

Names of Group Members:

Case Study # _____

Summary of the problem:

Do you think this was plagiarism?

What do you think the consequences should be for the perpetrator(s)?

Case 1

“Plagiarism is using other’s ideas and words without clearly acknowledging the source of the information.” – Indiana University Writing Center

People/publications involved:

- Kaavya Viswanathan – author of How Opal Mehta Got Kissed, Got Wild and Got a Life – published in April 2006
- Megan McCafferty – author of Sloppy Firsts (2001) and Second Helpings (2003)
- Harvard University – school at which Viswanathan is a sophomore
- Little, Brown and Co. – publisher who advanced \$500,000
- DreamWorks – movie company plans to make a film based on Opal

Background – Kaavya Viswanathan, a Harvard student writes a book for an advance of \$500,000 complete with movie option. The book for young adults is published April 2006.

Accusation

At least 40 passages copied/paraphrased from Megan McCafferty’s books plus a smattering of sentences from other authors - Salman Rushdie, Meg Cabot, and Tanuja Desai Hidier.

One Example

From Born Confused by Tanuja Desai Hidier

“All day the house had smelled of spices, and now before our eyes lay the resulting combustion of all that kitchen chemistry. The feast my mother had conjured up was extravagant, and I realized how hungry I was;”

From Opal Mehta...

“This year, fortunately, there wasn’t an egg in sight. Instead, the house had smelled of spices all day, and when we sat down at the dining room table, I nearly combusted at the sight of the extravagant feast my mom had conjured up.”

Defense

"When I was in high school, I read and loved two wonderful novels by Megan McCafferty, Sloppy Firsts and Second Helpings, which spoke to me in a way few other books did. Recently, I was very surprised and upset to learn that there are similarities between some passages in my novel, How Opal Mehta Got Kissed, Got Wild, and Got a Life, and passages in these books.

"While the central stories of my book and hers are completely different, I wasn't aware of how much I may have internalized Ms. McCafferty's words. I am a huge fan of her work and can honestly say that any phrasing similarities between her works and mine were completely unintentional and unconscious. My publisher and I plan to revise my novel for future printings to eliminate any inappropriate similarities.”

"I sincerely apologize to Megan McCafferty and to any who feel they have been misled by these unintentional errors on my part." Ms. Viswanathan’s statement to the press.

Things to discuss

What should happen to the books? What consequences should Viswanathan face? Should Harvard University take any action?

Case 2

“Plagiarism is using other’s ideas and words without clearly acknowledging the source of the information.” – Indiana University Writing Center

People/publication involved:

- Physics students – submitted work that wasn’t theirs
- Prof. Lou Bloomfield – professor who suspected plagiarism
- University of Virginia – place where this happened

Background

Lou Bloomfield, a physics professor at UVA, heard that some of his students were submitting work that wasn’t theirs and wasn’t attributed. He wrote a computer program that would look for common phrases. Since all students submit reports in electronic format, he was able to search 1,500 term papers with the program. UVA has an “Honor System” which has been in place since 1842. Students caught lying, cheating or stealing and found guilty are permanently expelled. (source: *The Washington Post*, *Wired News*)

Accusation

Prof. Lou Bloomfield accused, with evidence, 122 students of plagiarism. He ran reports through his software program looking for papers that shared phrases of at least six words. Those papers with matches tended to have other, longer portions in common with other people’s work.

Example

No specific example of writing. Just the facts of 122 students accused.

Defense

One student, who graduated in 1999 but was under investigation, thinks he lent his paper to a friend to use for ideas, but not for copying.

Things to think about

This program compared one student at UVA’s work to another. What do you think the professor would have found if he compared papers to information that could be found online, in newspapers, in encyclopedias? Do you think expulsion is too harsh a sentence for plagiarism? Is it fair to take back a degree someone already earned?

Case 3

“Plagiarism is using other’s ideas and words without clearly acknowledging the source of the information.” – Indiana University Writing Center

People/publication involved:

- Stephen Ambrose – wrote The Wild Blue: The Men and Boys Who Flew the B-24s over Germany pub. 2001
- *The Weekly Standard* – the journal that publicized the plagiarism
- Thomas Childers – wrote Wings of Morning in 1995
- Simon and Schuster – Ambrose’s publisher

Background

Stephen Ambrose is an historian with more than 25 books to his credit. One book, Band of Brothers, was made into an HBO series.

Accusation

It is claimed that whole passages in The Wild Blue are nearly exactly the words in Wings of Morning. None of the passages are put in quotations or attributed to Childers. While there is an acknowledgment of Childers’ book, citations are inadequate and misleading.

Example

Childers:

“Up, up, up, groping through the clouds for what seemed like an eternity...no amount of practice could have prepared them for what they encountered. B-24s, glittering like mica, were popping up out of the clouds all over the sky.”

Ambrose:

“Up, up, up he went, until he got above the clouds. No amount of practice could have prepared the pilot and crew for what they encountered – B24s, glittering like mica, were popping up out of the clouds over here, over there, everywhere.”
(quotes from *The Weekly Standard*)

Defense

Initial defense from Simon & Schuster - “Stephen Ambrose’s The Wild Blue is an original and important work of World War II history. All research garnered from previously published material is appropriately footnoted.” Defense from Ambrose two days after article – “I made a mistake for which I am sorry. It will be corrected in future editions of the book.” (info from *TWS*)

Things to Think About

Is an apology enough to right the wrong of plagiarism? What do you think of Simon & Schuster’s statement?

Case 4

“Plagiarism is using other’s ideas and words without clearly acknowledging the source of the information.” – Indiana University Writing Center

People/publication involved:

- Doris Kearns Goodwin – wrote The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys (1987)
- Simon and Schuster – her publisher
- Lynn McTaggart – author whose work was plagiarized, settled the issue for an unknown amount of money soon after publication
- *The Weekly Standard* – journal which exposed the plagiarism that had been undisclosed

Background – Ms. Goodwin has six history books to her credit, written over the span of 15 years. She was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for No Ordinary Time: Franklin & Eleanor Roosevelt -- The Home Front in World War II. The Pulitzer is awarded annually for accomplishment in literature, journalism and music.

Accusation – An article in the January 2002 edition of *The Weekly Standard* detailed many similarities between Goodwin’s book and Ms. McTaggart’s book and pointed out the lack of citations.

Example

McTaggart:

“Hardly a day passed without a photograph in the papers of little Teddy, taking a snapshot with his Brownie held upside down, or the five Kennedy children lined up on a train or bus.”

Goodwin:

Hardly a day passed without a newspaper photograph of little Teddy taking a snapshot with his camera held upside down, or the five Kennedy children lined up on a train or bus.” (quotes from *The Weekly Standard*)

Defense

“I wrote everything in long hand in those days, including the notes I took on secondary sources. When I wrote the passages in question, I did not have the McTaggart book in front of me. Drawing on my notes, I did not realize that in some cases they constituted a close paraphrase of the original work,” Goodwin in 2002.

Things to discuss

Should people have been told Ms. Goodwin plagiarized when it was first discovered instead of 10 years later? Ms. Goodwin has a new book being published, does it deserve scrutiny? What should happen to the book she plagiarized? What about her other books? Is her defense good enough?

Consequences

Case 1: Viswanathan

Initially, book was to have been rewritten, but now book withdrawn from bookstores, cancelled book deal, cancelled movie deal. The Record of Bergen county, a newspaper, will review articles written by V during her previously held internship (2003 & 2004), loss of reputation. Graduated from Harvard, went on to Georgetown Law.

Case 2: Goodwin

Initial book published in 1987 – veracity as recently as 2003 questioned as a result when new book about Lincoln published. Indefinite leave from pundit perch on *PBS's News Hour with Jim Lehrer*. Withdrew all unsold copies of Kennedys book, issued an apology. Simon and Schuster reached a substantial financial settlement with McTaggart after the book appeared in 1987, in return for unspecified damages, aggrieved author agreed to keep matter confidential, sparing Goodwin embarrassment.

Book republished with 40 new endnotes citing McTaggart that weren't in first edition. A preface now acknowledges McTaggart's work, but nothing indicates these are new changes. At one point accused another author of plagiarizing from her.

This is from a Letter to the Editor in the *New York Times* written October 25, 2003 by a number of distinguished historians in defense of Goodwin.

“Plagiarism is a deliberate intent to purloin the words of another and to represent them as one's own.

Ms. Goodwin did not intentionally pass off someone else's words as her own. Her sources in her 1987 book, *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys*, were elaborately credited and footnoted. Her errors resulted from inadvertence, not intent.

She did not, she does not, cheat or plagiarize. In fact, her character and work symbolize the highest standards of moral integrity.” (from Slate.com)

Case 3: Ambrose

All of his books have come under scrutiny. Plagiarism has been found in three other books. Childers did not sue for damages – says he is disappointed in Ambrose. Ambrose says quotations and attributions will be added in future editions of his books.

Case 4: UVA

After a 20 month investigation, 45 students were expelled and three graduates saw their degrees revoked. Students were either convicted of cheating or left the school admitting guilt.