whenever I'm in a group, I don't mind putting on somebody else's name, even if they did miss, like, the three group meetings or something. Because I feel as though most of those meetings were just to BS—to idea-generate. And if they weren't there, then they obviously didn't have anything to put in—there wasn't an issue that they would have helped us with anyways [laughs]. So, I don't know. I think it's natural to have inequity within the group, and I think that getting bent out of shape about it—or telling the teacher, being like this person didn't show up—just takes your responsibility from you and gives it to somebody else. I would rather put the person's name on the paper and talk to them myself [laughs].

HILDA (FG 06): I totally disagree [laughs, as do two other participants]. I get so bent out of shape with stuff like that. Because I—you know, like Larry said, when we do group work, there's always somebody who takes charge. And I feel like, generally, I'm the person who's like, "All right, this is what we're gonna do," cause everyone else just kind of sits there with their mouth hanging open. So I always feel like I'm trying to get the thing started or whatever, and if someone doesn't help, you better believe I don't think they should get credit for it—because if you're leaving everything up to one person, that's not fair. And I have no shame in saying that; I have gone to professors, I've gone to teachers in high school, and been like, "I did everything—just so you know." Because I—I can't let someone get credit for something I've done. I just can't. And that's why I can't take credit for something somebody else has done. Because I know that they've put so much work into it.

BOBBY (FG 06): Yeah, that bothers me too.

Plagiarism and Property Rights

Questions of Copyright

Before his interview started, Mark mentioned that he had some conflicting ideas about plagiarism. Once our session began, I asked him if he would talk a bit more about that. For Mark, a central conflict about plagiarism involved what he called "the intellectual property issue." As he explained,

MARK (INT 08): I feel that there should be intellectual property, yet I also feel that a piece of work, once it's written, is also owned by the readers as well. Like whenever somebody comes out with a beautiful line, if I want to integrate or get it into my poetry, I feel that I should be able to do that—although I know that I really can't, without some certain permission being done. Unless it's not published; if you don't publish something, you can pretty much write whatever you want.

Mark clearly understands what the traditional Western perspective on intellectual property requires of him as a writer. His perspective, however, shows an alignment with a much earlier construction of authorship—one that existed before the products of one's intellect held exchange value. Mark understood yet disagreed with the premise that a person should be able to claim ownership over things like words, believing that such things should be available for the greater common good:

> MARK (INT 08): You know it's possible to copyright algorithms? Yeah—you can copyright algorithms. It's just pretty much a line of mathematics; you can copyright that, and for somebody to be able to use it in a practical setting, they have to pay you—pay the person who copyrighted that. And I—is that right? I don't really know, because that could be really helpful for, say, security software—then the company would be able to get money off [the use of] this algorithm that they created, which is essentially just a line of mathematics. Yet should that not also be able to be utilized for the greater good? I mean, how can you really copyright a mathematical process? I mean, it's—like, how—could you consider copywriting the line, "2 +2 = 4"? No, of course not; you can't—why would you go and seek copyright for "2 + 2 = 4" and then try to charge everyone for that?
>
> KURT (INT 08): But—but you could copyright, "These are the times that try men's souls."
>
> MARK (INT 08): Right—and that's just a line of statement. It's his statement, and it's a line, and that line is a word—you know, a line of sentence, the structure of sentences. Aesthetically, it's just a bunch of words put right next to each other. Take the meaning out of it and it's really nothing; it's just like "2 + 2 = 4," in a way.

Jared separately agreed with Mark on this point:

> JARED (FG 02): I think for advertising, that's when plagiarism gets really ridiculous—when advertisers can, like, copyright statements, you know what I mean? Like, each company has their own—"Have it Your Way," and that kind of stuff—so now I can't say that? [laughs] That combination of words? Are you kidding me? That's ridiculous. That they can patent sentences is ridiculous, I think. Copyright sentences—I think it's pretty crazy.

As an English and economics major planning for law school and a career in publishing, Mark engaged with questions of plagiarism and intellectual property on a much deeper level than

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the other students I talked with. His discussion of copyright and the rights of authorship

sensitively framed the issues at play:

> KURT (INT 08): Do you see that an author can sell off the rights to intellectual property even while she's still alive?
>
> MARK (INT 08): You know, I've thought about that myself, and…. [sighs] I suppose you can. I mean, it's done—and I've looked over it, and it's really become a matter of necessity for authors to be able to do this. Because if they can't sell off their rights to their works, then the companies have no guarantee that they're going to be the only company that's going to be able to publish this, and they have no guarantee that they're going to continue making a profit off their work. So, really, it becomes a tool that's necessary for both the publishers and the authors to get their work done—because in order for a company to publish an author's work, the company needs to be able to get a profit off of it. And for a company to be able to get a profit off of it, they need to be assured that they're going to have the sole access to being able to publish this work. And for the author, in order to get published, they need the company to come over and say, "We think that your work's great, and we think we can make a buck off it; can we print this for you?" So, it's really become a matter of necessity, because it just— without it, you can't really have modern publication, because there needs to be an ability for profit, for both the author and the company. So copyright, in essence, is a necessity for intellectual property; it's a necessity for profit, which therefore makes it a necessity for publication.

Questions of Use (Fair and Otherwise)

Many of the research conversations—not just Mark's—explored the boundaries of

intellectual property as it related to plagiarism. Amanda believed that reusing a paper that she

had written should not constitute plagiarism because that practice did not involve questions of

property rights:

> AMANDA (FG 01): yeah, but when you use something that is not copyrighted, and nobody else has ownership to it except yourself, I don't think that's plagiarizing— that's just using your own ideas over again.

Hannah represented property rights as attaching to a work's form and not simply its

content. As a Communications Media student interested in working in advertising, she noted

that her career would likely involve designing marketing materials. I asked her if it would be

appropriate for someone to create a corporate Web site based on the design of an existing site:

KURT (INT 09): What if you find the Web site for The Sunday River Inn, and you really like the design of the Web site, so you download the site, keep the background and keep the font and keep the arrangement but scrub the content and build in your own content. Do you consider that plagiarism?

HANNAH (INT 09): Yeah. You're supposed to call them and ask for consent, or write a paper and ask for consent.

KURT (INT 09): How come?

HANNAH (INT 09): Because they designed it—you didn't design it. So you're stealing someone else's work, and passing it off as your own. And that's plagiarism. We had to do that with a class; we were borrowing an image from somebody, so we had to write an e-mail and send it out to them asking them for permission to use it.

The potential sanctions for the unauthorized use of images did not prevent Shelley from violating copyright; she described taking her chances based on the vastness of cyberspace:

SHELLEY (FG 03): Well, you said about art? I've been working on a lot of things—like, making web sites and stuff like that. And, you know, I'll go and Google images, and—I will look at it, and I'll say, "Well—who's gonna know if I take this? I know the Internet is so big, and it's just this one little piece of clip art: "Okay." Then I'll just take it, and put it on my web site, and—or, on a T-shirt—I have to make T-shirts for some things, and I can't draw—and who—who's gonna come to our university and look at the fifteen T-shirts that I designed and say, "You owe me $10,000 'cause you used my image"?

LEIGH (FG 03): are you talking about copyrighted images?

SHELLEY (FG 03): Yeah.

LEIGH (FG 03): Because some images, if they're on the Internet without a copyright, are public domain; you can use them anyway.

Despite the vastness of the Internet, several students expressed concern about their property rights for work they have posted online. Julie described steps that she had taken to protect her authorial rights—for her poetry and for her songwriting:

JULIE (FG 05): I write, so I wouldn't like it done for me. And I worry about that; I have my poetry online. And online, they tell you—even at poetry.com [laughs] they tell you this is protected—there are rights once you submit this here. And also, I have my own music on the Library of Congress page. I sent it in, and it's been— you know, they would copyright it for you, it's online, and it's been processed, and I have the copies, too.

Participants mentioned that some instructional practices appear to violate property rights, such as when professors ask work-study students to photocopy copyrighted materials for

distribution in class. When I suggested that this practice might not represent a violation of

copyright because of the principle of fair use, Erica and Wendy laughed, finding nothing very

"fair" about the matter:

> KURT (FG 04): But one of the things we'll say when we do that is that this is fair use—
> this falls under the particular umbrella called academic fair use.
> ERICA (FG 04): But, if a student were to use these pictures, or these notes they pass out
> to us, we'd get in [laughing] so much trouble [WENDY (FG 04): um-hmm], fair
> use or not.
> WENDY (FG 04): I don't think that fair use is applicable, but that's just my opinion.
> Because I think that—okay, if you're a professor, you have a PhD…, you should
> be able to dig a little deeper and come up with something a little more original,
> rather than go to the Internet, spend a five-minute search on Google, print out the
> first thing you see that you can make a lesson plan on, and pass out to your kids. I
> think that's crap.
> KAYLA (FG 04): I agree with her.

Most of the participants in this study came of age during the heyday of Internet-based

file-sharing. In fact, on the day of one of the focus groups, our campus newspaper's headline

indicated that the RIAA—the Recording Industry Association of America—was expanding its

legal action against file-sharing college students. I asked the participants if they felt that

filesharing was analogous to plagiarism:

> KURT (FG 02): Do you see students passing around and sharing and downloading and
> uploading online music files as equivalent to plagiarism—they way students pass
> around texts?
> JARED (FG 02): No.
> DESIREE (FG 02): I don't think that our generation can at all, because we were the ones
> who grew up with Napster. I just can't grasp my head around that as being bad. I
> just can't.
> GINA (FG 02): Yeah—it's not like we're downloading a song and saying, "I made this
> song up, buy it from me."
> JARED (FG 02): Back like 20 years ago, I could take a tape of a Metallica song and give
> it to a friend across the street, and I could also do that with mail—like mail that
> tape; it wouldn't be illegal. Now, I can just do it through the Internet; it's a
> different medium for the same thing. I'm not making a profit off of it, I'm not
> making a profit off of it, I can't see it being illegal.
> GINA (FG 02): I mean, I understand if they got mad if people were burning CDs and
> then selling them—yeah, that would be bad. But, if you're just keeping it, for
> yourself….

JARED (FG 02): And it's not being played for a large audience….

KURT (FG 02): But if you download a paper, it's not—you're not making a profit off it.

JARED (FG 02): I don't think downloading a paper either is plagiarism.

GINA (FG 02): Well, I think that is—because if you're using it for a class, then you're profiting through your grade.

JARED (FG 02): If you're using it for a class, and you're not citing it. But if you're just—the same thing, if you're listening to the music for enjoyment, or downloading someone else's paper, just to enjoy reading it, that's not plagiarism. [GINA (FG 02): Yeah, that's okay…] That's—again [GINA (FG 02): yeah] this is a new medium of being able to get information that you've created.

KURT (FG 02): So what makes plagiarism more wrong, and music sharing okay?

JARED (FG 02): You gain from it. You're not using it for personal enjoyment for yourself; you're using it for some other means, to obtain something else.

KURT: That makes it wrong.

JARED (FG 02): Right.

GINA (FG 02): Yes.

DESIREE (FG 02): Um-hmm.

<div align="center">Source Use, Citation, and Matters of Composition</div>

A primary characteristic of academic writing, as many research participants described it, is its use of sources. Source-based writing is a hallmark of academic discourse, and it is demanding. Successful academic writing requires much more than knowing the basics of a citation style. Citation, in fact, is only a surface feature, a "superficial manifestation" of much deeper principles and practices of academic referencing (Angélil-Carter, 2000, p. 4). To be judged as proficient academic writers, students must negotiate fluctuating expectations and complex conventions regarding source use and citation—and they must do so in an environment where they are frequently reminded that the wrong kind of mistake, misstep, or misjudgment can have a devastating impact on one's academic career.

<div align="center">*Conventions and Practices Regarding Source Use and Citation*</div>

Navigating Instructional Requirements

Participants reported that they encounter widely divergent expectations regarding conventions and practices regarding source use and citation. I asked participants for their

thoughts on what college instructors are looking for when students write with sources. A

common reply addressed one of the basic parameters outlined by an assignment sheet:

> ERICA (FG 04): Fill quotas. To fill a quota. Like—I just finished writing a research lab
> report for physiology. And we had to have five sources for our report—plus, you
> know, our own data, and a couple of other things. It was hard finding five, and
> it's just—to a large extent for me, anyway, in my research classes, it's filling a
> quota.

Susan described frustration at such a source use requirement:

> SUSAN (INT 02): You know, some instructors are like, "You have to use ten
> references." Why—what point is that? What point is there, that ten references?
> And—and they only want a three-page paper [laughs]…. I don't have a problem
> reading, or looking at, or reviewing ten other sources. You have to find them; you
> have to make sure that they're trustworthy—well, you should. And, I would
> prefer to be able to pick and choose three out of those ten, you know? Or, they're
> all saying the same thing, so now you're just—now it's semantics; now you're
> just picking and choosing who said what from which study. And it really doesn't
> matter, 'cause they all said the same damn thing. So it's just—it becomes an
> irritant.

Participants also described feeling constrained by requirements that specify the nature of

the sources they are expected to use:

> WENDY (FG 04): A lot of professors are very—they're a lot more picky now about
> where you find your sources. You know, they want you to use Ebsco, they want
> you to use all of the scholarly journals; whether they're online or they want you to
> use the actual scholarly journals that are downstairs [(in the library's back
> stacks)]—not just find a book [or] random Web site, you know. Which is good to
> an extent, but there are also—you know, sometimes you will run across a random
> web site that's just full of information, but it's not a scholarly Web site so you
> can't use it.
> KAYLA (FG 04): I agree with her.
> ERICA (FG 04): Yeah.
> KURT (FG 04): So—what do you do when that happens?
> WENDY (FG 04): Just pray that Ebsco gives you something that you can use, basically
> [laughs]. [ERICA and KAYLA (FG 04): yeah].

Leigh pointed out that, paradoxically, the specificity with which an instructor constructs

an assignment may contribute to plagiarism:

LEIGH (FG 03): I think that a lot of professors—almost with some students—push plagiarism. Like, they put it on themselves by requiring a certain number of sources to be used. Because certain people do not know how to take the information and put it into their own words. So if they tell them you need ten sources, two of them have to be this, two of them have to be this—you know, that almost makes a student who might not be a very good writer want to say, "Okay, I'm just gonna copy from this one and not cite it." Or cite it at the end and not cite the actual text. I think in that aspect, professors almost make the problem for themselves.

Participants' Practices of Source Use

The research conversations also explored students' purposes and practices for using sources. Several participants described turning to sources to prompt or shape their thoughts about a topic. For example, Amanda mentioned looking at other students' papers when she was having trouble coming up with something to write about:

AMANDA (FG 01): I know there have been times that I've had to write a paper for my English minor, and I'm just like, "I have no idea what to say about Shakespeare," so I'll go and read other people's papers, and be like, "Oh, I like the topic that somebody suggested that he might have been gay," or something—and so I'll make a whole paper about that. But—I read other people's work to get my own ideas going.

Desiree described using *Spark Notes*—an online database that summarizes, analyzes, and discusses works of literature—to help her write her way through difficult points:

DESIREE (FG 02): If I hear someone going, "Oh, I'm just gonna go on *Spark Notes*, 'cause I don't feel like doing this," and I've actually done [the assignment], then I get mad. But, like, if there is something that I don't understand, I—I've been known to copy something, stick it in my paper, but then just use it as a guide to sum up what they're saying in my paper, and then delete it.

Most instructors would question the textual ethics of Desiree's use of *Spark Notes*, and many would characterize it as clear plagiarism. What Desiree describes, however, is—on a semantic level—a textbook embodiment of Rebecca Moore Howard's *patchwriting*. While her final paper may or may not make a clean break from the lexical and syntactic features of her source, Desiree

uses *Spark Notes* "as a way of understanding unfamiliar material" as she engages with a new

discourse community (Howard, 2000a, p. 85).

As Susan described it, sources can help her meet her rhetorical goals as a writer:

SUSAN (INT 01): If I'm writing a paper about communication, and somebody has
something pertinent that helps me to pull a point across in the work I'm doing,
then I want to be able to draw from that—because it emphasizes and supports
what I'm doing, and what I'm trying to promote or get across.

Susan found that using sources allows her to engage with the broader discursive fabric of her

discipline. She described this as a "collaboration" between herself and others:

KURT (INT 02): As a writer, what would you say your reasons are for going to others'
writing?
SUSAN (INT 02): To learn—to learn what they've done, where they've been, what their
viewpoints might be on it, and their philosophy. And, you know, to expand upon
my own, whether in dispute or agreement. I find that necessary; you have to—
have to go to others' work.
KURT (INT 02): Do you have to draw the line between their work and yours?
SUSAN (INT 02): Oh, I think you can collaborate between their work and yours. For
instance, if I'm writing a paper about communication and somebody has
something pertinent that helps me to pull a point across in the work I'm doing,
then I want to be able to draw from that—because it emphasizes and supports
what I'm doing, and what I'm trying to promote or get across. So, in that—that
would be a collaboration.

Susan's sophisticated perspective of source use seems in close alignment with the reasons

many academics would give for using sources in their scholarly writing. I wondered if she

would regard issues of referencing in the same way, so I asked her to talk about how citation

figures into her source-based writing:

SUSAN (INT 02): If I'm looking at something, I have an idea, I have a theory of my own that I think, okay, now I want to find things that will support this, and so I can go and look further. If I have an idea, and I go and I see, umm, something in the National Institute of Mental Health Web site that, "Oh, I never—it never occurred to me to look at it that way," [KURT: yeah], well, but it makes sense, and it's just what it is I'm looking at, so I'm, I'm gonna pull that, and, and write it down as a reference. But it's not my own; I'm gonna make sure that, you know, people know where I got that information from; who, who was the researcher responsible for it, or, or whatever. But, but yeah: it's really important to know that…. So it's very important to know who, and where, and why [KURT: um-hmm] and all that stuff, and to refer it—if I'm going to use it in my paper, to make reference to it immediately. Absolutely.

KURT (INT 02): Is this something you look for when you read writing—when you read research also?

SUSAN (INT 02): Um-hmm. Yeah. Yeah, to make sure that, that the peop—because, umm, maybe somebody's duplicating a research experiment, and maybe they've added things to it, or subtracted things from it. Well, what experiment are they duplicating or replicating? I need to know where that source is from, and then I need to know where their source is from [laughs], all the way back to Skinner, if that's necessary. So, yeah. Yeah, absolutely.

Composing with Sources

Students shared different responses in terms of the "burden" of citation. Molly—a criminology major—explained the impact that the negotiation of her discipline's conventions regarding the presentation and citation of background information has an effect on her composing practices. She speculated that the challenges of citation may be one of the factors that lead some students to plagiarize:

MOLLY (INT 03): We learned all this stuff about criminological theory. I mean, it's very basic stuff. [Then] you're writing a paper for another class in crim, and you need to bring up the theory, and, you know, how—how do you do that when, technically, you—you already know it? But you have to; I mean, it's not like you came up with the theory on your own, so you at least have to cite that. And it's— it gets hard. It can be very tedious, where a paper will sometimes just flow out of you, you know, and then sometimes you fight for every sentence. I find that how much you keep track of all that stuff disrupts my—my flow of everything…. I think that's maybe why people have trouble with giving credit; it is difficult to do that stuff. [But] writing the paper is not all the work; it's half of it, and the other half is doing all that stuff. And I think maybe people don't prepare themselves for the actual amount of work that they have to do.

Molly regarded the process of citation as tiresome; she described it as "the biggest pain of writing a paper," but noted that it eventually becomes easier:

> MOLLY (INT 03): I've been doing APA for four years, and, of course, it—it's a big pain in the butt. Like, I'm not gonna deny that it's really—knowing where to put the period, and knowing at what point do you say all the authors' names, and after, what is it, 40 words, you do a block quote, and it's—you know, it's really—it can get frustrating. But once you do it enough, it's not hard.

Erik, however, expressed the idea that citation need not be burdensome:

> ERIK (INT 01): It's not that hard that even if you do use someone's work word-for-word, to just, at the end of the sentence, put parentheses and put the person's name and what page or whatever published work it was in. I mean, it takes about a minute.

The challenge of referencing is not the only dimension of source-based composition that affects students' writing processes. Paraphrasing, too, can be difficult, in that it demands "a large and sophisticated vocabulary" and requires a writer be able to "recognize (so as not to repeat) sometimes very subtle stylistic features of writing" (S. Myers, 1998, p. 9). Larry noted that he avoids paraphrasing as he writes, finding it safer and easier to quote his sources directly:

> LARRY (FG 06): I no longer like to paraphrase, at all. I don't like to paraphrase, because I—I think it's easier just to directly quote what I'm using, and to be safe. I—I really don't want to take a risk of writing a sentence the wrong way. Whether it's worded correctly or not, or worded well or not, I would rather just use the direct quote, and not try to rewrite it in my own words. Because I'm worried that too much is gonna trickle over from what I'm quoting from. I hope teachers don't mind, because I don't—I don't use paraphrases very often.

Because Larry had used the phrase "no longer," I asked if there had been a particular incident that changed his thoughts or practices. He replied:

> LARRY (FG 06): No—just becoming aware that the paraphrases can still be considered plagiarism. It's just kind of wild to me, because you're citing that you got these ideas from somewhere, so why shouldn't it be reflected in what you're writing? But in some ways, changing the way someone's ideas work is gonna change the meaning somehow, so I just steer away from it.

Lauren reported that she, too, had modified her practices for paraphrasing. Unlike Larry, however, her ideas about paraphrasing did change in response to a specific event. She explained that, in high school, she had failed her senior research project due to a plagiarism charge. Since then, however, she reported that she has been much more careful about how she uses sources in her writing:

> LAUREN (INT 06): I've taken a lot more care with reading a source and really trying to internalize it and get my own angle on it, to ensure that it's not just parroting whatever I had read. I try more. I don't know if I necessarily succeed with that all the time, but I definitely look at it differently.

Lauren's plagiarism story is one of two I will quote from at length, in order to represent her construction of and questions about plagiarism as fully and richly as possible.

Caesura One: An Unanticipated Accusation

Laura's Plagiarism Story

Concern over the way a teacher had approached and addressed a question of plagiarism is what led Lauren to participate in this research study. She wanted to share her story in the hope that some good might come out of her bad experience. Her stance toward source-based writing is one that most of us would encourage our students to develop. For Lauren, however, it seems to have come at a cost. When we met for her interview, she still did not fully understand what she had done wrong.

> KURT (INT 06):[20] Can you tell me what interested you in helping out with this research study?
> LAUREN (INT 06): My senior year of high school, I failed my senior research project. I don't know if that's something that they do in all high schools—most people that I have talked with have at least some kind of presentation or paper or some research paper that they have to do for graduation requirements. But, I failed it because apparently I had plagiarized without realizing it, and I just found it kind of interesting

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[20] I have reordered parts of our conversation to improve the narrative clarity and sharpen the focus of this excerpt.

that you're doing something on that particular subject, so I figured I could probably have some insight. Or some ideas. I don't know.

I asked Lauren to talk about what had happened.

LAUREN (INT 06): I don't know. But, I never sat down and just took whatever source I was using, looked at it, copied it, [and then] tried to think of some other way to make it look like I wasn't. But somehow my wording, through proofreading and everything else, ended up making it, like—I don't know. If anything, I think that maybe when I tried to put it into my own words, I realized that that sounded kind of awkward, so whenever I tried to fix it, it ended up being more similar to whatever sources I was using. Either way, I just failed it and had to rewrite it. I failed one nine-week period of English, and whenever I rewrote the paper and got it checked off, I could graduate. But if I hadn't done that, I wouldn't have been able to graduate that year.

KURT (INT 06): So, you failed because, you said, "I apparently plagiarized." What—what happened?

LAUREN (INT 06): I turned in my paper, and then whenever we get them back, the teacher would sit down with whatever student's paper it is, and just look over it, check the sources, and read the citations. And I guess as it turned out, my wording was too similar to the actual source.

KURT (INT 06): And what was your teacher's response?

LAUREN (INT 06): She just said that it had to change. And that it was plagiarism. [a 4-second pause] And actually, she started explaining how plagiarism was a very grave offense, and stuff like that, but—the impression I got from her is that she didn't realize that I knew that we weren't supposed to plagiarize, or that I didn't know quite what it was. So she started explaining about how it was a very serious deal, and I knew that. I hadn't—I didn't have any intentions of doing so. That's one thing that I really was very annoyed with—talking about you shouldn't be plagiarizing. That— yeah, everybody knows that you shouldn't be doing that. But—it seems as though the teaching is kind of vague—that they don't really tell you exactly what it is. I mean, people know that if you copy it down word-for-word, that's plagiarism, and nobody's going to argue with that. But I was getting held accountable for things that I didn't realize were plagiarism, because we had never sat down in class and said, "Well, you know what? If the wording is just too similar, if the ideas are too similar, and you're taking credit for it when it's clearly something you took from another paper, then, it is plagiarism—it still is." I think—I mean, she just never—most teachers never really go over that. So—but, actually, I don't know if it's a personal thing or not. I think that they're not teaching it correctly, but I know that I didn't talk to too many people who had the same problems that I did, so it may just be me as well. Or, a mixture.

KURT (INT 06): So—so your high school teacher thought that you were taking credit for somebody else's ideas and words. Why did she think that?

LAUREN (INT 06): Because my—I suppose the sentence structure, and the, umm, word choice that I used were similar.

KURT (INT 06): And where it went wrong for you in the paper was that when you were trying to say, "This is what he thinks," or "This is what she thinks," that you had tried to put it into your own words, but it was too similar to the original?

LAUREN (INT 06): Yeah. It wasn't the same. There might have been—I'm willing to concede, and say that there may have been some where it was the same. Inadvertently, it could have been the same, just because reading it would have gotten my mind into thinking that sort of line of language; and then I would have just thought, "Hey, that's a good way to write that," and it was. Well—it was good because I just read it 30 seconds before. Umm—that's not exactly how I was writing, but it just shows the point. But there were some where I had thought that I had worded it pretty well, but then it was still plagiarism. Like, I didn't understand it—but I just had to change it [laughs].

KURT (INT 06): Do—do you understand it now, or do you regard it as plagiarism now, or not?

LAUREN (INT 06): Umm—she'd nev—my teacher had never discussed the plagiarism of ideas. She'd only used it as words. So whatever I was getting called on—for plagiarizing people's ideas, I didn't hear about anything like that, so I wanted to fight it then. I understand now that—I mean—I don't quite get the specifics of how you can plagiarize somebody's ideas, because, honestly, when you're writing a research paper, and you're finding other people to back up your own thesis, it's gonna be hard to find—well, it—it's gonna be hard to find people that—well [laughs], it's just gonna be hard to write about someone else's idea without making it seem like you're using it for your own benefit. I'm—confused on that. I don't like to admit that—if that's what…. If I plagiarized, I plagiarized; I just don't know now specifically how that happened.

Lauren's assignment had been to write a five- to eight-page research paper on a topic related to what they had studied in high school or on what they planned to study in college. Students were expected to use at least three to five sources, and have their topic approved by their instructor. Lauren's paper was on the usefulness of music therapy; she said that she "really didn't have a problem" finding sources that met her instructor's criteria, but mentioned that her instructor didn't spend much time explaining what students were to do with their sources:

LAUREN (INT 06): We didn't get a whole lot of feedback; it would just be, bring everything—your materials in, and the teacher would check off that I had them with me. I guess if you wanted to, you could individually go up and ask for some assistance, but she wouldn't read [your paper] to proofread it and then hand it back.
Lauren acknowledged that the paper did not represent her best writing:

LAUREN (INT 06): I definitely know that I could have put more work into it, but I have a tendency to procrastinate, which is not exactly a good thing, but—so, basically, it wasn't the greatest, but I was pretty happy with the end result of it. And I was kind of surprised whenever I found out that it wasn't passing.

Several other participants had mentioned omitting citations from their papers—intentionally as well as inadvertently. I asked Lauren if she had provided citation:

LAUREN (INT 06): Um-hmm. I think there might have been a few spots where I didn't realize that a citation would have been necessary. Because, I thought maybe since it was held together by the whole paragraph—I don't really know how to get into detail about that, but there were some that—maybe there was a citation error, and I could understand that. And there were others that I considered to be general knowledge of myself, because it was a music therapy paper, and I knew enough about music to be able to talk about it. And you don't cite stuff that you know. At least, I was under that impression—she'd said it before. So there were some points that I would argue, "Yes, but that's general knowledge for me; I know this, so I don't really need a source for it." But—I don't know….

KURT (INT 06): It sounds like you don't know if you plagiarized.

LAUREN (INT 06): No, not really [laughs]. I can see how I would have, but I don't know exactly how.

KURT (INT 06): Do you agree with her assessment that the paper looked like plagiarism?
[a 9-second pause]

LAUREN (INT 06): Not really. I mean, it doesn't really matter if I think so or not. I can see where she was coming from—but I don't agree with it.

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Citation Styles, Systems, and Formats

Lauren's story illustrates struggles that many of our students have. As they move through their academic careers, many students will encounter unfamiliar citation systems. Whether asked to use MLA or APA, participants reported that their previous experiences with referencing left them unprepared to meet their instructors' expectations for citing sources. For instance, even though one of her instructors had given students a paper at the beginning of the term to show them her expectations regarding citation and source use, Julie still felt unsure about what exactly she was required to do to protect herself against charges of plagiarism:

JULIE (FG 05): She just gave an example—you know, this is what you want, and how you want to cite this. And we got a letter from the university saying about plagiarizing and the consequences of plagiarizing. And then we got her consequences on top of it. Which said to me—you know, I know this is serious, so no problem. Except for when it comes to the little things and citing correctly, that concerned me—because everyone does things differently, and in order to do it the proper way, you're not sure…. I know enough to give credit to the person and not take responsibility for the work that I didn't do, but, you know, sometimes it's an accident—you don't know how to cite it. It's not that you're not citing, it's just you are not sure what and how to go about citing.

Confusion About Citation

Hannah mentioned that many professors assume students arrive in their classes already familiar with the basics of citation styles. However, her explanation indicated that she, herself, was unsure:

KURT (INT 09): What have you been taught about plagiarism and sources and citation?
HANNAH (INT 09): Just if you—like, you borrow a sentence from them—a quote from them, or—I think even if you use a word, like that's a unique element—I'm not sure though. But you just put the—you either put their name at the bottom of the paragraph, in the sentence, or like at the bottom of the page. I don't know which; I think it's either one, but…. Different styles. And most of us haven't learned those styles since, pretty much, high school or elementary school, so we all forgot it by now. And all the professors here believe that we already know this stuff, and expect us to do it.
KURT (INT 09): So it's not something you've been taught here?
HANNAH (INT 09): Mm-mmm [the "no" sound].

Part of the trouble Hannah had with citation is the variation she saw in instructors' expectations about citation styles and formats:

KURT (INT 09): In your experience, have professors had similar standards about, and expectations about, writing in those different areas, or different standards and expectations about writing?
HANNAH (INT 09): Different, definitely. Some like the APA, some like the—the MPA, or whatever it is—and they go back and forth. Some don't care at all; some just tell you to write it. Some don't even want a bibliography. I mean—depends what department you're in, the more strict they are, but…. So far, it's usually been that they don't really care what you do; you can do whatever you want. So that's why we're left to—just do, not doing anything, [and] if it's right or wrong, we don't know, you know? They never taught us how [laughs]. All they tell us is to get, like, two or more sources.

Hillary reported that it's harder, too, because the citation systems in style manuals

themselves keep changing from edition to edition:

> HILLARY (FG 05): But it also makes it harder that it changes [JULIE (FG 05): yeah],
> what, like every five years it changes. So it's kind of hard. My research writing
> teacher even told us, don't memorize the format on how it's supposed to be done
> because it's just going to change.

David described how the many different formats for sources in the information age

makes correct citation harder. He, too, wished his professors would spend more time teaching

citation:

> DAVID (INT 05): I guess to this point, I've never been—because there's so many
> different things to cite, and with the Internet age now, there's so many different
> ways to cite things, and how to cite them; and you have MLA, and APA, and
> everything else—that each professor expects different things of you.… With the
> research writing class, where I got accused of plagiarism, she said that you could
> use whatever style of citing you wanted, and that was pretty much how she had it.
> And she just gave us a couple Web sites to go to that showed us how to cite
> things. I guess it would have been helpful to sit down and to show the class how
> to cite some of the—like, the big citings are easy to do, like books that have
> different editions. But some [are] harder ones, like personal interviews, and some
> of the web sites are hard to cite—some of those things. Some of the things that
> you don't really think about when you think about citing would be helpful to sit
> down and be taught how to do.

The High Stakes of Mistakes

When discussing mistakes, students again brought up the difference between intent and

accident. Erica and Wendy argued that unintended citation errors should not be regarded as

plagiarism:

> KURT (FG 04): You said, bottom line, Erica, that plagiarism is cheating, and you other
> guys agreed. Um—would you say it's still cheating when a student doesn't know?
> Or forgets a citation?
> WENDY (FG 04): No, no.
> ERICA (FG 04): No—because there is an innocence with that.
> WENDY (FG 04): You are not purposely trying to make someone else's work your
> own—you just made a simple mistake.
> ERICA (FG 04): You're not even trying to just make it easy.

WENDY (FG 04): Right…. Especially if you did try to cite them. I mean, it's pretty much just like a mechanical error, or something like that. It's not like [saying] "This? I wrote this."

Julie, by contrast, expressed fear that citation errors would be seen as plagiarism:

KURT (FG 05): What happens if you mix it up, and use one when you are supposed to use the other, or if you make mistakes as you cite?

JULIE (FG 05): Well I feel like that's cheating. I totally feel like that's cheating, and I feel like people are going to look at me like I'm ripping someone off, and that's not…. I just get confused; it's not that I want to do that, like I said and like Hillary said, but, I mean, it's confusing—it gets confusing. And I know that when I have a class that focuses on doing this kind of work, it comes easy for me and I get used to doing it, and then I realize what I'm supposed to do. But then, you know, you go from one class that requires this to, then, one class that requires that. And sometimes, your professors—it's no one's fault, they just kind of expect that you've had enough classes so you know what you're doing.

Given the layering of confusion and savvy apparent in Julie's description, I wondered how her uncertainty affected her nuanced sense of the exigencies of composing. I asked both Julie and Hillary to talk about how their writing was affected by what they know about citation.

Julie answered first:

JULIE (FG 05): It's drastically affected for me. I—I barely even want to write the paper then, because I'm so afraid about what I'm citing that I get totally distracted and I don't even concentrate so much on my thoughts—my own thoughts, and my own opinions, and what I value as important for the paper—because I'm so worried about where this piece is going to fit in, how I'm going to cite it, and where I'm going to get my references. And it's—that's difficult for me. It definitely impacts how I write.

HILLARY (FG 05): Oh, yeah. I think for me it just scares me, or makes me put the paper off longer and longer—and then when I do do it, I try to focus on getting the information that I researched as much into it…. There are so many things to focus on at one time, and it's, it's really hard.

I then asked these students what they would find helpful:

HILLARY (FG 05): I just did my final research paper for research writing, and I know I got a perfect score on that biblio… on that works cited page, because I had went to the teacher and I asked, "Could you show me, could you tell me where I'm doing this wrong?" And I even had a sheet to help me, and it took me a really long time. So, I guess if you put a lot of work into it, I guess you could get it right, but maybe some people don't put as much time in that, because it's not as important, I guess.

Hillary offered a novel and intriguing recommendation for teaching: a class that would help prepare students for the multiple citation demands they are likely to encounter in college; Julie responded with a much less cumbersome suggestion:

HILLARY (FG 05): And maybe, maybe, it might be helpful just to have one particular class that focuses just on citing. [JULIE (FG 05): yeah] because I think that would help me. Maybe, maybe some of the year do MLA, some of the year do APA [JULIE (FG 05): yeah], I don't know, whatever else.
JULIE (FG 05): [interrupting] And that way they could show us some kind of chart of differences so that we can process it.

Common Knowledge and Familiar Phrases

Another point of confusion raised during the research conversations is an idea noted as well by a number of scholars, including Pennycook (1994). He pointed out that

whether or not a passage is deemed to be plagiarised [*sic*] … depends a great deal on

personal views as to whether a piece of knowledge is considered to be shared or specific,

and whether a piece of language is seen as in common circulation or as a particular and

new phrase. (p. 282)

Questioning Common Knowledge

Several participants questioned the definition of common knowledge:

REGINA (FG 03): And the whole, like, general knowledge—like, you don't have to cite general knowledge: what is that? [laughs]
BRANDY (FG 03): Um-hmm—but what is general knowledge? General knowledge for the population of the United States, or general knowledge for AP British Literature students? [two participants: yeah]

REGINA (FG 03): Like, "1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue": do I have to cite that? [several participants laugh] Is that general knowledge? 'Cause people in Africa might not know that. [a participant: yeah; another participant: it's really vague]. Yeah.

Students also expressed confusion related to plagiarism and common knowledge:

CARRIE (FG 06): I think my problem is when it—the common knowledge thing—when does it become common knowledge. Because, especially in your own field, when you're—you've studied it and studied it, then you kind of start owning it. Like he said, when you're sharing knowledge, when does it become common, and—and how do you know [laughing] that really wasn't my idea, I got it from somewhere else? So, I think that's where the gray area is for me.

Problems with Communal Language

Similarly, students also raised questions related to language use—specifically, to matters of quotation and attribution with regard to common sayings. Susan described the example her instructor used to help students understand that plagiarism would not be tolerated in their online course, even during internal class discussions held on a private discussion board:

SUSAN (INT 02): If we were in a discussion board, posting messages to one another, and we used somebody's quote, or we quoted somebody, we would be taken to task for not citing that person within our discussion board. Even if it was, you know, a "four score and seven years ago," you know? The Gettysburg Address— Abraham Lincoln?
KURT (INT 02): Is that an example that she used?
SUSAN (INT 02): Yeah.
KURT (INT 02): "Four score and seven years ago"—she said, ""If you're gonna use this phrase, put it in quotes."
SUSAN (INT 02): Um-hmm. "I want to know who said it." … [So] if I were to start a paper just cheeky, like, "Four score and seven years ago, whatever….": if I didn't put that in quotes, I am plagiarizing…. In the classes that I've taken…, I would have been taken to task for it.

Susan also described having had a problem when she used a commonplace expression in a paper. Susan had put quotation marks around the phrase to acknowledge it as a familiar, widely known expression. Her instructor, however, seemed to believe that quotation marks

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necessarily signaled source use, and she reproached Susan for failing to provide a citation for her common saying:

> SUSAN (INT 02): Something that's familiar to everybody—"The Pledge of Allegiance": if we would write that [phrase], who are you going to cite for it? There are some things—"Where's the beef?"—that are just kind of in our society, that everybody takes as common. It's commonplace, it's familiar—they don't care to cite references for it. I even got in trouble for doing that. I did put it in quotations, [but] it didn't even occur to me that it would be considered plagiarism because I hadn't put a reference right after the quotation. It would have been better if I had not enclosed in quotes at all. That was my notation: "Either don't enclose this in quotes, or if you are going to enclose it in quotes, give me a reference."

Susan seemed perturbed by her instructor's position. Her elaboration of the matter shows her strong confidence in her own construction of what is, and what is not, plagiarism:

> SUSAN (INT 02): [But] I think there's some plagiarism—I don't think that it subdues anybody's creativity, but I just think that it's not—like "four score and seven years": who cares? Everybody knows; let it go. You know, if you want to be a stick up somebody's ass, that's a good way to do it. But in the long run it's not hurting anybody, because it's common knowledge. But when you're taking somebody's research, and making it your own—or somebody's work, and claiming it as your own—that's serious.

Issues of Teaching and Learning

As the research conversations made apparent, problems with plagiarism in college can often be linked to issues of instruction. In fact, several of this study's participants represented their own plagiarism challenges and accusations as stemming from a series of breakdowns in the instructional relationship between teachers and students. Mark, for example, described how one of his instructors—a T. A. who had taught Mark's first-year writing course—seemed to place the full responsibility for learning about plagiarism on the students. Mark's unflattering characterization illustrates the strength of Mark's belief that his instructor had neglected a basic responsibility of teaching:

MARK (INT 08): My 101 class, I had a T. A. as an instructor, and he was very by-the-book—by-the-letter…. He seemed to be a pretty big asshole about the whole idea…. He considered it all to be completely on the student, rather than being also on the instructor to really verbalize of what plagiarism is, and to really let you understand why it's wrong. It was pretty much like, "It's wrong. You do it, you're in shit." It was not like, "You know, you shouldn't do it, and this is why." It was like, "It's wrong, so you're…." You know, he was very abrasive about it.

For Mark as well for many other students, issues of teaching and learning are central to questions of plagiarism in college.

Learning and Teaching About Plagiarism

I asked students what teachers had taught them about plagiarism. Lauren's reply was a common one: She described having been instructed to avoid plagiarism, yet she could not recall having been taught much about it at all:

LAUREN (INT 06): About plagiarism itself? I haven't really been taught a whole lot about plagiarism. Mostly the only thing that they ever really say is just, "You're not to copy somebody else's work." It's just—very simple, and seems to be a lot more than what they're teaching. There's more to plagiarism than just taking someone's work and copying it word-for-word. Because it's easy to realize that you just can't copy it word-for-word, but when people are getting failing grades over things that they don't know that they're doing wrong, then something's wrong with how they're educating.

Laura, too, noted that in most of her classes reminders about the consequences of plagiarism displaced any substantive instruction about the construct and the construction of plagiarism:

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LAURA (INT 04): Actually, it hasn't really been touched on very much in my classes, I would say. I had a really great English teacher—Dr. Connor;[21] I don't know if you remember him – who really touched on it enough that it wasn't annoying, but so much so that he got his point across. But I think he's probably the only person that hasn't been like, "If you plagiarize, you're gonna be kicked out of the school, so don't do it." You know, it's like more of a fear of plagiarism than actually explaining what it is and trying to help us really come up with our own ideas. I mean, what if someone really didn't have that background that I had in high school, and didn't understand that even if you copy someone's idea, you need to give them the appropriate….

I was eager to learn what suggestions the participants might offer for how we might improve the instruction around plagiarism. Desiree noted that her best learning about plagiarism had occurred in high school, where she had been taught a model for source-based writing that continued to shape her writing practices in college:

DESIREE (FG 02): This was my thing that I was taught in high school, and I thought it made me a better writer. And it was—every time you, you'd find a source, you know. If you—like, pick the essential part of that that is what you want to say, introduce the author, introduce the writing, introduced the quote, and quote it—then after that analyze it, and further your opinion on that. And that could be a whole paragraph right there, and you just looked at one little source… that's might approach to it usually—that's my favorite thing to do.

Hannah felt that more instruction in citation would reduce the frequency of plagiarism. However, as she explained this idea, it became clear that, in Hannah's mind, responding to the problem of college student plagiarism would require instructional attention to issues much more intractable than confusion about citation:

KURT (INT 09): Do you have any thoughts about how you think colleges and college teachers should address plagiarism?
HANNAH (INT 09): They should teach them how to cite things properly. And maybe people will plagiarize less. And they'll feel more confident in it. Or they'll teach them how to write better, so they don't have to steal someone else's work. Or, threaten them [laughs], and say that they're gonna check everybody's work. Cause that's probably what got me to—like, as I got older, the higher teachers kept saying, "If you plagiarize, you're gonna get an F."

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[21] I have used pseudonyms for the names of all instructors mentioned by participants.

Lauren—the student I quoted above, who had said that she had not been taught much about plagiarism—actually recommended a specific instructional technique that teachers could use to help students learn how to avoid plagiarism when writing from sources:

> LAUREN (INT 06): I don't think it would be that harmful to just take a class and give out a paragraph of some kind of research something—doesn't have to be long, just a paragraph—and have students rewrite it in their own words. And then have the teacher check it, at some point, and just look and say, "Well, yeah, you can paraphrase this well, [but] you need to work on this part of what you're doing…. You know, try revising it a few different times and get it further away from what this person is saying and more towards what you're saying about it." [That way] students [will] have a better understanding of how not to plagiarize.

The teaching technique that Lauren recommended embodies the kind of direct instruction in plagiarism that so many of this study's participants called for. Beyond this, however, I believe that Lauren's strategy holds real promise for helping the kind of writers Hannah described to develop the skills and build the confidence needed to write effectively, comfortably, and *originally* with sources.

<div align="center">

Issues of Voice, Style, and Influence

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A number of the sources I discussed in my review of the theoretical literature on plagiarism addressed issues of voice, style, and influence as they pertain to student writing. Scholars have referred to these dimensions of composition as matters of "discursive repetition" (Randall, 2001, p. 13), "transgressive intertextuality" (Chandrasoma et al., 2004), and "cryptomnesia" (Bink et al., 1999, p. 293), among other terms. Yet while scholarly lenses have offered us ways to think about how various constructions of voice, style, and influence play out in composing, they have failed to capture the affective dimensions of students' experiences as novices writing within the discursive universe of higher education.

The participants in this study expressed confusion and concern about why issues of voice, style, and influence figure so prominently in many instructional and institutional constructions of plagiarism. Instructors should find this concerning, too. Given that student writers—even those in college—are building their linguistic, rhetorical, and discursive repertoires and skills, we should not be surprised if echoes and traces of their sources figure too prominently in their own compositions. Yet even when students are not working from sources, their audiences sometimes allege plagiarism on the basis of questions of voice, style, or influence. Hilda noted how troubling this can feel to a student writer:

> HILDA (FG 06): I actually was at a poetry reading, and I read this poem—that I had written, myself; it wasn't from anything else. And the emcee said that it sounded like some particular author, and that it obviously couldn't be mine, because it sounded too good. And that really bothered me, because I had definitely written it.

Academic Voice and Student Writing

Interview and focus group participants expressed diverse ideas about the ways that college instructors expect voice to play out in academic writing. Most participants felt that instructors wanted student writing to have a particular academic style and voice. Lauren explained her belief that instructors' expectations and conventions regarding academic style and voice result in a kind of linguistic hegemony that actually seems to invite plagiarism:

> LAUREN (INT 06): Really, the English language—to be put together in an academic sense, usually the way that it's written in research papers is the way that teachers – or, the sources that you're using, rather—are the way that teachers want it to be written. They want it with that intelligent, intellectual thing. So whenever you're trying to go for that goal of wording, sometimes it ends up being the same. Because really, there are so many things out there—I don't know if this is making any sense—but there are so many research studies done now that it's kind of hard to find a new way of putting things together. I realize that the English language has a—I mean, it's tons of words, but [sighs] they teach you a style of writing, and to succeed you have to stick to that style.

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Lauren felt frustrated that questions of stylistic imitation could be used to ground accusations of

plagiarism. In fact, she believed that the academy should reevaluate its construction of

plagiarism with regard to issues of voice, style, and influence:

> LAUREN (INT 06): I guess whether similar vocabulary can be considered plagiarism. Because like I said, whenever you're learning how to write, they teach you the best way to get an idea down. Like, you take a sentence, you revise it and make it sound better. If everybody's been taught that this particular way of writing is the best way of getting a research point across, then you're going to have similar ideas. And similar ways of putting it together, just because that's the way that the education system trained you to write…. Now I'm not blaming the system, because you know when you're going out of your way to copy something like that, but—I think a lot of times maybe they ought to reevaluate what truly can be considered plagiarism….

Yet even as instructors expect student writing to reflect a particular academy style, part of

what teachers want is to hear their students' voices to be apparent in their compositions. I asked

Erik what he thought instructors were looking for from student writing:

> ERIK (INT 01): I think that the instructors are just looking for something that is genuinely yours—not spitting out someone else's information and just rephrasing it.) When I write, I write very conversationally; I want to be able to sit down and read this out loud and have someone be sitting there and have them understand it, and have it be like a conversation. So I kind of feel that that's what the professor might want—that they want to be able to hear your voice in it.

A dilemma that students face related to issues of voice, however, is that issues of voice

can lead to accusations of plagiarism—as we saw with Hilda's poem. David described a similar

experience:

> KURT (INT 05): Have you been accused of plagiarism on any other occasions?

DAVID (INT 05): Well, in high school I was—umm, it was seventh grade, seventh-grade English class. The way the teacher had set up, it was for peer editing, and if the peers thought it sounded like plagiarism she turned it in—the student would turn it in, and the teacher would put it through a board of students just from the class. She'd give it to the class, some other classmates, to see if it sounded like plagiarism. And it got turned in for sounding too much like Gary Paulsen's *Hatchet*…. At that point, I was a huge Gary Paulsen fan. And so she turned it in through the board, to the students, and it came back that they didn't agree that it was plagiarized—but she still sent a note home to my parents saying that I was put up for review by some peers. I guess what could have happened—I don't remember, that was a while ago, and I wasn't real big on writing back then—I didn't plagiarize to my knowledge, but I had read that book so many times that it could have gotten mixed in there somehow, I don't know how, but I guess if you read enough of someone your style becomes the same. And that's all I read back then; I must have read 15 or 20 books by Gary Paulsen at that point. And I guess maybe that could have happened, but in no way did I mean to plagiarize Gary Paulsen at all.

Several participants mentioned having seen voice-based explanations used as a response tactic to diffuse an instructor's plagiarism suspicions. For instance, Stephanie mentioned overhearing several classmates from her research writing class talking about how they hoped their instructor would not pick up on the fact that they had plagiarized. The students were concerned because the papers they submitted were written on a much more advanced level than their previous assignments had been. According to Stephanie, the instructor "hinted that it looked like way too much of a jump to be humanly possible," but the students successfully defended themselves by explaining that they had gotten "peer edits, and dah, dah, dah, dah."

As Stephanie's anecdote shows, a little knowledge of composition pedagogy can allow a sly plagiarist to successfully bypass one of our basic plagiarism detection processes. In his focus group, Larry mentioned another tactic for defeating voice-based accusations:

LARRY (FG 06): The only way you could get caught is if someone said something—if you spread it around too much or the person who wrote it said something. Because, otherwise, "That doesn't sound like your wording." "Oh, I stayed up all night doing this; I was on coffee, blah, blah, blah." You know, whatever. It's hard to say if you only turn in a couple of page papers to a teacher that, "Oh, that wording is not the same." Like: "What do you mean? This is how I always write; do you want samples?" And you come back with samples of your friend's writing.

Paradoxically, some of the guidelines and principles we hope will help students write in their own academic voices with strength and confidence can, instead, impede their composing processes—even making students afraid to write well. The participants in Frank's focus group seemed to agree that instructors will question the authorship of a student paper that sounds too good:

FRANK (FG 06): I believe that that happens all the time…. Teachers are looking for this, so any decent work that we do, they go and [HILDA (FG 06): question it]—yeah. Like, their prerequisite is to question it—to be like, this is already out there. And I don't think that's good for us….

KURT (FG 06): So have you ever written down—dumbed down your papers, or written below your ability?

HILDA (FG 06): I have never written below my ability, but sometimes I think, "Oh, that was a really good sentence—maybe I should change it," you know? Just because I've had professors be like, "Oh… that looks interesting…." You know, just kind of second guessing if I wrote it or not.

BOBBY (FG 06): Yeah, sometimes you stop and think, "Maybe that sounds too intellectual—they're gonna second-guess that [HILDA laughs], so I should change it around a little bit" or "That sounds kind of like something this author would say—I shouldn't do that."

The suspicion of quality in student writing reinforces dichotomies of power and authority in the classroom. As Hilda explained, it also creates a difficult climate for both teachers and students:

KURT (FG 06): How has your concern about plagiarism, or your questions about plagiarism, affected how you write?

HILDA (FG 06): It sometimes makes me afraid to write well. Because that's always
      been—that's the one thing I can do…: I'm really good at writing. And sometimes
      when a professor or teacher will read it, they just don't believe it's yours. Because
      there are, honestly, a lot of professors out there that think we're a bunch of
      idiots—and a lot of stupid papers. My mom is a college professor, and it's
      amazing some of the papers she gets—it looks like they're written by second
      graders. So as soon as they are written somewhat well, teachers start to question
      it. And that bothers me.

Generative Plagiarism: Copying, Modeling, and Imitation

In the literature review, I pointed out various academic perspectives on matters related to affirmative uses of copying, modeling, and imitation. Scholars noted that these practices once held a central role in composition instruction (T. Miller, 2004), and that some cultural groups continue to embrace them for the community-building purposes they can serve (see McLeod, 2001, among others). Some theorists, among them Mary Minock (1995), have added that strategies of imitation can allow writers to create valuable new works—"dialogues of shared and appropriated language that are nonetheless original based on their situatedness in context" (p. 495). A number of research participants espoused these concepts as they addressed plagiarism.

Susan, for instance, suggested that there can be affirmative and pedagogical reasons for seemingly plagiaristic composing practices:

SUSAN (INT 02): A lot of instructors do want their stuff back, as close to verbatim, to
      make sure that you understood…. I had one like that last semester, writing a
      research report, and he all but wrote the thing for us. He wanted us to use his
      words verbatim. So I said, "Well, I don't want to plagiarize you," and he's like,
      "No, go ahead; I want to know that everybody got it."

Other participants noted that compositional practices of copying and imitation can be valuable strategies—both for learning as well as for composing a new and original creation. Amanda recalled a practical application for copying in a film she had seen:

AMANDA (FG 01): Have you seen the movie *Finding Forrester*? The way he gets the kid to—well, it's with Sean Connery, he's a famous writer, and there's a kid who lives in his neighborhood who is really intelligent but doesn't apply himself. So he takes the kid and he makes him copy his work, word for word, just to get his ideas going. And I think—that's a totally different subject than directly taking somebody's work and saying it's yours.

I asked Candice, an art major, if art students do any direct copying of works—something

I had seen in museums:

KURT (FG 01): Literal copying. You see it in museums sometimes; people sit in front of a Renoir, and….

CANDICE (FG 01): Oh, yeah. That's considered wrong. I had a friend who was in trouble for something like that. There was a photograph on *National Geographic*, and she copied it with a pencil. It was beautiful; it was gorgeous. But she mailed it in to a contest and she won. And she got this nasty letter back, because a reader of the magazine had written in and said, "Look—this is exactly like the *National Geographic* cover." And they said that what she did was wrong, and blah, blah, blah. The thing is, it kind of got twisted around, because they interviewed her on the phone, and she told them that she had copied it, [but] the person that took down the interview changed what she had said so it sounded like she had changed the image—but she hadn't. So, it got weird, but that's—that's looked down upon.

Candice did point out, though, that copying could be a useful learning technique:

CANDICE (FG 01): When I was learning to draw, I'd copy things—even trace things sometimes. When you're learning, I think it's important. But usually we try to have 3-D references—like in figure drawing, we draw from models. We don't draw from photographs unless it's our own photograph—then we try to stick with that.

Like Susan, Amanda raised a question about the appropriateness of an instructor's

instructions to copy work (a technique that many writing instructors know as *genre analysis*).

AMANDA (FG 01):[22] Well, the Communications Department encourages unconscious plagiarism. Like, I have one professor who tells me all the time to get samples of different ways to write references, different ways to do résumés, different ways to write, you know, whatever—job descriptions, things like that; and pretty much look at all the different ways, and unconsciously copy or plagiarize it….

KURT (FG 01): But is the message "Copy this," or….

AMANDA (FG 01): No, it's "Look at it and see that that's how you're supposed to do it"; and not so much copy what it said, but how it said….

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[22] I have reordered parts of our conversation to improve the narrative clarity and sharpen the focus of this excerpt.

CANDICE (FG 01): I think that theory goes into art, as well…. You want to have references, because if you want something to look realistic—if that's your goal—then it's hard to do that without a reference. And some teachers require references before you—while you have a design—like, in your notebook. You need to have references of other artists you've looked at, just so you can learn about other artists. A lot of teachers encourage not, like, necessarily directly copying from a reference, but using a reference and changing it enough that you might not know, or [using] parts of something—or you can reference it yourself, in the title of the work: "Picasso-Inspired whatever." You can do that.

The participants also distinguished between plagiarism of a work and updating or reinterpreting an existing work in order to create something new:

MARK (INT 08): Whether or not [Shakespeare] invented the story of *Romeo and Juliet* is not really important to me. Uhh, if he had rewritten it, that what—I wouldn't necessarily consider that plagiarism; I mean, if I took *Romeo and Juliet*, and I changed the story, and I updated it—and say I completely changed every single line—you know, from the middle English to the modern-day English—I wouldn't consider that plagiarism, necessarily, because it is a different work, in a sense. And it is in a very real way—it can be interpreted differently. You can't give the same interpretation, because I—it's not going through his lens and his mind, it's going through mine. And it's going through—well, it's going off my interpretation of his work, and what it would mean in today's society. And that would be a different—there would be a difference in the work, then.

But Mark also talked about another dimension of imitative composition—derivative composition to create something new. He explored whether a writer might incorporate a specific, identifiable element from another work (something beyond a reworking of a public-domain plot line or a Kurasawan recontextualization of the characters). This is an entirely acceptable composing strategy in the context of canonical literature, but not a technique we permit students to employ. This distinction is why, in a comment about the difference between literary and scholarly plagiarism, Thomas Jeffers (2002) explained,

What may be (barely) defensible in an imaginative mode like fiction is indefensible when

in an expository mode…, where a writer is obliged not only to acknowledge his source

but to stipulate that his own purpose is, or may be, different. (p. 55).

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Setting modes aside, several other students noted the creative potential of imitative composition, even relating it to literary theory. I asked Mark if he thought that it was ever okay to plagiarize—if there were any good or justifiable reasons. An extended excerpt from our conversation reveals Mark's active exploration and negotiation of how questions of copying, recontextualization, and literary homage figure into the construction of plagiarism:

> MARK (INT 08): I think there are justifiable reasons for borrowing somebody else's works. Uhh, well, not complete works, but, you know, parts of somebody's works, to create something new. I think in that—in that essence, it would be a tribute rather than just stealing somebody else's work for the sake of one's own…. Would it be okay, say, if I took, "These are the fragments I shore against my ruins" and then I used that as a line in a longer piece of prose? I think that can be used. I mean, why not; why should—if somebody's using that in a piece of prose, why not? It—it's a tri—then it would be really a tribute to Eliot, rather than, umm, stealing from Eliot. You know what I'm saying?.... I mean, I would recognize, hey, this is not written by me, but this is a tribute to him, because I've taken it and I've made it new; I've made it into something else, something different. And that, that could be kind of going back to the high modernist ideal, taking—whenever you create a new piece of literature, you're really reflecting everything else that came before it; you're reflecting all of your influences, you're reflecting everything else that came before in the literary canon.
>
> KURT (INT 08): What if you put it in a poem?
>
> MARK (INT 08): Sure. I mean, if it's—it depends on the context of the poem as well.
>
> KURT (INT 08): So, you said that you'd acknowledge that. But, you'd acknowledge that to yourself, but would you acknowledge that to readers? Like, would you put it—would you footnote the line? Would that be necessary?
>
> MARK (INT 08): I think that footnoting it would be appropriate. I don't know if it should be necessary or not. I—I honestly don't know. Umm, if it—it depends on the audience as well, maybe. If you're going off an educated audience, it probably wouldn't be necessary to footnote it, because they would all know where it came from. And it would possibly also be, umm, known that this probably is a tribute. And—if I were to use that in a poem, or in a book that I wanted to be published, and I took a line—"These are fragments I shored against my ruins"— under my acknowledgments in the beginning [KURT: um-hmm], I'd put down T. S. Eliot, or I'd say "For T. S. Eliot", or something like that.
>
> KURT (INT 08): That's actually a tradition that many poets work in, you know, is a line that "For so-and-so," and it's a poem written after the style. But, umm, a line—if I took a line like – "she, uhh, gazes across a hillside, sniffs the air, eats a few flowers, and trudges off"—that's considerably less widely known than Eliot [MARK (INT 08): um-hmm], and it's from a living poet. So, would you think that that would be appropriate for me to include?

MARK (INT 08): In, like, acknowledgments? It would be appropriate. If you're borrowing from somebody else's work, and you're using it in your own, umm, I think it would – probably, it—it's just, it would be nice, to really have their name under the acknowledgments. And I think, ethically, it'd probably be best. Not necessarily necessary, but I think, ethically, I feel like everyone should be compelled to do it anyway.

In this exchange, Mark represented a "high modernist" perspective on what might be called "literary sampling"—a discursive practice analogous to the musical sampling that, as I have noted, McLeod (2001) described as "a way of paying homage to older artists" (p. 82). It also suggests how a student writer might engage in a *generative plagiarism*, lifting from something old in order to produce a creatively original new.

Factors In and Decisions About Plagiarism

The literature review addressed a number of factors that scholars had associated with plagiarism. Love and Simmons (1998) found that a "lack of competency" and "time pressure" (p. 542) led some students to cheat and plagiarize, while "personal confidence" and a "desire to work or learn" (p. 544) curb these behaviors." They further reported that "situational, environmental, and personal characteristics affect whether a student will cheat or plagiarize" (p. 546). Donald McCabe's research mentioned personal factors—"laziness, a lack of responsibility, a lack of character, poor self-image, a lack of pride in a job well done, and a lack of personal integrity" (McCabe et al., 2001a, p. 228). Because so many academic professionals make claims about the reasons behind student plagiarism, I was eager to learn how the participants in my study addressed these issues.

Plagiarism, Validation, and the High-Stakes Academic Environment

As I have already discussed, the textual conventions that academic writers employ to reference and credit their sources represent a "superficial manifestation" of much deeper

principles and practices of academic discourse (Angélil-Carter, 2000, p. 4). In the same manner,

a number of study participants described the phenomenon of student plagiarism as resulting from

issues much deeper than we might ever imagine. As the research conversations demonstrated,

some aspects of student plagiarism involve questions at the heart of education itself. Frank, for

example, felt student plagiarism to be closely related to issues of power, authority, and

validation. He presented this construction of plagiarism most directly when I asked if it was

important for colleges to actively police student plagiarism. Frank's response represented

plagiarism as a symptom of a much deeper condition:

> FRANK (FG 06): I think [colleges] should address the core issues first—like, the things that exemplify themselves through plagiarism—that show themselves through plagiarism. I think they should address those issues and stop being the policeman.
> KURT (FG 06): What do you see as the core issues being?
> FRANK (FG 06): It relates back to the validity thing. We're always trying to be confirmed, and told that what our thoughts are is correct. And I don't know if that's so true; like, I don't know if that's such an easy thing to do. So—yeah, that's it: validity. That's the core issue: what is valid, what is a valid idea that's your own, and who decides. So address that.

In the following excerpt, Frank explained his belief that plagiarism results from a

student's desire for intellectual and academic validation:

> FRANK (FG 06): The function of plagiarism, in my mind, would be [that] we all want success, we all want power, our ability to get things. And if you plagiarize, then you are obviously using somebody else who is already validated. And like—how could you go wrong? I mean, it's a sure step. Whereas I'm not brilliant, so I can't put in, like, good words, [or] make sense out of, like, complicated issues. But if I use somebody else's work, it's a sure thing.

As Frank described it, attempts to reduce student plagiarism through improved policing tactics

would be misguided. A better approach, he explained, would be to "eliminate the element of

failure" that drives some students to lift others' words:

FRANK (FG 06): Instead of trying to catch everyone that steals ideas…, you could make it so that they're willing to put out ideas that are bad—that aren't correct—and have it not hurt them, if that makes sense. Like, if you didn't have people stressing out about trying to put together a coherent argument; they just put out what they really thought, and they were able to say, "I don't really know how I feel about this…." I would want them to foster diversity within the field—like, to integrate what they know, and not [just] what they're being taught.

While the other participants in Frank's focus were somewhat reluctant to embrace his suggestions for reform, they clearly embraced his basic premise that contemporary college students face a competitive, high-stakes educational environment. As Frank's focus group session wrapped up, I asked if participants if they wished to share any final thoughts. Although somewhat light-hearted, Frank's last, memorable comment powerfully articulated the high stakes of academic writing as some students construct it:

FRANK (FG 06): Right now, suicide rates are going up, children have more prescription medication than any other time in the world—and I think that these issues relate, because people are plagiarizing—might not be true, but in my mind they're plagiarizing to do well in other people's eyes. And I think that it relates back— like, we're rejecting a lot of people, to the point that they have to take other people's ideas. And it's really—it starts in high school, with, "Oh, I'm just gonna do this."

HILDA: Yeah, there's so much pressure to do well.

BOBBY: It—it's a big issue. Like, they get so down and out, they just want to quit, because they can't—be as good as everyone wants them to be.

FRANK: I can't know what Eric Ericsson knew. [Hilda laughs] I mean—like, I really can't! The guy was much smarter than I am. And, like—I can't see the world that way; I'm sorry. I'll see it differently, but then, I'll get an F.

Contributing Factors in Student Plagiarism

Participants in this study mentioned that students' decisions about plagiarism can be affected by a number of somewhat abstract factors related to the nature and focus of a course. Lauren felt that the instructional approach taken by her college composition instructor made plagiarism much less likely:

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LAUREN (INT 06): I have Dr. Emma, so it's kind of—there really aren't any chances to plagiarize. It's mostly a personalized kind of—you just write. A lot of it is, maybe, narrative style. So, really, you—I guess you could go out of your way and find some story and plagiarize that, but that doesn't happen often, because you're writing about your own personal experiences. I mean, I—when I take Research Writing, there are probably going to be more people who do that, but when it's not a research setting, plagiarism, I don't think, is all that more common.

As I previously mentioned, one study participant—Molly—noted that about half of the students from her upper-division criminology class had been questioned about plagiarism for having failed to cite the sources referenced in their papers. While Molly did not believe that these students had intended any deception, she did feel that the students had been capitalizing on the instructor's laid-back demeanor to avoid the work of proper documentation:

MOLLY (INT 03): They just didn't cite any sources. I think they did the research, and didn't give anyone any credit…. I don't think it was malicious; I think people were just lazy. The class had a really laid-back atmosphere; the class had a really, really laid-back atmosphere, and so I think they took it to think that they didn't have to do the work to cite it and everything…. I think [the professor] was irritated with the lack of citations and everything, because I think people had taken advantage of the fact that he was so laid-back.

Molly represented student laziness and a "laid-back" class atmosphere as factors in her classmates' plagiarism. Research participants also suggested that college students' decisions about plagiarism are influenced by factors such as one's personal investment in a particular course, assignment, or writing topic:

SHELLEY (FG 03): I think it also has to do a lot with the class you're in. Like, for example, if I didn't have such a guilty conscience, I would probably plagiarize in my liberal studies class. Because they have nothing to do with my major, and I'm never going to use anything—well, I probably will, in some abstract way, but really, I should really be concentrating on a major.

DAMION (FG 01): I think when it comes to most college students anymore, when it comes to papers, and not be—and, uh, having to fall back on plagiarizing, it's getting an assignment you're motivated about…. It's just—you just have to have a topic that you are excited to research, and that's—that's the key.

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AMANDA (FG 01): It's putting yourself into the work and enjoying talking about what it
is. Like, if you—if you give a person a general topic and ask them to put their
own spin on it, they'll enjoy it so much more than keeping it in such a narrow
topic. I think that—that's one of the big things that causes people to plagiarize, is
just cause they—they so dislike what they have to talk about that they don't want
to do it.

In addition to personal investment (or the lack thereof) as a factor in plagiarism,

participants also suggested that the Internet affects student plagiarism:

JULIE (FG 05): The Internet makes it easy—you just get on the Internet, copy and paste.
SHELLEY (FG 03): I think the Internet has opened such a wide world of plagiarism for
us. You can buy it, and you can copy it—because the Internet's so big, and if you
don't know something exactly—like the exact Web address—your professor
might never know if you copied something. You can copy anything, basically, as
long as it's unknown.

As previously noted, the Internet has even given students a way to complete papers about

books they have not read—a composing strategy that many participants, including both Wendy

and Susan, associated with plagiarism:

WENDY (FG 04): Even if it's just a reading assignment, and you know you just going to
have to write a short response paper or something, you don't have time to read an
assignment, how easy is it to go to *Spark Notes*.com, Bartleby, something like
that—just get a quick summary of the book so you can just read something—have
an idea of what's going on.
SUSAN (INT 02): There's so much material out there, and it's so readily available to us,
especially with the Internet. It's not even like you have to delve into a book
anymore. You can just—you can go to Amazon.com, and just pull paragraphs out
of a particular book, because they give you the inside cover and the first few
pages, so you could probably get the first and last page and do yourself a
summary.

Yet even as the Internet facilitates some students' plagiarism, its wide resources can be used

against plagiarism as well. Both Lacee and Wendy pointed out how easy it is for an instructor to

look up a paper or check on a student's sources:

LACEE (FG 03): I think people, like—mainly professors just think it's gonna be way too
tempting because of all the information that is available on the Internet now. And
it is—it could be really easy, but it's also very easy to catch, too, in the same
instance, if someone is or not.

WENDY (FG 04): I think it would be really easy for the professor to check, too…. They expect you to get it off Ebsco, so how easy is it to get on the computer and just type it in, and they're like, "Yeah, they didn't get it."

Factors in the Study Participants' Plagiarism Decisions

While many research participants talked about having been suspected or accused of plagiarism, several of the students I spoke with mentioned having had experience with intentional plagiarism. Such accounts were more frequently shared by interview participants, but a number of focus group participants also described experiences with plagiarizing. Yet even students who had never plagiarized discussed in detail their reasons for having steered clear of plagiarism in their own writing. Participants' first-person stories about their own plagiarism decisions provide an intimate perspective on college student plagiarism, and they reveal that the factors involved with plagiarism are, at times, much more complex than we might have thought.

Laura's explanation of her plagiarism represents a dilemma we have all faced. In doing so, it reveals a classificatory splitting of hairs that perhaps allows Laura to justify her decision to plagiarize:

LAURA (INT 04): I don't do it on a regular basis, but I'll admit that I do do it—you know, even though I think it's wrong, and even though I know it's hurting me educationally. But, it's like sometimes I just want to go outside; I don't want to be bothered with another ten million page paper. It's not that I'll copy and paste it—I'll at least bother to take that information and, you know, form it into what I want to say. But that—that's still ideas.

Mark's plagiarism involved faking some sources for a high school research paper. His story raised issues regarding access to source information and course materials:

MARK (INT 08): I was really struggling to find sources…. There wasn't really a lot that I could find on [my topic], surprisingly…. I went through several libraries, and the books I wanted were all checked out., and it came down to the deadline for the paper, and I made up a few sources. And that's—that was my instance of plagiarism…. I got a horrible grade on the paper: I got a C—but at the same time, it passed, so….

KURT (INT 08): Was the horrible grade related to the plagiarizing?

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MARK (INT 08): No; it was because I didn't know MLA's format at the time, and it was supposed to be in MLA format. [The teacher had] recommended that we buy this one textbook, but he didn't require it. And had I bought that book, I probably would have come out of it having a much better grade, and I probably wouldn't have resorted to what I did.

Susan's story of plagiarizing on an on-line test revealed several more the factors that figure in to students' decisions to plagiarize.

SUSAN (INT 02): People that don't care—they just want to get through—they might not consider the ramifications to themselves. I—I'll make a confession, and then I'll explain. [Susan clears her throat.] I had a sociology project to do; a sociol—oh, this can't go anywhere! [laughs] Had a sociology test to take, online, and I had all the professor's notes and outlines. It was supposed to be closed-book; I pulled up all the notes pertaining to that test, and I toggled between the screens. I actually found and searched. I—I did the search, I find this and I read it. And I was able to go right back to the test, and I'd just toggle in between screens. Oh. And, you know, I felt awful, doing it—but I didn't care. At that point, I didn't care. The thing is, did I retain any knowledge? Now I'm going into these sociology classes here and I'm like, "I screwed myself," because I don't know! I didn't read, it didn't sink in, I didn't retain any of it. It was just toggling; it was that quick, just going between buttons. And so all that really crucial information, that I could be applying now? It's lost to me. So we only hurt ourselves. But that was unethical, what I did; it was. And is that plagiarism? Yeah, it was [laughs], because I was using the man's own words in taking that test.
KURT (INT 02): The instructor's own words back to him?
SUSAN (INT 02): Um-hmm. Exactly.
KURT (INT 02): Did he notice?
SUSAN (INT 02): I got an A. So, if he did, he didn't mention it. He might have thought I just studied really well.

Lauren, in her interview, raised a number of other issues that she believed could contribute to student plagiarism. Her own decisions to plagiarize seem to be based on a combination of factors. Some factors related to plagiarism—time pressure, for instance—seem to be fairly routine, and their explanatory power is often dismissed with little thought. The excerpt below, however, points out that even excuses that seem trivial to an instructor may be experienced quite differently by a struggling student:

LAUREN (INT 06): I think a lot of plagiarism comes from just not caring—getting to a point where you just want to get something in. And you might be having—I know at least all the time with me, I'd been having some personal struggles with my family and stuff like that, and I didn't care—about school or anything else. So I just wanted to get something in. I think that happens a lot, because people spend their time maybe—I don't want to make that judgment, but maybe spend their time not so wisely, and they just want to turn a paper in. And they know it's plagiarizing, but they want to get it in. I think that happens a lot, because people spend their time maybe—I don't want to make that judgment, but maybe spend their time not so wisely, and they just want to turn a paper in. And they know it's plagiarizing, but they want to get it in. And—they aren't caught on it all that often, because it really takes a lot to go through every source of every single paper…. I know a lot of times maybe it's not on purpose, or maybe it's a problem with the person that—they're not plagiarizing to plagiarize, but they're having some more things going on that need to be addressed, because—this is just kind of making it a personal thing—um—not that a person who plagiarizes is not caring about their academics and they have a lot of issues going on that need to be addressed before they can really focus on studying. But with some people, umm…. Well, again, when I plagiarized in 10th grade, it wasn't with any bad intentions; it was just—I didn't care, so there are probably people out there who would do something like that because they're having so many problems that are going on, and rather than saying, you know, do you realize you did this, do you realize something wrong, umm, and maybe seeing in that person that there is something wrong there, they just say, "This is wrong, redo it."

Deciding to Plagiarize

The central goal of this dissertation study was to learn about plagiarism as it is understood and experienced by college students. Toward this end, I hoped to explore topics such as how students make decisions about plagiarizing and how previous academic experiences affect students' thinking about plagiarism. The phenomenological design of the interview and focus group conversations allowed me to ask pointed questions about students' experiences with plagiarism. The first-person accounts of plagiarism that a number of research participants shared shed light on some of the thought processes students go through in making decisions about plagiarism.

Several participants explained intentional plagiarism as being a more reactive than proactive compositional strategy. For example, Bobby represented his own cut-and-paste

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plagiarizing as more spontaneous than planned out. In doing so, he represented it as "an

innocent form" of plagiarism:

> BOBBY (FG 06): I don't know if—like, me cutting and pasting, for instance. You don't really think of that—I don't think you go in that thinking, I'm gonna take this idea and use it as my own, but rather, like, you like that, and you want to add it or something. It's just—I don't know; I don't think you go in there with the purpose of stealing someone's idea. I think that, too—that's like an innocent form.

Like Bobby, Laura also noted that students don't really reason out the decision to plagiarize. Her

first-person account mentioned a number of factors involved in her plagiarizing. Also like

Bobby, Laura's description included a comment about the nature of her own plagiarizing: "I'm

not like that," Laura asserted, representing the more direct, whole-cloth types of plagiarizing as

qualitatively worse than what she had done. Laura explained,

> LAURA (INT 04): I haven't done it in every class—maybe half. But it's not like every single assignment, you know? It's like the stuff that I just could not manage to get done. You know, there are not enough hours in the day to eat, go to class, do all your homework, work—like, actually get paid for something—and sleep. So, you know—sometimes it's just really stressful….
> KURT (INT 04): So, some of what goes into the decision-making process, then, is what kind of day is it outside, what kind of week am I having, and what kind of tasks there are.
> LAURA (INT 04): Yeah, uh-huh.
> KURT (INT 04): What else? What else goes into the decision?
> LAURA (INT 04): I mean—I don't think there's really a thinking process like, you know, "Oh, I'm gonna go back to my apartment and plagiarize this paper." You know, it's kind of like while you're writing it you're thinking, "Oh, man, I really need another paragraph or something here," and "I can't really think of what I want to say here, so let's see what someone else says." It's not like I'm directly saying to myself, "Oh, I'm gonna plagiarize this right now," or "Oh, let's see what Kurt thinks about this topic, and I'll just use all of his words." I'm not like that.

As their first-person accounts demonstrate, some college students regard decisions about

plagiarism as complicated by a variety of personal, academic, and composing factors. For

others, however, decisions about plagiarism allow little room for negotiation. For instance,

despite having argued that the high-stakes environment contributes to student plagiarism, Frank

did not find plagiarizing to be an appropriate *response* to that situation. In his mind, plagiarism

obviated the benefits a student would gain by working within the academic environment.

However, when several members of his focus group raised potentially mitigating factors, Frank

reconsidered his stance toward plagiarism. The following excerpt shows the group's active

construction and negotiation of several factors involved in students' plagiarism decisions. The

exchange began as I shared the results of their anonymous plagiarism surveys with the group.

> KURT (FG 06): One person checked "plagiarized in college: 2 to 4 times." Umm—I'm not asking who it is, I don't—that's—I mean, that's not the issue, for me. But, umm—part—one of the things that the focus group can do as a methodology is see how others—see how other people respond to it. So, what are your—what would you guys have to say, there's five of us; that means two of you aren't sure if you've plagiarized, but if one person says, "Yes, two to four times," umm, let's imagine it was intentional, cut and paste, or something like that. What would you—how do you feel about sitting here talking with him or her? Would you say? [a 5-second pause] You have a problem with it?
>
> BOBBY (FG 06): No. Not with them as a person, not at all. No, I don't think it –
>
> FRANK (FG 06): Well, we associate with a lot—like, I've read stuff that talks about how people will hear something nice and associate with it—but never really put the time in to truly understand the topic [CARRIE: right], but will just be like, this is—this person knows what they're talking about, and it sounds good. It's intuitive. I'm gonna—this is what I think. So I'm not against them in a personal way at all. Umm, but—I would—"may as well take the F." That's what I would say, because—like—it's not worth it. I mean, the time that you spend doing that doesn't gain you anything, other than a grade. Doesn't. So, take the F; at least you'll learn a lesson. [HILDA laughs]
>
> KURT (FG 06): What lesson is that?
>
> CARRIE (FG 06): Yeah, but when grade point averages are so important, and, you know, graduating from and possibly maybe they—maybe they have a scholarship. We just don't know what—you know.
>
> KURT (FG 06): And if three quarters of the math class is getting their homework done by photocopying homework,[23] then—if you're trying to not photocopy homework, you're at a patent disadvantage. [FRANK: true] So doesn't plagiar—can't plagiarizing even the field?
>
> FRANK (FG 06): I suppose.
>
> [a 6-second pause]
>
> FRANK (FG 06): Like, what if you plagiarize that homework so that you have more time to study? [several participants laugh] A legitimate student that plagiarizes [Larry: right, right] so that they have more time to study their calculus.

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[23] Earlier in the conversation, Frank had mentioned that his homework grade had suffered because "probably 80%" of his classmates had plagiarized other people's work while he had not.

HILDA (FG 06): That happens a lot, too.

CARRIE (FG 06): But you don't know. Yeah. That's the thing—a lot of people plagiarize because of time. [two participants: um-hmm]

KURT (FG 06): It's not my major. [Frank laughs] This is what I heard in a previous group: it's not—it was not in my major.

BOBBY (FG 06): It's just a—liberal studies class.

HILDA (FG 06): Well, I know that sounds stupid, but honestly, for some people that makes sense. Because, you know, if you're not going to the field in that area, who cares? I can see—you know, I can see that thought process.

LARRY (FG 06): You're s—you're thinking that people reason these decisions out [laughs] a lot, and [Hilda (FG 06): Oh, I'm sure they do; two other participants laugh] I don't think there's that much reason that goes into much of it.

BOBBY (FG 06): I think most of it is, I don't really want to do it, or I don't have much time to do it. Or just kind of like—yeah, that's…..

KURT (FG 06): Is that sort of what you were saying, Larry? Like, people don't reason these out? …. [I have wondered what] thought processes that go into the decisions about, "Do I plagiarize or not?", "Do I cut and paste or not?", or "Is this a paragraph I'm going to take?"

LARRY (FG 06): I don't think that it is always that way. I don't think that—I think sometimes, it is literally spur of the moment, like, I need to have this done right now. Let me go do this; let me go take this off the Internet.

KURT (FG 06): I need to have this done "well"?

LARRY (FG 06): No, just now. Done.

LARRY (FG 06): Yeah. Right now.

FRANK (FG 06): Being backed into a corner. [Larry: right] Like, whether the bad choices of before were unintentional—like I didn't sit down and do this for months and months [Larry, laughing: right], and that wasn't so intentional. And then now, I have 35 minutes [several participants laugh], and then what am I going to do?

LARRY (FG 06): You're out of options.

FRANK (FG 06): They might not have money to go to school without a scholarship.

CARRIE (FG 06): Exactly.

Deciding Against Plagiarizing

A number of research participants asserted that they would never knowingly plagiarize, or that they could not imagine themselves choosing to plagiarize again. Their explanations of their decisions against plagiarizing also suggest factors related to student plagiarism—factors which, for these students at least, are inhibitory.

Mark, for instance, who had talked about plagiarizing on his high school's senior research project, commented later in our interview that he had not plagiarized in college—nor did he imagine that he would. He explained:

> MARK (INT 08): My approach had changed towards it. Because in high school, I just really didn't care too much about academic integrity, and I didn't really care too much about my own work…. [Now,] I figure that I'm in a university setting. And when I come out with a Bachelor of Arts in Economics and English, I want my Bachelor of Arts to mean something to me. I want this Bachelor of Arts to mean that I've gone through and I've done this work; that everything that I've done will amount towards me being a publishable writer, or a workable writer. It really just comes down to what my degree means to me, and I really want it to mean something to me. I really want to show that, hey, I went through and I did this work, and I did it better than the vast majority of people who are in this school.

Because a number of previous participants had mentioned "busywork" as contributing to student plagiarism, I asked Mark if this belief extended to assignments that he did not regard as meaningful. Mark replied that he found all of his work meaningful:

> MARK (INT 08): I don't consider anything busywork, really, at the university level, because you don't really find busywork at the university level like you do in high school. Like, in high school, 99% of your work is busywork, whereas here, it can count towards maybe 1% at most. Even your liberal studies—people would consider that a liberal studies class is busywork; I don't. I think that liberal studies teaches you something real, something valuable.

And participants offered other reasons for not plagiarizing—including, for these three participants, their concern about plagiarism's effect on their future academic plans:

> KURT (FG 04): If you—if you haven't plagiarized, what are your reasons for not plagiarizing? In other words, what keeps you—KAYLA, what keeps you from writing a paper like your friend did?
> KAYLA (FG 04): I know I can be punished…. I'm looking to go to grad school, and—being kicked out of a university for plagiarizing would pretty much knock down your chances for doing something like that.
> ERICA (FG 04): Sort of an honors system thing. I mean, one—I don't want to get caught, and get punished for it, but also I want to—I'm here to learn how to do stuff, and I want to be a nurse, and I want to be able to go on to grad school. And what good will I be of a nurse or a student if I can't learn how to do something properly?

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WENDY (FG 04): Pretty much grad school. Plus, obviously, you don't want your GPA or anything to suffer, just because you blew off one assignment. And, you know, it can totally screw up, like, your whole grade.

KAYLA (FG 04): I know—I think that if I would plagiarize something, and I wouldn't get caught, and I get a good grade in the paper, I think I would—I'd be the type of person, I would feel really guilty; I would be like, "I don't deserve an A, cause it's not mine."

Several students mentioned their confidence as writers as the reason they avoid plagiarism. For Damion, his pride in a job well done keeps him from plagiarizing. As he reported, "There's nothing that feels better than being recognized" for your own work:

DAMION (FG 01): This—honestly, this was the thing that made me never want to plagiarize…. I wrote a paper, a research paper, for my English class, for a really tough teacher I had in high school, and she actually stood up when she was returning our papers and said to the class, I had to go back and check on his paper because I really thought he plagiarized. But I just found, he's just a really good writer [laughs]. And that felt so good that I just was like, I never want to be accused of that again, I want to make sure that everything I write is my own writing, because that felt really good to have somebody say that to you. And, it's just—ever since that, when you see that you are applauded for your genuine effort, it is…. I guess in my case, it is beyond gratifying to spend a long amount of time on a project or a paper, get it back, and find out you did an excellent job on it [CANDICE (FG 01): mm-hmm], and that is worth more than just a B+ because you copied somebody else's work, to me, than anything. It's incredible.

As we continued our discussions, I asked students what other factors might facilitate plagiarism. Erik referred to "character," then explained how he would avoid compromising his own character when facing a familiar academic challenge:

ERIK (INT 01): I think in a lot of it's the person's character. I mean, who you are would determine—like—if you would be able to go through with something like that. Like, your morals or your values. Um—also, maybe, panic? I mean, I know—I know I've had times when I wake up in the morning and I'm like, oh no—I have this paper due in about an hour, and I completely forgot about it. I think that might lead someone—cause at that point in time, you're just like, I need something to turn in, so you might resort to something like that when you normally wouldn't have….

KURT (INT 01): So what's your response to that—sleeping through your alarm and waking up an hour before class?

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ERIK (INT 01): I try to pull it together if I can; if not, I'd talk to the professor. Try to work something out with him. I haven't had any professors that were so nasty that they're like, well, that's too bad. But I have had times where I've been like, "Hey, I did not get this paper done; I will do it today, can I turn it into you tomorrow, or come to your office?" And they're usually really helpful in that kind of situation; they kind of make some allowances for you.

Like Erik, Lacee, too, mentioned that she steers clear of plagiarism, even when she is struggling to complete an assignment. She described how she takes plagiarism off the table by working through the challenge of writer's block:

KURT (FG 03): Do you guys think that all the information that's so easily available on the Web—do you think that makes plagiarism more tempting for people? Has it made any of you think twice about plagiarizing?....

LACEE (FG 03): I know I have whenever I've had a huge, like, paper that was due, and it wasn't for my major class. I mean, I didn't—I didn't do it, but the temptation was just like, it was so great, cause it was late at night, I had already written like X many pages, I've like got writer's block like crazy, and it's just like, it was killing me. And I was so tempted to, but—I just went to bed and woke up the next morning [laughing] and started writing again.

Policing Plagiarism

As with any other "crime," plagiarism must be policed in order to establish and maintain the academic and discursive values it violates. Instructors and institutions have employed diverse practices to authenticate the authorship of the texts that students submit. These practices require that we first detect plagiarism. Then, if warranted, we must confront the student with our suspicions or an accusation. Finally, both teachers and colleges must respond to incidents of plagiarism.

Plagiarism Detection

The detection of student plagiarism has become something of a complex game of "catch me if you can." The research discussions explored a number of issues related to plagiarism detection.

Roles and Responsibilities for Detecting Plagiarism

Participants made a number of comments that revealed their understandings of the roles and responsibilities that various players have toward the policing and detection of plagiarism. They discussed what students, instructors, and institutions should do if they suspect—or know— that a student has plagiarized.

In general, the participants did not seem to regard that students have a role in terms of policing for plagiarism. Stephanie, a leader in a campus sorority, said that that if her organization received word from the university that a member of their chapter had plagiarized, the student would likely be taken through the chapter's own judicial process. She noted, however, that absent any official notice from the college, the members of the sorority were not likely to address plagiarism:

> STEPHANIE (INT 07): As for just one sister knowing another sister plagiarized? Probably nothing would happen.

Gina mentioned feeling somewhat powerless in the face of another student's plagiarism. She described what she typically thinks when she overhears a student bragging to his friends about having plagiarized:

> GINA (FG 02): That's pretty much like what I think: that person's a jerk. But I don't, like, say anything to them. What am I going to say—"Oh, I'll call the police on you," or something? I—what am I going to do? There's nothing I can do.

Like Gina, Molly understood that she had little responsibility to act in terms of another student's plagiarism. She acknowledged that she might feel angry toward a classmate who earned a higher grade for a plagiarized paper than Molly did for a paper she had written herself, but she would not feel obligated to report the student to the instructor. In fact, Molly's comment about turning in a student for plagiarism evoked the childhood taboo of *snitching*:

MOLLY (INT 03): I don't think that it's necessary for me to say anything, because she's cheating herself, and then she—it'll show in—like, it'll pay her back in the long run…. I—I don't know if I would say anything to the professor. Because it's her [the other student's] business; it's not mine. And it's kind of almost like a tattle-tale.

When Laura mentioned having a friend who plagiarized on a somewhat regular basis, I asked how his plagiarism made her feel as a friend and as a classmate. Her reply questioned whether students have an ethical responsibility to turn someone in for plagiarizing, and it showed that Laura understood her ultimate academic responsibilities to be in her own hands:

LAURA (INT 04): I'm a pretty laid-back person; I'm not going to sit there and get offended. Maybe it's my ethical responsibility to report him or something, but I don't really think that—because, like, in the end, it's really none of my business if he's going to cheat himself out of a learning opportunity. He's not hurting anybody but himself….

KURT (INT 04): But what if you get a B and he gets an A?

LAURA (INT 04): I mean…that stinks, but even if he really did it, it has nothing to do with me; I just didn't do as good as I could have. It is unfair; but in the end, it's like—in another year and a half, an A is not going to really matter, you know what I mean? Like, an A or a B or a C isn't even going to matter. So why am I worrying over if he's actually learning something and he gets an A when I'm actually learning something and I'm getting a B? In the end, I'll get my diploma, and I'll know that maybe I'm a better person, and actually learned something, and he didn't.

In describing her feelings toward a classmate's plagiarism, Laura used the word "unfair." The word *unfair* came up regularly as participants discussed whether teachers' and institutions' responsibilities should include checking students' papers for plagiarism. A number of participants, including Lauren, regarded plagiarism detection as an important part of a teacher's role. As Lauren described it, the policing of plagiarism ensures the fairness of students' grades:

LAUREN (INT 06): Yes, I do. Because—for somebody to just copy something else, or get the information from somewhere else—it's not fair because so and so worked really hard on it and got an A, and another person didn't, he copied it and got an A. It's true, even though it seems like more of a childish argument.

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Stephanie, too, regarded plagiarism detection as an important instructional responsibility. In

fact, she represented the process as an embodiment of care for students:

> STEPHANIE (INT 07): Maybe that one professor who catches you plagiarizing is the only person who's actually taken the time to care about your actual academics. And I think the university needs to be standing for that kind of stuff. They need to care about their students, and they need to make sure that these students are here for academics, and not just here for a piece of paper.

Hilda, however, felt that plagiarism detection disrupted the instructional relationship between

teachers and students. When I asked if it was important that instructors be on the lookout for

student plagiarism, Hilda replied:

> HILDA (FG 06): See, that just sucks…. They shouldn't have to be wasting their time looking to see if you're doing the right or wrong thing. It should be either your paper is good or it's not…. I don't know whose job it should be, but the professor's job should be to teach, you know?

Several participants remarked on how difficult it can be for an instructor to verify the

authorship of every student's paper. When I asked Lauren if she thought that instructors were

good at detecting plagiarism, she replied:

> LAUREN (INT 06): No, not really—but it's not really their fault. That's a lot—a huge workload, to try to find plagiarism within every single source. Especially when you don't have the sources readily available, and you have to look at what the students cited, go find it, look at it, read it, read what they're saying, and see if it's copied—see if it's similar enough to be plagiarism…. Not impossible, but, I mean—easily two or three days worth, depending on how many students are there, because you take a student that has an eight-page paper, each page has three citations, and there are thirty students…. That's a lot.

According to Lauren, the burdensome, time-consuming nature of policing plagiarism is one

reason that student plagiarists often escape detection:

> LAUREN (INT 06): They aren't caught on it all that often, because it really takes a lot to go through every source of every single paper…. That's another thing about it: I agree that plagiarism is wrong, but, it's nearly impossible for our professors to really check about it.

Many participants, however, held an opposite view about the process of plagiarism detection. A number of students described that just as technology had made it easier for students to plagiarize, it had also made it easier for instructors to catch plagiarists. As Wendy stated,

> WENDY (FG 04): I think it would be really easy for the professor to check, too…. How easy is it to get on the computer and just type it in.

Brandy and Shelley expressed the same idea in their focus group:

> BRANDY (FG 03): With all these professors using Turnitin.com and other sites like that, it just seems like people would be stupid to hand in a paper—especially electronically if your professor asks for it—and plagiarize it.
> SHELLEY (FG 03): Or even just Google. Like, if you just Google a sentence, it'll just come up.

Turnitin.com and the Electronic Detection of Plagiarism

The interviews and focus groups revealed a wide range of experiences with electronic plagiarism detection tools. Several participants were quite familiar with Turnitin.com (a plagiarism detection service that the university had recently purchased), having used it in high school. For others, electronic plagiarism detection remained something of a mystery:

> HANNAH (INT 09): [Some people] think that the teachers have that machine that they put all the papers through, and they can find out if it's someone else's work…. I don't know if all professors have it, but there's just—it's a bit rumor that everyone—like, they put through a computer, or the Internet, and it searches, or something. Or it even searches their past papers that students have handed in.

In Stephanie's mind, the availability of electronic detection tools served as a useful deterrent for students who might consider plagiarizing:

> STEPHANIE (INT 07): Since papers have come online—like, I guess there are two search engines where you can just enter a whole paper and it'll tell you if it's been replicated. Like, the more this technical stuff comes in, the more it makes it readily available for them to catch you for doing it. I think plagiarism is going down—because it's not, "Oh, he won't notice it; it's from this citation of this little book, he's never going to catch on." [Now] he can type it in and it will search a million and a half different things—and if anything pops up being exact, he's going to find it. So it's more high-risk now, because there is more consequence—more probability that you will be caught.

Several participants pointed out that it would be helpful for students to have direct access to a tool such as Turnitin.com. Julie, for example, noted that she would use it to confirm her citations before submitting a paper:

> JULIE (FG 05): Say you had written this paper, and you pulled from a variety of sources, and you feel like you've done an okay job citing. Say you want to turn your paper in and see for yourself if it turns up anything. Could you do that, or is it just for professors to turn it in? [Because] I would check my paper.

Laura felt that Turnitin.com could serve as an effective reminder and reinforcement of the university's stance on academic integrity:

> LAURA (INT 04): I think Turnitin.com is a good way to that—getting that point across pretty quickly…. I mean, as a university professor, it's physically impossible to check every single paper you get in for plagiarism. So I think Turnitin.com is probably the most effective way.... I think that's something that the student body should be more aware of. Because it's like—that's instilling the fear of [plagiarizing]—like, "We're serious about this, and we really want you to learn, so we're taking the extra step to make sure you don't [plagiarize]." I think that plagiarism, obviously, would go down considerably, because [students] wouldn't really have the option if every professor did that.

While online plagiarism detection may indeed be an efficient way to quickly scan a large number of papers for plagiarism, the system is not foolproof. Brandy, who had used Turnitin.com in high school, pointed out that the program flags text but does not indicate whether the writer has cited that text—requiring that an instructor review each paper to check for citations:

> BRANDY (FG 03): It not only picks up suspect lines, it picks up everything you actually cited, and will highlight it red. And the teacher will have to look at everything that's highlighted red, even if you cited it, and make sure that you cited it.

Brandy also mentioned that a student could defeat Turnitin.com's plagiarism detector by making some fairly basic changes to the wording of a cribbed paper:

> BRANDY (FG 03): You probably wouldn't have to change the sentences that much; you could probably use a thesaurus, because [Turnitin.com] looks for phrases.

Mark, however, urged caution. As he described it, the outsourcing of plagiarism detection subverts part of an instructor's responsibility toward students. In Mark's mind, technology should not be trusted to make the sensitive and context-dependent judgments that a determination of plagiarism requires. He explained,

> MARK (INT 08): You have to take a logical approach to it, and you have to take a careful approach to it. And something like Turnitin.com, which is completely autonomous, doesn't really take situation into account. It can even just be a jumble of words—could be coincidental—and they're going to say that it's plagiarized. So, I don't—I mean, yeah, if somebody has sources listed, I think it would be appropriate to check the citations that they used; that's completely appropriate. I mean—yeah, they should check for plagiarism, but they shouldn't assume that everybody's a plagiarizer at the same time.

Caesura Two: A Terrible Tale of *Turnitin*

David's Plagiarism Story

An accusation of plagiarism—and its academic aftermath—took center stage in my interview with David. In fact, at the beginning of our conversation, he expressed his hope that participating in the research study would allow some good to come out of what he had experienced as a very confusing, painful, and frustrating experience with college composition. His story describes a sequence of misunderstandings and breakdowns that suggest a series of failures on the instructional as well as the institutional level. In doing so, it raises important questions about responsibilities and processes involved with the policing of student plagiarism.

> DAVID (INT 05):[24] It was last semester; I was accused of plagiarism, and I failed the class because of it. And in no way, shape, or form did I plagiarize all. And I just felt I could maybe do some good by participating in this and at least get something off my chest about it.
> KURT (INT 05): Can you talk about that?

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[24] I have reordered parts of our conversation to improve the narrative clarity and sharpen the focus of this excerpt.

DAVID (INT 05): Yeah. [quietly, to himself] Where do I start? Well, the report that I did was on Dante's Inferno.

KURT (INT 05): What course was this for?

DAVID (INT 05): The class was research writing. I chose to do my research on Dante's Inferno, which has been researched to death almost, by everyone. We had to have so many sources, and I think I had 16 or 17 sources. And originally, the first time I handed it in, I messed up the sources, and that's completing my fault, and I take responsibility for that. Not purposely, but it was plagiarism. [But] one of my major sources was John Ciardi's translation of Dante's Inferno. I cited it for the first idea of his in the book, but I didn't throughout the rest of the book, because I just figured it would be in the end. And I—I realized that that was wrong after I did it…. [And] the professor turned it in to Turnitin.com, and it said I had plagiarized it. There were, like, a lot of different papers that it took the plagiarism from. And some of them were my own words also. And—so I went back, and I redid the paper, and I cited a bunch of things, and [when she resubmitted it to Turnitin.com] it still came up with a bunch of areas in plagiarizing. But when I went back and looked at it, I found out that most of the areas that were plagiarized were when I was using my own words, and just summarizing what some of the others were trying to say. The first time, she told me the problem, and I went back and fixed it. The second time, she said that the problem was still there—even though I don't understand how, the problem was still there. That's what got me the F, and eventually I failed the class because of it; she said, "I have no other choice but to fail you."

KURT (INT 05): But as you talk about it, though, you don't seem particularly angry, upset, or bitter.

DAVID (INT 05): Well, [laughs], I'm trying to be as respectful as I can about it, but to be honest with you, I was angry— but there is nothing—I couldn't really do anything about it. I thought about going and getting the grade reviewed, but I found out that you could be dismissed from the university for it, so I figured it wasn't worth that chance, that risk. And I didn't know what to do about it, and I really didn't—I guess to be truthful, I didn't really understand what I did wrong, entirely, and…. I guess I was in, somewhat, denial about it. 'Cause I didn't plagiarize whatsoever. I am very respectful of other writers and what they write, and their own ideas, and I would never steal any of their ideas…. But I [sighs]…. I guess I just look at it as, there's nothing you can do about it now, so you might as well just keep on keepin' on.

I asked how David's instructor had addressed plagiarism with the class as a whole:

KURT (INT 05): Did the professor talk about plagiarism at any point in the semester, or make a policy known?

DAVID (INT 05): She did. Well, I don't know if she made a policy known; plagiarism was addressed more as teaching us how to cite things than going over what plagiarism actually is. I don't know if she ever defined exactly what she considers plagiarism. I can't be positive that she didn't, but I don't remember it. She focused more on teaching us how to cite things than actually going over plagiarism.

David shared more detail about what had happened:

DAVID (INT 05): I'll admit, [the first paper I turned in] wasn't that great. It was almost more of a literary review than a research paper. We discussed my grade, and within a couple days, she asked me to come outside class and she said that she turned my paper in to Turnitin.com, and it came up with several hits for plagiarism. I said that I didn't plagiarize whatsoever, and I'd bring all my sources in and show it to her and everything. She said okay, so I went in just after that class and I saw her…. She said that she was surprised because she didn't think I would do anything like that, but the issue had to be addressed anyways. So she showed me what I did wrong; she never really asked to see my sources—she never saw the sources. I understand that entirely, and I understand that the first time I submitted it I did plagiarize, but it was just a misunderstanding of how to cite things. So then I went back, I did the paper again, I fixed all that I could find that would even qualify for plagiarism.

KURT (INT 05) [interrupting]: Did she give you the report?

DAVID (INT 05): Yes, um-hmm. It comes up in different colors, like for however…. I've never used it personally, but I've seen—I just saw the areas that it came up in different colors. And the professor never really explained to me—like she picked out a couple different parts that, umm, were plagiarized, but overall I didn't know entirely like what parts of the story were plagiarized. So I went back and fixed what she had said that I had done wrong—that she had pointed out to me individually. I went back and did those, and I went back and read the paper to look for spots that even could be plagiarized, and I cited all those, and it still came up with a whole bunch of stuff. And I don't know where it came from. I don't know if it was just coincidence—like, my words being similar to others' words—or what. She did that, and I fixed all the places in there, and all the things—all the things that weren't my own words, I fixed. But some of the stuff that came up was underlined as plagiarized, but it was my own words, and I didn't feel… I guess I didn't feel that I should sacrifice my own thoughts just because it came up as plagiarism on this web site.

I wanted to find out if David meant his "own words" when referring to his paraphrasing of a source or to the words he used to describe his own ideas on the topic, so I questioned what his teacher had told him:

KURT (INT 05): Was your instructor saying that you had incorrectly paraphrased, or incorrectly formatted, or was she saying that you used ideas and words from sources that you didn't cite at all?

DAVID (INT 05): She was saying that I used ideas and words from sources that I didn't cite at all. And that's not true at all.

KURT (INT 05): But the computer thinks it's true.

DAVID (INT 05): Yes. [an 11-second pause] I don't think that she explained to me well enough what I did wrong, and she didn't provide the proper knowledge for me to correct it properly.

David continued his story:

DAVID (INT 05): I got such a poor grade on that first paper; she gave me a D on, because it came up with so much plagiarism. That grade's fine; I accept that because it was wrong. The second grade—I was struggling with the class already, because that was a big part of my grade, so I had to do well in this last part, when I turned it in the final time. It was like two weeks before the end of the semester. I turned it in again, and I didn't hear from her again. We had issues finding a time to meet, so it was like the day before the final when we finally had to meet. And she told me that when she ran it through again it still came up as plagiarism, and this time she didn't even bother to specify where—she seemed rather short about it and didn't want to discuss it, and I can't be positive, but she implied that the same spots, almost all the same places, came up as plagiarism. And she said—her exact words were—she said she "had no choice but to fail me." [a 10-second pause, during which DAVID sighs several times] I tried to get out of there as soon as possible, because I knew if I didn't I was going to say something that… In no way, shape, or form did she threaten me, but it was almost like if I stayed there longer, she could turn it in for the option of having me dismissed from the University for however long, and I didn't want to risk that at all.

I asked David what he would have liked his instructor to do once the Turnitin.com report

came back—how he would have liked her to handle it:

DAVID (INT 05): Well, I would have liked for her to have gone through the paper and distinguished where I was, well, exactly the parts that she thought I needed to change. Because what she did, what she did was just handed me the printout of Turnitin.com, and expected me to change all of that, which was very difficult, because [laughs] it prints in black and white, and the colors didn't come up, like, what I needed to change most. And—and I don't know what level—I didn't know—because there's different levels of plagiarism, apparently, Turnitin.com…. That's what I understood it to be: there's different levels, like exact wording, partial wording, and I would have liked for her to at least have given me a certain point where she would have liked me to change….

I wondered if David felt that Turnitin.com had a role in the writing classroom. I asked:

KURT (INT 05): Do you think Turnitin.com is an appropriate tool for instructors to use, or an important tool?
DAVID (INT 05): My problem is, this class was research writing, and that's [laughs]—I hate to say this, but that's like plagiarism with cites almost, with cites behind it. You're allowed to use other people's thoughts and ideas, but you just cite them at the end. And I think that Turnitin.com should be used more for—like, they have all these Web sites now that you can print entire papers off and just turn those papers in. And I think that's a huge problem, and Turnitin.com would be a great tool for that—for entire works that people would print out and use as their own works. The professor that I experienced relied solely, too much, on Turnitin.com. I think you should use that as more of a—as more of almost a guideline. You should use your own judgment at some point. You should—I guess you should use Turnitin.com almost to

see as more as what's out there, just to get familiar with what this person's trying to write.

Happily, David felt much better about his subsequent research writing class. He described what he likes about the way his second instructor addressed plagiarism with the class:

> DAVID (INT 05): He uses his own personal discretion. After you came in and talked to us that day [(KURT had visited DAVID's class as part of the recruiting process for the study)], he explained to us very thoroughly—he hadn't addressed it before that, but he explained to us very thoroughly what he thought plagiarism was, and he thinks that it's…. He thinks that professors' ideas on plagiarism extend further than what they should. He told us that he uses a lot of his judgment; like if things by chance turn up as your words into somebody else's words, he—he doesn't count that as plagiarism. He'll look into it, and he doesn't count that, so I guess a lot of it depends on the professor's personal perception of what he thinks plagiarism is and how he defines it.

<p style="text-align:center">❖　　　❖　　　❖</p>

I hope that David's participation in this research study did help take some of his concerns off his chest. David wanted some good to come out of what he had felt to be—and what certainly appears to me to have been—a truly miserable experience. As a composition instructor at David's school, I was a departmental colleague of the instructor who had addressed David's apparent plagiarism, and his subsequent questions about it, in such a brusque and categorical manner. Of course, his instructor would likely represent the situation quite differently. With hundreds of pages of source-based writing from scores of composition students, it is easy to understand how misunderstandings can arise; and in the context of a writing course, Turnitin may well appear to be a valuable, time-saving service that can allow a teacher to spend more time responding to the substance of a student's source use than to concerns about the representational integrity of the student's source use and authorship.

David's story reinforces some of the points noted by Brown et al. (2007)—the writing center tutors who took on Turnitin. They explained that professors who use Turnitin "must still look at Turnitin's report of the student's paper because this report does not distinguish between properly and improperly cited information" (p. 15). Clearly, David's instructor had not recognized or understood this responsibility—a responsibility that she took on when she registered her classes with Turnitin.

Teachers are rarely among the first to realize the implications of our instructional and institutional choices, yet students experience the results of our pedagogical and policy decisions every day—and students often recognize the responsibilities attached to our decisions before we do. The tutors who had examined Turnitin.com described their responsibility toward Turnitin's presence on the campus as an opportunity for valuable, *productive* work:

> If we took the time, together with students to pose problems with what Turnitin said they
>
> plagiarized and explained why it had said so, then we'd be doing productive work in our
>
> writing center rather than working to just fix the supposed problem areas of flagged texts.
>
> (Brown et al., 2007, p. 12)

As a researcher, a teacher, and a person, I regret that David's instructor did not regard her responsibilities similarly.

Accusation, Confrontation, and Responding to Plagiarism

Some of the most important stories participants shared in the focus groups and interviews concerned accusations of plagiarism. In fact, three students—David, Lauren, and Leigh—said that an experience of being suspected and accused of plagiarism prompted them to participate in the study. While several participants talked about intentional plagiarism, the most compelling stories of suspicion and prosecution came from students who insisted that they had not

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plagiarized—and who, at the time of our conversation, reported that they still did not fully understand what they had done wrong.

Considered on its own, any claim of false accusation may be questioned. Without access to the instructor, the context, and the suspect paper itself, a student's story stands as an unreliable witness to the facts of the matter. However, as this research has shown, the "facts" of plagiarism can be highly contingent. Phenomenological research aims to understand a person's lived experience of a topic, and for many of the participants who talked about having their authorship questioned, their lived experience of plagiarism includes lingering pain, mistrust, and self-doubt that they describe as continuing to affect their writing.

Accusations of Plagiarism

Many participants reported that they had been accused of plagiarism when they had not plagiarized. Lacee was one of them; she talked about an experience from her junior year of high school:

> LACEE (FG 03): We had to write, like, a final paper in my English class, and I just used more technical work. They started—like, they doubted me, and they pulled me aside, and [asked me to] define the word and everything. They finally believed me, but it was like—it was an unnerving experience, to say the least.

Leigh, a senior, described an accusation that had happened during her freshman year. Even though it had happened three years previously, the experience still seemed fresh as Leigh discussed it. When I asked her if the situation still bothered her, Leigh replied:

> LEIGH (FG 03): Still bothers me that I failed a course and wasted my money and time, and wrote—I mean, it was like a 14 page paper. And I put all that time and effort into it to be told it wasn't my work, you know?

When I asked why she had been interested in participating in the study, Leigh responded by describing what had happened:

LEIGH (FG 03): I was really interested in it because I had a professor accuse me of plagiarizing. And I really didn't plagiarize the paper, and he ended up either—I had an option of going to the university's judicial board, which he told me I wouldn't have a shot in the dark at, or failing the class. And I really hadn't plagiarized…, and that's probably why I was interested in it….

When her professor asked her to meet with him, Leigh said, "I knew there was something

obviously wrong":

LEIGH (FG 03): He asked me to write the basic principles of my paper, and he said that if I could do that—because I started crying, and told him that, you know, I really did not plagiarize this paper. And he told me if I could do that without seeing my paper, and I wrote everything effectively as written in the paper, he would not fail me or turn me in to the university judiciary board. And that was at the end of the semester, and I ended up with an F in the course. So he kind of lied to me to get me out of there. So, that's why I was kind of interested in the study. And I really didn't know what to do with it afterwards, so just retook the course. With a much better professor, I must say….

Leigh expressed and explained her frustration with how her instructor had handled the whole

situation:

LEIGH (FG 03): He wouldn't listen to me whatsoever, and told me basically I had no shot at the university judiciary board…. [It] really upset me. It's almost like he didn't care. And he lied to me and told me if I could define the things that he would give me the grade which I would have received on the paper, which would have been an A. And, for my regular grade in that course, I ended up with an F.

Later in the focus group discussion, I asked the participants what they thought an

instructor should do if she suspects that a student has plagiarized. Leigh referred back to her

experience of having been questioned by her professor:

LEIGH (FG 03): [He] questioned me for a very long time; it was almost like his way for me to break and say, "Yeah—I didn't do [the paper]," you know? But—maybe just question them, be fair about it, let them explain if you have a question. Like, at first, he wouldn't tell me why he thought I plagiarized the paper—gave me, actually, three different reasons why. So, [an instructor should] be fair and honest, and say this is why I feel that you've not written this paper; and give them time to explain and think about it, and maybe talk to a colleague about it instead of maybe making a snap judgment and failing somebody for a course, or telling them you're going to turn them into the university judicial board and possibly get them thrown out of college. I mean, I'm sure that wouldn't have happened once I had gotten in there, but he told me I'd have no chance against him. So, I mean, maybe not be so harsh and mean.

Leigh was not the only participant who described having had an instructor lower her grade based on the suspicion of plagiarism. Julie said that she had lost points on a high school paper despite the fact that her teacher had "searched the Internet and searched the Internet and couldn't find anything." This excerpt begins with Julie talking about how much work she puts into her writing:

JULIE (FG 05): I've always spent time revising, revising, revising, and my parents have always worked with me on that. And my dad, professionally, writes things that, you know, his supervisors, and their supervisors, read, and everyone signs off on them, so he values that immensely. So when he reads my work, you know, it's got to be good, and that's just kind of like what I was saying about when I was accused of plagiarizing. And the reason [the teacher] accused me was because he didn't think I could write that well—that's what he said. He did not believe I could write that well, so therefore it must be plagiarism…. I think that the paper was only, like, 20 points, but you got—it was—there were categories, and you got five points here for this, five points there, and I think that he took two or three points out of five in that category from me because he didn't believe it. And I never got to speak with him face-to-face and say, you know, I didn't do this. But, I don't think it was right that he assumed that but couldn't prove it and still took the points off. I mean, I still graduated, obviously, and I graduated with honors, but…. I'd never plagiarize. I would never intentionally plagiarize.

Confronting Suspicions

The participants uniformly asserted that the first step an instructor should take if she suspects a student of plagiarizing is to talk to the student directly. The following four excerpts show different angles on how the topic might be addressed:

DAVID (INT 05): I think they should, first of all, address the student about it…. They should address the student; ask to see the sources—I guess they should ask the writer to prove to them that this is their own work, and if they can, then, then it's settled. And if they can't, then I think that you should still look into it further.

LACEE (FG 03): I think just like…calmly asking questions. Like, just calmly asking questions, and giving the student a chance to prove themselves. But, not like demanding it of them, and not breathing down our necks. It's not the way to go about—to, like, make people tell you the truth. Like, demanding and being mean doesn't get you [laughs] anywhere.

LAUREN (INT 06): Umm—I guess definitely address it, and talk about it, but not in a condemning tone, where you automatically assume that this person—just—had all of these—negative designs on what they were trying to turn in. I don't know; I—I think that, um—it's too easy to just say, "This is wrong, you know it's wrong," …..

KAYLA (FG 04): Talk to the student after class…. Um-hmmm.
ERICA (FG 04) [simultaneously with Kayla]: Talk with him after class. Put it on the paper—you know, please see me after class. And, that leaves it up to the student whether or not they want to talk to the professor or not. If they do, then you need to say, you know, I think you plagiarized on this. Now depending on how obvious a plagiarism it is—like, if it's just a simple citation thing, I think the kid should be allowed to correct it, or at least have the opportunity to learn what they did wrong. [Wendy: um-hmm] If it's a pretty clear and, you know, obvious copy and paste, you know, all over the place, it's like—I think that needs to go to a higher, you know—I don't know what you'd call it – court? [Kayla: yeah] I think a lot of it depends on whether or not you think the student did it on purpose.
WENDY (FG 04): Definitely.

Responding to Plagiarism

If an accusation or confrontation leads to proof that a student has plagiarized, an instructor needs to consider what type of response may be appropriate. Whether punitive, instructional, or a combination of these, our institutions expect us to respond to plagiarism we have discovered.

The following focus group excerpt shows several factors an instructor might consider when responding to plagiarism. Candice's comment clearly summed up her sense that the response should take intent into account; and Damion, for his part, suggested a progressive

policy with different levels of consequence depending on whether the student has plagiarized

before:

> KURT (FG 01): What do you think the consequences of plagiarism should be? What should—what should the response be? For instance, if a teacher thinks that a student's paper is plagiarized, what would you say that a professor ought to do?...
>
> CANDICE (FG 01): I think if it were a perfect world, well, first off, everyone would know how to correctly cite something, and how to paraphrase it correctly, but it's not, and if—if it were perfect in a different way, like, we could tell which people were doing it intentionally and which people weren't, that would be nice, too, because the unintentional—people who do it unintentionally just need to be taught, and the people that do it intentionally are—are usually vicious—like, it's a vicious thing, like a lazy—I think directly copying and pasting something—chunks of your paper, the entire paper—is obviously deliberate. Or buying somebody's paper. I think those people should just be kicked out. But, something like with an ESL student who doesn't understand completely what is acceptable and what isn't, because—and, like, for example, in Asian cultures, some, uhh, they—they don't need to cite their sources, and when they reference different ideas, it's looked at like that you are looking at your reader as knowledgeable, that they're going to recognize your sources, so by citing something, in one of their papers, you're undermining the intelligence of your reader, and your own intelligence. So, I think it'd be a hard transition to make. Plus knowing the difference between general knowledge and knowledge that isn't general would be difficult. And—so I don't think those kids should be just booted out, but, instead, yeah, it's hard to tell who's intentional and not.
>
> KURT (FG 01): How about you, Damion?
>
> DAMION (FG 01): There are so many facets to this. I think if you find that it's deliberate, that's a failing paper; and then the second time you find it, I think it's—as KEVIN said, it's a dropped letter grade at least. And then the third time, I say class is done; you're finished flying for the class. But, as we pointed out that you could do it accidentally, not know you did it—if it looks that way, which, if professors were good at it, they would be able to figure this out—if it looks that way, I think the students just need to be confronted about it, and told, you know, here's the issue: this is what you did wrong, and I'll explain it to you; don't let it happen again. And if it happens again, then you go to the other—what I already said. That's—that's down the ladder. Cause I don't think—deliberately, I think it should be a lot shorter to the final cut. But, accidentally, you kind of have to work with these people that don't mean to do it, because they just—it doesn't mean that they're stealing someone's ideas, it just means they don't understand how to make them their own without letting us know that it originally came from someone else's idea. So, I don't think they deserve as hard a punishment.

Institutional Policy and Procedures

The Consequences of Plagiarism

For many students, the many important issues of institutional policy and procedures

regarding plagiarism come down to one question: What can happen if I plagiarize? The

predominant idea participants had about the consequences of plagiarism is that plagiarism could

or would lead to expulsion:

> JARED (FG 02): I know that a lot of schools—like, it's immediate expulsion from the
> school, or immediate expulsion from the class…..

> JULIE (FG 05): Well, if you're caught plagiarizing intentionally—stealing other people's
> works, using it as your own, cheating—it goes right hand in hand with the
> cheating policy. If you're going to cheat, the consequences should be very
> serious. I'm under the impression that you get expelled. I'm not sure if that's
> right…, but—you know, I've had the fear put in me.

> KURT (INT 07): What's your sense of the institutional consequences of plagiarism?
> STEPHANIE (INT 07): If I recall correctly, I believe you can be kicked out of school.
> And, it will go on your record as to why you were kicked out. So you can say
> goodbye, basically, to any legitimate career, if people look into you as much as
> they should before offering you a job. Which [for] some jobs it's not really
> necessary, but—part of the reason they hold the standard so high is because in my
> job, it is. [Stephanie was planning graduate school and then a career in forensic
> psychology.]

While the widespread belief that plagiarism will lead to expulsion may seem to serve

instructional and institutional interests, it does not reassure students that they will be treated

fairly or respectfully if their authorship is in doubt. Few students know that they have rights of

due process when questions of academic integrity are raised—a central principle of the academic

community that, as this research makes evident, some instructors violate.

Two participants in the study mentioned learning about this little-known, little-enforced plagiarism provision from the university's Provost, who had met with their student groups to talk about plagiarism. Mark described what he learned from the Provost's visit:

> MARK (INT 08): I've had the Provost come in and speak to one of the groups that I'm a part of—he came and spoke to us about plagiarism. He had a long discussion about letting us know what the university considered plagiarism, and letting us know that if a faculty member tries to take sanctions against you for plagiarism without going through the proper channels, that they were actually violating the academic integrity policy of the school. Because we have a very laid out policy for handling plagiarism, and if a teacher tries to take individual sanctions against you—say, failing you for the whole class for one count of plagiarism—that's challengeable, and you can go through the school's academic integrity board, and then you can have—there is reciprocity for you; there are modes to prevent faculty members from taking too-harsh penalties for something that could be considered accidental plagiarism.

Suggestions for Policy

Participants addressed plagiarism policy on a number of levels. Stephanie's thoughts on policy included recommending different levels of response:

> STEPHANIE (INT 07): I think before it hits the university level, the teachers have to deal with us on a case-by-case basis.
> KURT (INT 07): Um-hmm. Umm, and when should it hit that level?
> STEPHANIE (INT 07): If they—when they are sure that it was plagiarized. Deliberate. So, if they pop it through the machine, and the paper comes up—like, half the paper is on this other paper, you're gonna need to pull the student aside, be like, I know you plagiarized this; I'll be taking it to the university. You don't need the one-by-one case. But, if you pop it through and this paragraph comes up, or something looks funny, you know—and you talk to them, and you iron it out, and it was a simple error, because they didn't realize they had to cite all this stuff or something like that, then you correct their incorrect knowledge, and you say "okay," and you let it go, cause it wasn't deliberate. I think that the policies need to deal with deliberate plagiarism. Not honest mistakes.

Many study participants insisted that intent be a factor in responses to plagiarism:

> HILLARY (FG 05): And then—again, it comes back to talking to the person [Julie: yeah]. Like, if they really didn't mean to do it, then I guess you can't really punish them [Julie: yeah] if they did it by accident. But I mean, if they did it on purpose, sure [Julie: yeah], full extent.

Like Damion had, previously, Molly also recommended a progressive policy for

plagiarism. Molly's discussion made it clear that she regarded instructional interventions as

fundamentally important to the process:

> MOLLY (INT 03): And I think that the university—I hate saying like three strikes or something, but, when it's a—as it becomes a problem, umm, it should be documented. If—if—if it's really, really obvious that something happened, that—that a student, you know, did something like that, it should be documented. And, um, and—and followed through with. And, if you see it more than—more than a couple times, than it—maybe it's time to take a punitive action. But I don't think that students should be punished right away; I think that they—that people deserve the benefit of the doubt. Especially in a learning institution; we're here to learn, and to learn from mistakes as well as from teachers. Umm, and, rather than, you know, coming down on them in a punitive fashion, I think that the first time especially, maybe they should be required to go to, umm—I don't know. I know the writing center does things on plagiar – on, well, on citing sources, and, and everything, and—meet with people to, to—you know, not just punish them for it, but to make them understand why it's wrong. If, if they don't have that innate sense. Do you know what I mean? Of—of—of it being wrong. And then they need to be taught why it's wrong. Not—not only just, you know, "don't do it."
>
> KURT: Would you say—would you say that that, umm—would you endorse that approach even if, say, a student turns in a paper that she purchased from a paper mill? Like a, like an online site saying "Buy research papers here, $6.00/page," and so she says, "Great," buys it, turns it in; professor finds it at that paper mill, has the original, has hers—same paper?
>
> MOLLY (INT 03): I would say yeah. I would say at least—I mean, obviously that was done purposely [Kurt: right], but I, I would say that, umm, that—it—rather than punishing her for it, expelling her or whatever—cause that's really not gonna do her any good – umm, try and fix the problem. So, put her in basic wr—you know, obviously she's having a problem writing. Put her in some writing classes, or, you know, have mandatory writing center sessions, or whatever. Umm— obviously I think the academic level—if it's a freshman, that's one thing. Cause you can get away with anything in high school. And I did [laughs] Umm—if it's a junior or a senior, I think that's—I think that's a different story. I think if it's— if it's a junior or a senior who has had research writing, who has had like classes where they've had to write papers before, and they do, they do it in an upper-level class, I think that maybe it should be a little bit m—it should be more punitive, versus—I don't think like expelling the person right away is, is the answer, because you're not addressing the problem.

To be consistently enforced, something like Molly's "three-strikes" policy would require

some sort of central documentation of student plagiarism. Stephanie suggested that institutions

could track plagiarism through a student's academic record. Erik, whose statement follows

below, made a sensitive comment about why this should matter:

> STEPHANIE (INT 07): Hmm. I think the first time you're caught plagiarizing, you should fail the class and retake it, and it should go on to your university record. And I think maybe the second time you're caught, you need to be booted from the school. If not the first time; I'm being very lenient [laughs]. For example, because people can plagiarize in different classes. Say they take a research class, plagiarize, they fail it, they have to retake it; they're not gonna plagiarize in that class, but maybe their Anthro class wants a paper on people in Ghana, they plagiarize that. That's their second offense, and they need to go. Because people are gonna learn from their mistakes; they're not gonna plagiarize the same thing twice.
>
> ERIK (INT 01): Cause, I mean, that's just as important as if you do really well in a class that that gets documented, but what about if you're doing these things that aren't so great in a class?

However, a number of participants questioned the appropriateness of a centralized system

that documents student plagiarism. For example, Laura disagreed with the value of a central

registry, believing that it would prejudice instructors against students who have plagiarized.

Laura explained:

> LAURA (INT 04): That's like having the tracking device on sex offenders…. I mean, I hate to make that comparison but—that's what it reminded me of. You know, maybe some sex offender is trying to really get over it, and is really changing himself as a person, you know? But he's automatically judged for the rest of his life by having this bracelet on him, by every single person he comes across, you know? That's like—the chance thing, you know? Everybody deserves a second chance.

Recommendations for Institutions

I asked participants in most of our conversations to share their thoughts on how well

schools raise the issue of plagiarism to students. In general, they reported, we do a poor job of

making our ideas and expectations clear to them. The following focus group exchange raised

several suggestions for how we might improve:

KAYLA (FG 04): I think that when you come to do your freshman orientation, I think—they give you all those classes, like, I know one that I took was on the African Culture Center—the society, whatever. I think they should add one more on plagiarism, letting you know…. I think students should really be informed on—not only should you not do it, but they should inform on what happens when you do do it, and what could happen.

WENDY (FG 04): I think it should be explained also, like, within each class. Because like I said, a lot of—especially just because I have a lot of English classes, so obviously, it's, you know, somewhere in the syllabus where plagiarism is not acceptable, blah blah blah. But, for each assignment, you know—obviously, because not all of them are just straight research assignments, you know—there is just such a wide area of what you—you know, what you're required to do in each paper. Whenever the professor gives you the guidelines, or tells you what they expect in the paper, they should tell you—tell you also, you know, if you use your class notes—like you said, in one of your Crim classes, you have to cite that—you know, because some professors would never dream of you having to cite that, and others are like, you know, you have to—what are you thinking? [KAYLA right] so I think, with each professor, they just kind of take it to a different level, so I think they should just kind of give you a sense of what—where the plagiarism issue falls with them. Does that make sense?

ERICA (FG 04): Right. And another idea, for freshman orientation, would be, you know, maybe as part of a plagiarism class. Just a very very quick and simple explanation of how to cite something. Because, you know, as Kayla and I both experienced, students coming to college, you know, often don't know how to cite something… [Kayla: And I know, in high school…] If they all learned, across the board, coming on in, that this is what's going to be expected of you, that would lower the number of students who make mistakes, then, wouldn't it.

Conclusion

I end this chapter by returning to Mark, the thoughtful English/economics major whose ideas and theories about plagiarism echo those of so many of our scholars and theorists. In many ways, Mark's characterization of how plagiarism concerns play out in the academic environment, and his thoughts on how plagiarism policies should be constructed, embody my best understanding of plagiarism as it exists in the lifeworld of the research participants.

KURT (INT 08): Do you have a sense that you've said that the things that you wanted a chance to say? When I said what brings you in, you talked about how plagiarism had been handled inappropriately…

MARK (INT 08): Right. And I think that what it's come down to, is that I think it sometimes has become an institution versus student situation. For the institution's really trying to crack down on something that they see as a rampant problem, where I really think it's just a lack of education. The majority of it's just a lack of education for students; they don't really know what the definition of plagiarism is, they don't really know what they're doing is plagiarism, or they don't really know why it's wrong, or…. I think we would do well to have, like, an ethics class, or we would do well to have some more direct education on the issue of plagiarism and the issue of professional ethics, and why something would be considered wrong or why something would be considered inappropriate. And I think that it needs to be handled—it needs to be handled delicately; you can't just start cracking down on students, trying to make examples out of them, because nobody learns anything that way, whereas if you take it as an issue of ethics, then you can make it into a learning experience. And that would be mutually beneficial to the institution and the students in the end.

KURT (INT 08): If this school were to convene a committee to revisit our plagiarism policy, and you were invited to contribute to a new policy or a new statement here, what would it look like? What would be some things that you would include?

MARK (INT 08): I'd include some of the things that I've already said: you know, to really take an account of the situation, to take it on a case-by-case basis. You can't just have a zero-tolerance policy, because a zero-tolerance policy really removes the situation; it removes the conscientious approach towards the topic. It's automated; it just says this is a problem and you're screwed; I think they should really take it into account by a person-to-person basis. I think they should really give it due process so somebody has a chance to defend themselves, and to have a defense of their action rather than just being able to convene an action against somebody. So I think there should—it would—you need something to have like a process to bring a case of plagiarism against somebody, they would have to have a reasonable chance to defend themselves, and there would also be a reasonable recourse of action, depending on how severe the plagiarism was.

KURT (INT 08): That takes—that would take a lot of work for an instructor to bring a charge.

MARK (INT 08): And, as it should be; an instructor should take a lot to bring a charge against a student, because the instructor should be positive that the student has done something wrong before [KURT: hmm] taking a case against the student. You can't assume that the student is automatically guilty. And we live under a justice system where everybody's innocent until proven guilty, and such should be the same case of plagiarism or murder. Anybody who does anything that they're accused of being wrong, they should have a reasonable chance to defend themselves. And if the teacher believes that it's wrong enough, then they should really be strong enough in their conviction to go through the process, then.

As I have shown, the topic of plagiarism is substantially more complex than many people believe it to be; and for students, it can involve issues much more diverse than we might expect. In making room for their voices, I have shown that students' *experiences* of and with plagiarism are also diverse—and quite complex as well.

The research approach I took to investigating student plagiarism was novel within the field of Composition Studies. Many of us have wondered what our students know and don't know about plagiarism, yet little research has examined this. Even fewer studies have asked not what students *know* about plagiarism but instead what they *think* about it: how they understand it, and how they arrive at their understandings; what they make of it; and how they experience it in the context of their lives. This chapter has presented my exploration of these questions, and the responses that 31 college students offered for them.

CHAPTER EIGHT:

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Overview and Discussion of the Study's Findings

The broadest research question guiding this study was, "How do college students understand and talk about plagiarism?" As the research sessions explored participants' construction of plagiarism, it was apparent that the students understood the boundary between acceptable and improper composing practices:

> KURT (FG 03): Do you think that most students have a pretty good idea of where the line is?
> BRANDY (FG 03): Yeah; even though it's big, somehow most of us know, like, up to the line. Like—when you step over it, we can notice where that line is, but it's kind of hard to say where that line would be until you cross it.
> REGINA (FG 03): Well, that's something that we've always learned—like, in elementary school, nobody wants to be a copycat; you'll get made fun of on the playground. So the line is always—drilled into our heads, even if it's in a different context. So I think everybody mostly understands.

The problem, of course, is that so much textual evidence suggests that many college students do not understand plagiarism—at least, not in the ways that we require them to. As my research participants' stories made clear, even when students try diligently and with best intentions to fulfill our textual expectations, they may be unwittingly tripped up by the invisible line between appropriate and inappropriate textualities.

It is not that students don't know that they should not plagiarize. It is, rather, that they do not fully understand just what our expectations are. Recall Lauren's description of having been accused of plagiarizing:

LAUREN (INT 06): The impression I got from [my teacher] is that she didn't realize that I knew that we weren't supposed to plagiarize, or that I didn't know quite what it was…. That's one thing that I really was very annoyed with—talking about you shouldn't be plagiarizing. That—yeah, everybody knows that you shouldn't be doing that. But I was getting held accountable for things that I didn't realize were plagiarism, because we had never sat down in class and said, "Well, you know what? If the wording is just too similar, if the ideas are too similar, and you're taking credit for it when it's clearly something you took from another paper, then, it is plagiarism—it still is." I think—I mean, she just never—most teachers never really go over that. So—but, actually, I don't know if it's a personal thing or not. I think that they're not teaching it correctly,

Based on my conversations with students, here are some dimensions of plagiarism that I can confidently say our students do understand:

1. Yes, our students will say that they know what plagiarism is. In fact, they will likely be able to provide accurate, consistent definitions of the term.

2. Yes, our students learned about plagiarism before arriving in our classes. They understand it's bad, and they know they shouldn't do it.

3. Despite this, yes, some of them will still plagiarize. However….

4. No, not all of the students who plagiarize were trying to cheat. Even the sharpest of our students will slip up from time to time and forget a citation.

5. No, our students don't have a very good understanding of plagiarism. They know not to do it, but they don't really know just what we mean when we say "plagiarism," because they have heard the word used in so many different ways.

6. Yes, our students think that plagiarists should face consequences—even quite substantial ones. But no, they don't think these punishments should attach to unintentional plagiarism. If they did the crime, they'll do the time—but they don't think they should have to do time for crimes they do not believe thehy ave committed.

When asked their ideas about what a plagiarism policy might look like, most participants stated that policies should respond differently to deliberate and accidental plagiarism—although most of them acknowledged that it could be hard to determine a writer's intentions. Students also felt that a plagiarism policy should be sensitive to each particular situation, and that a progressive response of some sort would be appropriate for repeat offenders. However, their clearest belief about policy issues—apparent in most of the research sessions—is that punitive sanctions should not be applied unless the student clearly had both knowledge about what it means to plagiarize and a clear intent do do so. Their main idea is that, as far as plagiarism goes, ignorance of the law *should* be a valid defense.

I find this to be a strong argument. The law on plagiarism is interpreted with great variability; the crime of plagiarism is prosecuted with great unevenness; and the academic processes of deliberation and litigation are opaque at best. In the eyes of the American legal system, criminality requires two components: "(1) *actus reus*, or an objective part, the criminal act; and (2) *mens rea*, or a subject part, the criminal defendant's culpable state of mind" (D. Clark, 2002, p. 4). Yet when it comes to student plagiarism, it seems as though this basic principle of American jurisprudence is set aside. Outside the academy, to be a crime, plagiarism requires "appropriate legal evidence of intention to deceive" (Randall, 1991, p. 526). Inside the academy, however, the evidentiary standards vary widely, and many academic and instructional policies assert that plagiarism may be adjudicated regardless of a student's intentions. In fact, several research participants described having been prosecuted for plagiarism even without any evidence supporting the suspected "crime."

Actus reus, the criminal act: I have shown that we do not agree on what, precisely, plagiarism is, nor on whether and when copied or cribbed words or ideas become transgressive.

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Mens rea, the guilty mind: I have shown that policies, procedures, and punishments for

plagiarism are carried out regardless of whether or not a student writer's plagiarism is traceable

to a guilty mind. Sometimes the minds *are* guilty, yes, as the study's participants pointed out.

Other times, however, the students I spoke with represented plagiarism as traceable to minds that

are uninformed, careless, distracted, misguided, and even troubled. Overall, the participants

seemed concerned that a student could be found guilty of plagiarizing and then be punished for

violations of academic expectations that they could never have foreseen.

Many college students experience the long arm of the academic law as reaching toward

them, forebodingly, each time they sit down with their sources. The participants in this research

study truly regard plagiarism as a capital crime of the academy.[25] One of them actually

described it as such:

> FRANK (FG 06): What would a professor do [if] you catch—like, say ten or fifteen
> percent of every class is people taking other people's ideas. What would you do?
> If you don't slap them on the wrist, you cut off their educated head—like, they get
> kicked out of school. There's no middle ground; it has such a bad connotation in
> the institution on a higher level, that the teachers—like, this is happening with
> everyone that they teach. And they caught this person—how can they rationalize
> ending this person's education whenever—everyone else is also doing it, and they
> are vaguely aware…. There's no middle ground….
> CARRIE (FG 06): Well, I was like—if I was a professor, actually it would be hard for me
> to—if I knew somebody who was plagiarizing—it would be hard for me to end

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[25] Recall that Howard (1995) described "all forms of plagiarism [as being] located on a
juridical continuum on which expulsion from college—the academic death
penalty—sits at the extreme end as a potential punishment" (p. 789). their college
career. I would—but—being—like if I was hired by this university, I would have
to go with it, so I would probably overlook it. I don't know.
> LARRY (FG 06): Right—that's the problem, too…. It's getting ignored, and people are
> doing it like crazy.

When charges and accusations of plagiarism are brought, students are often coerced into accepting an
instructor's offer of settlement, bullied by the threat of expulsion and misled about their rights of due process.
Indeed, such plea bargains might seem like a win-win situation: the guilty party is punished; order and standards are
maintained; the integrity of the institution remains intact; and the parties are spared the hassle of a formal judicial
board review—a third-party-mediated process of fact-finding that scrutinizes and squeezes both teacher and student.

However, the terms of an instructor's offer do not automatically serve the best interests of the students. Mark talked about how his roommate had been confronted by an instructor for including in his paper a paragraph from a Web site without any citation or reference:

> MARK (INT 08): I don't think he really understood that what he was doing was something that was considered plagiarism—something that would be considered very wrong…. The teacher pretty much gave him the option of going through the university's process, or doing extra work in class. And from what I gathered, he probably would have been better off going through the university…. I mean, the professor more or less kind of twisted his arm for it, and made it sound like if he went through the university, he would be kicked out of school. But he—I think if he went through the university, he would have probably been saved from a lot of grief.

I believe that violations such as these are what prompted the university's Provost to discuss plagiarism policies with Mark and his peers. The experiences that many of this study's participants described underscore the importance of due process when it comes to adjudicating plagiarism. While a student's plagiarism can call into question the writer's academic integrity, arbitrariness or inconsistency in an instructional response to plagiarism call into question the integrity of the institution.

Indeed, some students will cheat—and some instructors will get mad at these cheaters. Even though Amy Robillard (2009) has argued that anger might be an appropriate response to plagiarism (p. 17), several students I talked with seemed to suggest that we should, so to speak, take a pill. Erik urged teachers to see a bigger picture about plagiarism in college:

> ERIK (INT 01): I don't think it's like some huge thing like everyone might make it out to be. I mean, yeah, there are gonna be people that do it, but you need to see the bigger picture…. More teachers are saying, "This is the policy, you have to know it, you have to think about it every time you're writing a paper," and I don't think that that needs to be done so much, because it's only a handful of people, and I think there's a handful of people no matter how hard you put this thing on them, and show them the plagiarism policy, they're still going to do it. I mean, there's always going to be someone that's going to stay up too late and forget about the project, and try to find the easy way out.

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We may expect this sort of justification from a student, but I wonder if we will receive it differently if it comes from one of our own—a composition teacher and scholar such as Eric Prochaska (2001), who argued,

> We must accept this fact: some people cheat. On term papers and in life. And we cannot stop all of them all of the time. If we can accept that, we can move beyond the constraints of the Western notion of plagiarism, which is employed to catch and punish cheaters, and begin to envision a more practical solution. (p. 75)

The Empirical Context of Plagiarism Scholarship

From previous research on student plagiarism, we have learned a variety of things. Wide-ranging survey-based studies of plagiarism and academic integrity—such as Donald McCabe's—have helped us begin to think about plagiarism as it fits into the broad terrain of college students' ideas about and experiences with issues related to academic integrity. His studies and others have shown correlations between cheating and fraternity/sorority membership (McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 2002; Storch & Storch, 2002); cheating and athletic involvement (McCabe & Treviño, 1997); and plagiarism and procrastination (Roig & DeTommaso, 1995). Survey-based studies have also indicated that students regard internet-based plagiarism as somewhat less serious than plagiarism from a print source (Baruchson-Arbib & Yaari, 2004), and that explicit institutional honor codes can affect students' thoughts and actions related to cheating and plagiarism (McCabe & Treviño, 1993). However, a methodological limitation of survey-based research on plagiarism is its reliance on self-reporting. While it is possible to account for variance in reporting rates—for example, by comparing student-reported plagiarism with plagiarism rates observed in student writing samples—it is much more difficult to ascertain the extent to which respondents' replies conform to a common

understanding of a term as unevenly understood as *plagiarism*. Even when researchers have

been careful to frame their surveys (and their discussions) in terms of clear, unambiguous textual

acts (see Roig and DeTommaso, 1995, and Scanlon and Neumann, 2002), their survey-based

findings have said more about frequencies and correlations more than they have about what may

be behind the phenomenon of student plagiarism. Survey-based studies simply have not revealed

much about the richness and complexity of our students' experiences with plagiarism; they have

not shown us how students think about plagiarism, nor have they shown us how students

understand and experience our instructions, expectations, and practices related to it.

A number of composition researchers have designed studies that have presented a richer

student perspective on plagiarism than surveys have offered. For instance, both Cherry

Campbell (1990) and Casey Keck (2006) have conducted text-analysis studies that investigated

how college students use, incorporate, and acknowledge source information and language in their

writing. By examining specific student-generated texts, Campbell and Keck were able to explain

how students' ideas about paraphrasing, quoting, acknowledging, and citing sources were

manifested in the context of the students' writing. Their studies have detailed *how* some

students' texts appear transgressive, but they have not shown us *why* the student writers in their

studies made the discursive choices they did.

Pat Currie's (1998) examination of an L2 college student who had plagiarized in an

English class extended the text-analysis model of empirical scholarship on plagiarism. By

combining interviewing and text analysis, Currie's case-study research model allowed her to

describe both *how* the student had plagiarized and *why* she had plagiarized. By inviting her

participant's voice into the professional discourse on plagiarism, Currie's research methodology

enriched our understanding of student plagiarism. Yet while Currie's study helped us understand

some of the reasons a student might turn to plagiarism, it did not seek to explain her participant's construction of plagiarism. In other words, it did not help us understand how students themselves understand plagiarism.

By contrast, Faun Bernback Evans and Madeleine Youmans (2000) designed a study specifically intended to examine the "beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors concerning plagiarism" among L2 college student writers (p. 50). Evans and Youmans planned a multimodal study involving classroom observations, questionnaires, and follow-up interviews, yet when these strategies failed to generate much useful data about students' ideas about plagiarism, they asked their participants to discuss plagiarism in a series of informal small-group conversations. Although focus groups had not been part of the authors' original research design, their study revealed them to be an appropriate and effective methodology for examining students' perspectives on plagiarism. In fact, as I previously noted, each of the themes that Evans and Youmans described from their conversations with L2 college students was apparent in the constructions and representations of plagiarism made by the research participants in this dissertation study's discussions.

The Methodological Contribution of the Study's Empirical Design

This dissertation study picks up where previous Composition Studies research has left off. While previous scholarship has taught us much about some dimensions of student plagiarism, most of our empirical studies have examined student plagiarism through researcher-designed epistemological and hermeneutic frames—and because the epistemological and hermeneutic perspectives that frame our research studies also frame what we will be able to learn from those studies, it has been scholars and researchers, rather than students, whose perspectives have dominated our empirical understanding of student plagiarism.

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Our theories, policies, pedagogies, and practices related to college student plagiarism are based on our own perspectives on plagiarism, and on the experiences that we have had as students, as teachers, as scholars, and as writing program administrators. Yet without a rich sense of the experiences and understandings that our students bring to our classes, our best theories, policies, pedagogies, and practices will remain wedded to *our* constructions of plagiarism rather than in our students' constructions of it. By inviting college students to discuss plagiarism in a safe and controlled research setting, this dissertation has invited the voices of college students to inform the professional discourse on plagiarism. And it is imperative that we listen to their voices—that we consider their perspectives on plagiarism, that we attend to their experiences with plagiarism, and that we reflect on their stories about plagiarism—as we work toward "a more practical solution" (Prochaska, 2001, p. 75) for the problems that plagiarism presents for students as well as for our classes—a solution than we have yet been able to envisage or achieve.

Implications of the Study's Findings

So what does this research study help us conclude?

We teach academic discourse, including its genres, patterns, conventions, and styles. We assume a backdrop of academic principles and values. But we should not teach a personal morality of plagiarism. After all, what we call *plagiarism* is neither inherently moral nor immoral. We attach the label to a number of different textual and performative acts, and whether a passage is judged to be fair or foul depends on a variety of factors: context, audience, background knowledge, intent, and so on. As I have shown, students do experience plagiarism as a moral issue, and some of them regard intentional plagiarism as a substantial moral transgression. Yet whether or not we believe purposeful plagiarism to signal an odious lack of

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morals, we should not teach it as a violation of *personal morality*. Instead, we should teach

about, and respond to, deliberate plagiarism as a transgression of *academic ethics*—as a textual

and behavioral act that violates a commonly understood, widely accepted principle of the

contemporary Western academic community. And we should teach the construct of plagiarism

as we understand it to be. Even though we cannot fix plagiarism's definition in a stable set of

textual practices, each of us can help our students understand our own ideas about textual

transgressivity. We can make our ideas, expectations, and policies much clearer to our students

than we do now. I believe that we must do better.

The study participants made a number of points that I find unsettling. They noted

substantial variation in terms of how plagiarism is understood, taught about, and responded to

within the academy. Recall what Erik, Jared, and Lauren noted:

> ERIK (INT 01): I mean, it's a gray area—with, like, paraphrasing, that one person might say that it's plagiarism, one person might say just watch yourself, and watch how you're paraphrasing.
> KURT (INT 01): Have you had instructors hold different ideas about that?
> ERIK (INT 01): Yeah—yeah. I've had instructors that are very strict about it; if it's anywhere close to it, then that's it; that's plagiarism, you're gonna lose the grade…. But then I've also had people that are just real laid back with it—like, this is what it is, and you know you shouldn't do it, so just be careful of what you do, but they're not gonna hold you real hard to it if you make an accident.

> JARED (FG 02): There's not, like, a standard—every paper a student at this school writes doesn't go to the Dean and he doesn't read it and say [if] this is plagiarism. It goes to the teacher, and there are fifteen English 101 classes, and each teacher is going to have a different judgment on what plagiarism is.
> LAUREN (INT 06): It seems as though the teaching is kind of vague—that they don't really tell you exactly what it is. I mean, people know that if you copy it down word-for-word, that's plagiarism, and nobody's going to argue with that. But I was getting held accountable for things that I didn't realize were plagiarism, because we had never sat down in class and said, "Well, you know what? If the wording is just too similar, if the ideas are too similar, and you're taking credit for it when it's clearly something you took from another paper, then, it is plagiarism—it still is." I think—I mean, she just never—most teachers never really go over that.

We should be disturbed at how little some students, and some instructors, understand

about an ncreasingly common method for detecting plagiarism in student papers—the electronic

detection of plagiarism. For these students, and for some instructors as well, an important

academic process—one that should be fully clear, consistent, and transparent—appears to be

mysterious and arbitrarily authoritarian:

> HANNAH (INT 09): [Some people] think that the teachers have that machine that they put all the papers through, and they can find out if it's someone else's work…. I don't know if all professors have it, but there's just—it's a bit rumor that everyone—like, they put through a computer, or the Internet, and it searches, or something. Or it even searches their past papers that students have handed in.

> DAVID (INT 05): I got such a poor grade on that first paper; she gave me a D on, because [the Turnitin.com report] came up with so much plagiarism. That grade's fine; I accept that because it was wrong. [But] the second grade…. She told me that when she ran it through [Turnitin.com] again it still came up as plagiarism, and this time she didn't even bother to specify where—she seemed rather short about it and didn't want to discuss it, and I can't be positive, but she implied that the same spots, almost all the same places, came up as plagiarism. And she said—her exact words were—she said she "had no choice but to fail me."

Finally, as writing teachers, we should all be concerned by the effect that the possibility

of plagiarism has had on the academic environment, and how it has affected our students'

composing processes:

> JULIE (FG 05): It's drastically affected for me. I—I barely even want to write the paper then, because I'm so afraid about what I'm citing that I get totally distracted and I don't even concentrate so much on my thoughts—my own thoughts, and my own opinions, and what I value as important for the paper—because I'm so worried about where this piece is going to fit in, how I'm going to cite it, and where I'm going to get my references.

In the training ground of the academy, we are more concerned with the development of

authors than with the production of texts. In other words, although we ask our students to

produce texts, it is ultimately the students themselves we judge, and not their texts. As their

stories have shown, the students who participated in this study understand that well. Rebecca

Moore Howard has written powerfully about the human impact of student plagiarism:

In the matter of student plagiarism, it is real people who are at issue. These are not author-functions; these are human beings sitting in one's class, one's office. And it is not their texts that are punished, but their persons. Their persons, therefore, must be integral to the definition of their plagiarism. For plagiarism, finally, is not a feature of a text. It is an action that involves both reader and writer. (1999, p. 164)

Rebecca Moore Howard's reminder about the human dimensions of plagiarism leads me to my conclusion. If we listen to our students (and this study has offered one way to do so), and if we talk about plagiarism *with* them rather than *against* them, we can learn a lot: about our students, about ourselves, about our teaching, and about why we believe some of what we believe. The 31 college students who participated in this study came forward to talk about plagiarism when they learned that someone wanted to listen. They came for a variety of reasons, but one of the most important seemed to be their sense that it was time for a change.

Several participants called on us to reexamine our most basic notions about plagiarism. These students believe that our ideas about what plagiarism is—and our ways of responding to plagiarism—have not kept pace with the significantly changing discursive environment that students experience both within and beyond the academy. Lauren was one of these students, and I present her ideas, slightly reordered, in her own voice. With as much attribution as the research study permits, I give Lauren the last word.

LAUREN (INT 06): With plagiarism, it was set up a certain way that worked. I guess it probably worked at the time, or else they wouldn't have set it up that way. But now, it doesn't really seem to be—it's not all that practical, and it's really big; not a lot of people understand the specifics of it. But rather than really delving into it and saying, "Well, what needs to change about this?," they're still just teaching students the same things. It's a different society that we live in, [and] we have so many sources available. Since things have changed so much in society, this is one of those things that's just kind of remained constant—and probably shouldn't, because, like I said, there are so many ideas floating around out there. Yes, I think taking someone's ideas and crediting it to yourself is wrong. There are some gray areas, in that [someone] maybe didn't know that somebody else had the same idea—and it's quite likely, with all the people and all the records that are out about what people have said and what they've thought. I'm not saying that the research isn't being done to change it, because obviously, this [research study] is probably going to play a part in it. But at least from what I have experienced, nothing has been changing—they're just continuing to teach the same thing. [And] again, I think a lot of it has to do with intentions, which is a hard thing to prove. So I really don't know how they'd go about doing all of this, but I think maybe they—they should relax a little bit on how they deal with it, or on how they review it, whenever there is an offense. Because right now, I think we are at the point where everyone just says plagiarism is wrong, plagiarism is wrong, and they don't really look any deeper. I think it definitely needs to be reevaluated.

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[26] A number of sources—among them Howard's own Web site—identify this article's year of publication as 1993, not 1992. I have used 1992, based on my photocopy of the article as it appeared in the print journal. 1992 is also shown as the year of the article's publication in the ERIC clearinghouse (http://eric.ed.gov), as well as the year indicated by the Web site for the Journal of Teaching Writing (http://www.iupui.edu/~jtw/jtw_index.htm). However, the Journal of Teaching Writing Web site incorrectly reports the article's title as "Plagiarism and the Postmodern Professor." As a doctoral candidate, I am confident of my ability to explain and defend what might appear to be a substantial discrepancy in my source documentation. I worry, however, how such an inconsistency might be regarded and responded to if it appeared in a paper by a first-year composition student suspected of plagiarism.

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This project has been approved by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects.

This survey asks questions about your ideas about, attitudes toward, and experiences with, plagiarism. **Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary and anonymous. Please do not write your name anywhere on this survey.** If you do not wish to complete this survey, or if you do not want your responses included in the study, you may discard the survey. The survey will take you approximately 10 minutes to complete. When you finish, please deposit it in the designated envelope, and pick up a copy of the Survey Debriefing Form. Thank you.

Section I: Ideas about Plagiarism

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Circle the best response in the columns on the right.	strongly agree	agree	neutral/ don't know	disagree	strongly disagree
1. I feel I have a good understanding of what plagiarism is.	5	4	3	2	1
2. My school's expectations about plagiarism are clear to me.	5	4	3	2	1
3. College and high school teachers have different expectations about plagiarism.	5	4	3	2	1
4. Plagiarism is a form of cheating.	5	4	3	2	1
5. Copying a few words from a source (without providing a citation) is plagiarism.	5	4	3	2	1
6. If I work with a tutor to develop a paper, I can be accused of plagiarism.	5	4	3	2	1
7. It's okay to have someone else edit the final draft of my paper for me.	5	4	3	2	1
8. Different departments at IUP have different expectations about plagiarism.	5	4	3	2	1
9. If my school required me to report other students' plagiarism, I would do so.	5	4	3	2	1
10. Plagiarism is always wrong.	5	4	3	2	1
11. Students who are caught plagiarizing should be punished severely.	5	4	3	2	1
12. Severe penalties for plagiarism would discourage me from plagiarizing.	5	4	3	2	1
13. If I knew that my instructor would check all of my papers against a computer database of sources, I would be less likely to plagiarize.	5	4	3	2	1
14. Teachers are good at discovering plagiarism.	5	4	3	2	1
15. It's okay to plagiarize in a class if the teacher gives poor or unclear assignments.	5	4	3	2	1
16. Most students have plagiarized at one time or another.	5	4	3	2	1
17. If I knew I would not be caught, I would consider plagiarizing on a paper.	5	4	3	2	1
18. I know someone who has plagiarized a whole paper without being caught.	5	4	3	2	1
19. Academic integrity is important to me.	5	4	3	2	1
20. Plagiarism puts other students at a disadvantage.	5	4	3	2	1

Section II: Understanding Plagiarism

Which of the following do you consider to be plagiarism? Circle the best response on the right.	definitely plagiarism	possibly plagiarism	not sure/ undecided	probably not	definitely not
21. Submitting an entire paper written by another person as your own.	5	4	3	2	1
22. Submitting a paper partly written by another person as your own.	5	4	3	2	1
23. Turning in the same paper for two different classes.	5	4	3	2	1
24. Turning in a paper that a tutor has helped revise.	5	4	3	2	1
25. Copying a few sentences from a source without including a citation.	5	4	3	2	1
26. Copying one sentence without using quotation marks or a citation.	5	4	3	2	1
27. Writing a paper by combining entire paragraphs from several sources, using citations and quotation marks around the paragraphs.	5	4	3	2	1
28. Using a thesis statement that someone else suggested.	5	4	3	2	1
29. Working with a classmate to plan the main points of a paper.	5	4	3	2	1
30. Having someone else do the proofreading and editing for a paper.	5	4	3	2	1

(SURVEY CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE)

Section III: Comparing the Severity of Plagiarism

How serious is plagiarism compared to the following? Circle the best response in the columns on the right.	plag. is much worse	plag. is somewhat worse	neutral/ unsure	plag. is not as bad	plag. is not nearly as bad
31.	Cheating on a quiz.	5	4	3	2	1
32.	Cheating on a test.	5	4	3	2	1
33.	Cheating on a homework assignment.	5	4	3	2	1
34.	Shoplifting a shirt from a department store.	5	4	3	2	1
35.	Buying a set of test questions before the test.	5	4	3	2	1
36.	Helping a friend cheat on a test.	5	4	3	2	1
37.	Making a copy of a computer program without buying it.	5	4	3	2	1
38.	Storing math formulas in your calculator for use on a test.	5	4	3	2	1
39.	Stealing a book from the campus library.	5	4	3	2	1
40.	Downloading copyrighted music or video files.	5	4	3	2	1

Section IV: Personal Experiences with Plagiarism

How many times have you engaged in the following? Circle the best response in the columns on the right.	never	one or two times	three to five times	six or more times	unsure/ don't know
41.	Copied someone else's music CD or cassette for your own use.	5	4	3	2	1
42.	Installed pirated or illegally copied software on a computer system.	5	4	3	2	1
43.	Searched the internet for a paper to fit an assignment you've had.	5	4	3	2	1
44.	Looked through paper files for a paper to fit an assignment you've had.	5	4	3	2	1
45.	Copied information or text from a website into a paper without giving a citation.	5	4	3	2	1
46.	Copied information or text from a printed source into a paper without a citation.	5	4	3	2	1
47.	Cheated on a quiz or test while in high school.	5	4	3	2	1
48.	Cheated on a quiz or test while in college.	5	4	3	2	1
49.	Plagiarized portions of a paper while in high school.	5	4	3	2	1
50.	Plagiarized portions of a paper while in college.	5	4	3	2	1
51.	Plagiarized an entire paper while in high school.	5	4	3	2	1
52.	Plagiarized an entire paper while in college.	5	4	3	2	1
53.	Plagiarized a paper for an English class (high school and/or college).	5	4	3	2	1
54.	Plagiarized a paper for a class other than English (high school and/or college).	5	4	3	2	1
55.	Plagiarized a paper and HAVE NOT been caught.	5	4	3	2	1
56.	Plagiarized a paper and HAVE been caught.	5	4	3	2	1
57.	Been accused of plagiarizing when you hadn't plagiarized.	5	4	3	2	1
58.	Considered plagiarizing but decided not to.	5	4	3	2	1
59.	How many times might you plagiarize portions of a paper in the future?	5	4	3	2	1
60.	How many times might you plagiarize an entire paper in the future?	5	4	3	2	1

Section V: Questions about this Survey

61.	I feel that my privacy has been guaranteed by how this survey was administered.	yes	no	not sure
62.	I have felt comfortable responding to the questions on this survey.	yes	no	not sure
63.	I would feel comfortable discussing plagiarism in a small focus group of fellow students.	yes	no	not sure
64.	Assuming I have plagiarized, I would feel comfortable discussing the details of my plagiarism one-on-one with a researcher.	yes	no	not sure
65.	All of my responses on this survey have been true.	yes	no	not sure

Section VI: Demographic Information

Gender:	female male
Age:	_____ yrs old
Year in School:	fresh soph jr sr other
Nationality:	
First Language Spoken:	
Ethnicity/Ethnic Group:	

APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHICS OF FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

FOCUS GROUP	PSEUDONYM	AGE, GENDER, YEAR IN SCHOOL (MAJOR)
FG 1: 4 participants	Amanda	22 year-old female, Senior (Communications Media)
	Candice	22 year-old female, Senior (Art Education)
	Kevin	23 year-old male, Senior (Psychology)
	Damion	21 year-old male, Senior (Communications Media)
FG 2: 3 participants	Gina	19 year-old female, Sophomore (Criminology/Psychology)
	Jared	20 year-old male, Sophomore (Elementary Education)
	Desiree	20 year-old female, Junior (Communications Media)
FG 3: 5 participants	Regina	18 year-old female, Freshman (English/Pre-Law)
	Lacee	22 year-old female, Senior (Communications Media)
	Shelley	19 year-old female, Sophomore (Criminology)
	Brandy	19 year-old female, Freshman (Criminology/Psychology)
	Leigh	(Female, 21, Senior, (Communications Media)
FG 4: 3 participants	Wendy	19 year-old female, Sophomore (English)
	Erica	21 year-old female, Junior (Nursing)
	Kayla	19 year-old female, Sophomore (Criminology)
FG 5: 2 participants	Julie	20 year-old female, Sophomore (Elementary Education)
	Hillary	19 year-old female, Sophomore (Child Dev/Fam Relations)
FG 6: 5 participants	Hilda	21 year-old female, Junior (Journalism/Public Relations)
	Carrie	42 year-old female, Junior (Child Dev/Fam Relations)
	Bobby	19 year-old male, Freshman (Undeclared/Elementary Educ)
	Frank	22 year-old male, Sophomore (Undeclared)
	Larry	22 year-old male, Junior (Business)

APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHICS OF INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

INTERVIEW	PSEUDONYM	AGE, GENDER, YEAR IN SCHOOL (MAJOR)
INT 1	Erik	19 year-old male, Sophomore (Business Management)
INT 2	Susan	39 year-old female, Junior (Psychology)
INT 3	Molly	22 year-old female, Senior (Criminology)
INT 4	Laura	21 year-old female, Junior (Communications Media)
INT 5	David	21 year-old male, Junior (Journalism)
INT 6	Lauren	19 year-old female, Freshman (Undeclared/Fine Arts)
INT 7	Stephanie	21 year-old female, Junior (Psychology)
INT 8	Mark	20 year-old male, Sophomore (English/Economics)
INT 9	Hannah	22 year-old female, Senior (Communications Media)

APPENDIX D: LIST OF PROMPTS FOR INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

Discussion Prompts for Focus Groups and Interviews:

1. Please discuss what you know about plagiarism. How do you define it? What do you think about it?

2. Do you think plagiarism is the same thing as cheating?

3. How widespread is plagiarism? In other words, what percent of students would you estimated have plagiarized?

4. What reasons might people give for plagiarizing?

5. Do you think any of these are "good" or "justifiable" reasons?

6. Do you think it is ever okay to plagiarize? If so, under what circumstances?

7. Should consequences for plagiarism vary by "type" of plagiarism? In other words, are some kinds worse than others?

8. Does the Internet make students more likely to plagiarize?

9. What questions or comments do you have for other students about plagiarism?

10. Do you know anyone who has plagiarized?

11. What has happened to people you know who have been caught plagiarizing?

12. What do you think the consequences of plagiarism should be?

13. Were you ever accused of plagiarism when you had not plagiarized?

14. Do you think you would be good at plagiarizing? Why/why not?

15. What sort of things do plagiarists do to conceal their plagiarism (to make people think they did not plagiarize)?

16. Do you think schools do enough to discourage plagiarism? If not, what should they do differently?

17. Many schools are using "anti-plagiarism" software. Do you think this would make students less likely to plagiarize?

18. Have you used "Turnitin.com," the "anti-plagiarism" program recently purchased by the university? What are your thoughts about this?

19. Do you think teachers and professors are good at detecting plagiarism?

20. What should a professor do if she suspects a student has plagiarized? What if she has proof of the plagiarism?

21. Present some definitions of plagiarism: which is the best definition/explanation, and why?

Specific Written Questions for Focus Groups:

1. What is your definition of plagiarism? (Write down; we'll discuss)

2. Have you ever plagiarized? (Write down Yes or No).

3. If you have plagiarized, what were your reasons for doing so?

4. If you have plagiarized, how many times did you do so?

5. Were you ever caught when you plagiarized? Describe what happened.

6. If you haven't plagiarized, why not? What kept you from plagiarizing?

7. What is source of your plagiarism? Paper file, internet, library book?

8. How do you go about plagiarizing? What practices did you engage in?

Specific Prompts for Interviews:

1. What is your definition of plagiarism?

2. Have you ever plagiarized?

3. If you have plagiarized, what were your reasons for doing so?

4. How do students decide whether or not to plagiarize? When do they decide?

5. If you have plagiarized, how many times did you do so?

6. Were you ever caught when you plagiarized? Describe what happened.

7. If you haven't plagiarized, why not? What kept you from plagiarizing?

8. What are some of the sources of your plagiarism? Paper file, Internet, library book? How do you choose them?

9. How do you go about plagiarizing? What textual practices did you engage in?

10. What else would you like to say about plagiarism?

11. Any specific comments for instructors?

12. Any specific comments for colleges/administrators?

13. Any specific comments for peers/college students?

APPENDIX E: SUMMARY OF TRANSCRIPTION RECORDS

Research Session	Number of Participants	Recording Time (min:sec)	Transcribing Sessions	Minutes Spent Transcribing	Word Count of Transcript
FG 01	4	71:39	5	350	10,650
FG 02	3	70:19	5	600	13,500
FG 03	5	66:45	5	300	11,750
FG 04	3	61:34	5	400	11,300
FG 05	2	75:17	5	400	13,700
FG 06	5	70:12	6	460	12,500
INT 01	1	71:57	4	230	10,300
INT 02	1	69:44	5	300	11,250
INT 03	1	63:30	4	260	9,300
INT 04	1	70:55	3	270	10,100
INT 05	1	64:19	4	300	6,650
INT 06	1	72:45	5	330	11,000
INT 07	1	76:46	4	275	8,750
INT 08	1	69:37	5	255	10,500
INT 09	1	72:20	6	385	9,750
15 research sessions	31 research participants	17:27 hours of recorded discussion	71 transcribing sessions	85:15 hours of transcribing the recordings	161,000 words in the full set of transcripts

Average Duration and Word Count of Focus Group Recordings: 69 minutes; 12,250 words

Average Duration and Word Count of Interview Recordings: 70 minutes; 9,750 words

APPENDIX F: PARTICIPANTS' WRITTEN DEFINITIONS OF *PLAGIARISM*

Name	Written Definition of Plagiarism
Amanda (FG 01)	Directly copying someone else's writing/words, and calling them yours.
Bobby (FG 06)	The act of taking another's ideas or work and using them as your own.
Brandy (FG 03)	The use of someone else's work with knowledge and without credit.
Candice (FG 01)	Using the ideas, words, or images of others as your own without citing or referencing. Or citing incorrectly.
Carrie (FG 06)	Using someone else's words or ideas without giving them credit, therefore giving the appearance that they are yours.
Damion (FG 01)	Using someone else's work or ideas and claiming them as your own, solely for your own benefit.
David (INT 05)	Purposefully and disrespectfully using the thoughts and ideas of another person as your own.
Desiree (FG 02)	Taking credit for another person's work in writing or professionally speaking.
Erica (FG 04)	Copying the written work of someone else either in part or entire and attempting to pass it off as your own. —Cheating.
Erik (INT 01)	Knowingly using someone else's work and passing it off as your own.
Frank (FG 06)	The use of other writers' or artists' material work uncredited and giving no acknowledgment of original author/creator.
Gina (FG 02)	The copying/use of someone else's work as your own.
Hannah (INT 09)	Using someone else's work without consent. Like copying articles or using some else's research papers as your own.
Hilda (FG 06)	Directly copying/using one's work for your own. Taking credit for another person's work.
Hillary (FG 05)	Using someone else's words/information as your own or not citing it.
Jared (FG 02)	Stealing others work and claiming it as your own.
Julie (FG 05)	Stealing someone else's thoughts/ideas by not giving them due recognition for their work/s.
Kayla (FG 04)	Using someone else's thoughts, ideas, words & using them as your own.
Kevin (FG 01)	Use someone else's words, ideas, writings, thoughts, etc. as your own.
Lacee (FG 03)	Copying someone else's work, or citing another person's work without giving them credit, and using it as if you wrote it yourself.
Larry (FG 06)	The use of another person's ideas or thoughts in words, or in a way that is unfair to the plagiarized of plagiarizing party.
Laura (INT 04)	Any form of copying of another's words/ideas without giving the appropriate credit or works cited.
Lauren (INT 06)	The act of taking credit for words or ideas that are not your own; usually implies a writing medium, but I don't think that it's limited to just that.
Leigh (FG 03)	The act of using someone else's written work as your own, without giving the original author credit.
Mark (INT 08)	An untruthful declaration of credit for oneself when using someone else's work.
Molly (INT 03)	Claiming that another person's research or writing is your own.
Regina (FG 03)	Using someone else's written property and defining it as your own.
Shelley (FG 03)	Copying the ideas and wording of an individual's work without proper credit given to the individual.
Stephanie (INT 07)	The deliberate use of another person's works where the original author is not identified and the works are implied to be one's own.
Susan (INT 02)	To read/retrieve oral or written work for personal use and promoting the material as though it were your own without giving credit to its original author.
Wendy (FG 04)	The use of written/spoken research/ideas without proper credit being given to the original "author."

APPENDIX G: FREQUENCY OF FOCUS GROUP PARTCIPANTS' PLAGIARIZING

	EVER PLAGIARIZE IN COLLEGE?			PLAGIARIZE IN HIGH SCHOOL?			PLAGIARIZE IN EITHER COLLEGE OR H.S.?		
	YES	NO	UNSURE	YES	NO	UNSURE	YES	NO	UNSURE
FG 01 4 students	2 stds 2-3 times[a]	2 stds	---	1 std 1 time	2 stds	1 std	3 stds 3-4 times	1 std	---
FG 02 3 students	---	1 std	2 stds	2 stds 1 time[b]	---	1 std	2 stds 1+ times	---	1 std
FG 03 5 students	---	5 stds	---	1 std 1 time	2 stds	2 stds	1 std 1 time	2 stds	2 stds
FG 04 3 students	---	2 stds	1 std[c]	---	3 stds	---	---	2 stds	1 std
FG 05 2 students	---	1 std	1 std	---	2 stds	---	---	1 std	1 std
FG 06 5 students	1 std 2-4 times	2 stds	2 stds	2 stds 8-14 times[d]	2 stds	1 std[e]	2 stds[f] 10-18 times	---	3 stds
OVERALL 22 students	3 stds plag'd 4-7 times	13 stds	6 stds	6 stds plag'd 11-17 times	11 stds	5 stds	8 stds plag'd 14-23 times	6 stds	8 stds

[a] combined total for the focus group; in this session, one participant reported having plagiarized once, and another reported, "rewrote a paper for a boyfriend once or twice freshman year"
[b] one participants did not report how many times s/he had plagiarized
[c] the participant reported, "citation error first year"

[d] one participant reported 3-4 times, and the other reported 5-10 times
[e] the participant reported, "probably"
[f] only one focus group participant (from FG 06) reported having plagiarized in *both* high school and college