

# The Notion of ‘Self-Plagiarism’ (Work in Progress)

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## Abstract

Irving Hexham affirms that “Unfortunately, while there are some good books on plagiarism generally..., very little has been written about academic plagiarism.” (*The Plague of Plagiarism: Academic Plagiarism Defined*, 2005).<sup>1</sup> Even less has been written about academic self-plagiarism. We can find more research and reflection articles regarding students’ plagiarism and self-plagiarism than on the issue of self-plagiarism by academics. Garfinkel (*A Fresh Look at Self-Plagiarism*, 2015) asserts that “Practically, because the definition of self-plagiarism remains unclear, many researchers are simply unaware of the implications of it” (p. 1). To address this issue, as clearly and shortly<sup>2</sup> as possible, is the main objective of this brief article. Furthermore, there is no adequate consensus with regard to this subject. There is agreement that some practices are self-plagiarism, but there is disagreement regarding other publishing practices. Our purpose in this draft essay<sup>3</sup> is to make an initial step toward a communication-oriented process, which is: 1) to identify a consensus perspective regarding the notion of self-plagiarism and/or 2) to provide some details and references related to what is considered self-plagiarism in the *Journal of Systemics, Cybernetics, and Informatics* (JSCI, <http://www.iiisci.org/journal/sci/Contents.asp>). Accordingly, this article is not a comprehensive one, but merely represents the most important viewpoints on the issue of academics’ self-plagiarism in order to 1) identify what is common to most perspectives on the topic and, consequently, 2) provide a clear and accurate description of what characterizes self-plagiarism as well as specific and unambiguous ways to avoid it.

## Meaning of Self-Plagiarism

According to the *Century Dictionary and Cyclopedia*, plagiarism is “The purloining or wrongful appropriation of another’s ideas, writings, artistic designs, etc., and giving these forth as one’s own; specifically, the offense of taking passages from another’s compositions and publishing them, either word by word or in substance, as one’s own; literally theft.” (The Century Co., 1889/1911, p. 4523). To plagiarize derive from the “Latin *plagiarius* ‘kidnapper, seducer,

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<sup>1</sup> Although more has been written since 2005, Hexham’s general reasoning is still valid.

<sup>2</sup> One of the best combinations of clarity, precision, detail, and length can be found in Miguel Roig’s article (“Avoiding plagiarism, self-plagiarism, and other questionable writing practices: A guide to ethical writing,” 2005).

<sup>3</sup> We understand as “draft essay” a “thought piece” intended to include reflections and interpretations, via critical thinking, applied to what has been defined or described by authors as “self-Plagiarism”. In our specific case, “draft essay” is a first step in the process of working toward a systemic notion of “self-Plagiarism”. In this context, this “draft essay” will support 1) the **dissemination** of initial ideas and the collection of feedback and other related intellectual perspectives on the notion of “self-Plagiarism” and 2) a trial and error **learning process** designed to identify an **integral** notion of “self-plagiarism”, which should be systemically comprehensive i.e. identifying the potential relationships among the different perspectives, senses, and definitions of “self-Plagiarism”. We are using the term “draft essay” to differentiate this writing from a research paper, a formal reflection paper, or even from an essay draft; but having in mind the purpose of growing into a research or reflection paper.

plunderer, one who kidnaps the child or slave of another', used by Martial in the sense of "literary thief," from *plagiare* 'to kidnap,' *plagium* 'kidnapping,' from *plaga* 'snare, hunting net' (also 'open expanse, territory')" (*Online Etymology Dictionary*, 2001-2017).

As we can see the meaning of both "plagiarism" and to "plagiarize" is absolutely clear. What about the notion of self-plagiarism? Can anyone steal from himself or herself? Can he/she kidnap himself/herself? Does that make any sense? It seems that in the etymological and actual general meaning of the word "plagiarize," you cannot plagiarize yourself. This is the reason why some authors affirm that self-plagiarism is, by definition, impossible; and consequently, indefinable and an oxymoron. But, at least, in the legal dimension, it is possible to steal from oneself. Irving Hexam (2005) provides an unquestionable example, asserting that "There are circumstances, such as insurance fraud, embezzlement, etc., when it is possible to steal from oneself." You can plagiarize yourself (in a legal context) if you sold the copyright of a product of your intellectual and/or artistic activities to a publisher, employer, marketing organization, etc. and sell it again. In this sense, *you would be stealing your product, which you have already been sold.* This is, in common sense terms, the meaning of self-plagiarism in a legal-economical context.

### **The Essence of Self-Plagiarism**

Does self-plagiarism make any sense in an academic context? Can an author steal his/her own idea, texts or prose, if he/she did not sell his/her intellectual product nor did he/she sign any exclusive copyright to a publisher? In our opinion, it might and it might not. It depends on whether you actually deceived or intended to deceive someone, e.g. the readers, the editors, etc. In general, we can affirm that **deception or the intention of deceiving is the essence and what characterizes self-plagiarism.** *"If there is 1) no act or intention of deceiving and 2) no copyright infringement, then there is no self-plagiarism, in any of the ethical or legal dimensions. Misrepresentation is a way in which deception is frequently sought.* We will relate this characterization of the term to the perspectives other authors have on this issue.

According to *Merriam-Webster*, one of the senses in the meaning of "plagiarize" is to "present as ***new and original*** an idea or product derived from an existing source." (*Merriam-Webster*, 1999, p. 888) [Italics and emphasis added]. This interpretative generalization of the etymological meaning allows us to make sense of the term self-plagiarization; which, accordingly, would mean "to present as ***new and original*** an idea or product (a text for example) derived from an existing source published by the same author". This agrees completely with the notion of self-plagiarism we proposed above because to present one's own previous ideas as something new and original is a misleading act intended to generate a deception in order to achieve some academic promotion, get some grant by showing multiple publications when there is just one, etc. In any case, it might be an intellectual theft and even an academic or economical one, i.e. academic promotion with or without an increase in the salary, the money, and the prestige derived from getting a grant via deception and even fraud, etc. This *Merriam-Webster's* interpretative generalization also applies to the legal and economic issues involved in self-plagiarism because it might generate copyright infringement and/or deceive the publisher with potential undesirable economic effects, which in turn might represent an unlawful behavior of the deceiving author.

Regarding the novelty of the issue, some authors, like Boisvert and Irwin (“Plagiarism on the rise,” 2006), affirm that, even for copyrighted material, it is acceptable for authors to use any portion of other published works of their own and “what is not ethical is the practice of reusing one’s own work *in a way that portrays it as new* when, in fact, it is not” (p. 24)<sup>4</sup> [Italics and emphasis added]. This means that what makes a text used in a previous publication qualify as self-plagiarism is to misrepresent it as *new and original* with the intention of deceiving readers, editors, reviewers, conference organizers, and other stakeholders as, for example, funding bodies, supervisors, grant committees, academic promotion committees, etc.)

### **Is Self-Repeat Plagiarism?**

In our opinion, reusing a previously published text, or self-repeat, is not self-plagiarism itself when referencing upfront the previous publication and no legal copyright infringement is made regarding a copyright transfer to a publisher. This is why, based on the definition and characterization of self-plagiarism given above, we completely agree with Chrousos, et. Al. (“Can one steal from oneself?”, 2012) when he affirms, in an editorial of *the European Journal of Clinical Investigation*, that “we should acknowledge that within the spectrum of self-repeat, one can find both honest and transparent use of text and clearly deceiving practices, and the only way to sort this out is by maximizing transparency in the publication and cross-citation process.” (p. 232)

Chrousos’s advice et. al.’s (2012) applies very well to situations in which the same article is published two or more times for different audiences in different disciplines, as it might be the case of inter-disciplinary research by the same researcher or by a multi-disciplinary team of researchers. Let us take as an example the specific case of Pamela Samuelson, a pioneer in digital copyright law, cyberlaw, intellectual property, and information police. In an article published by “Communication of the ACM” (“Self-Plagiarism or Fair Use?”, 1994), i.e. to a technical audience in Computer Science, describes what she called her own dilemma with regard to self-plagiarism. She affirms that “Being a writer for both legal and technical audiences, I grapple with reuse of prose questions quite often. The content of articles for each audience often overlaps substantially. With a legal audience, I can take for granted certain legal concepts (such as summary judgment) that I need to explain to the technical audience. On the other hand, lawyers don’t usually understand what algorithms are (as is clear from the Patent & Trademark Office’s continued attempt to distinguish between mathematical and non-mathematical algorithms), whereas I can take for granted that *communications* readers [from computing and mathematical fields] will know exactly what this term means...Oddly enough, the legality of lifting my own prose will depend, in part, on which article is written first. When I write an article for a law review, I almost always retain a copyright and license the review to publish the article... If instead I first write for a technical journal, I don’t own the copyright for the article because I have to assign it in order to get the article published (Many technical journals are published by profit-making institutions, and even non-profit publishers of technical articles like ACM will tend to require assignment of copyright as a matter of course)”. *This is a very good example to show the difficulties of re-writing a disciplinary article for other disciplinary readers or for inter-disciplinary communications. When no legal issues are involved, there might be still ethical concerns that would vary among disciplines, universities, and research institutions.*

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted by Bretag and Mahmud (“Self-Plagiarism and appropriate Textual Use?”, 2009, p. 195)

## *New and/or Original*

It is not unusual to find authors confusing the notions of “original” and “new”. A new dress is not necessarily an original one. A new expression of an idea would not forcibly mean that the idea is in fact original. A new way to express Newton's law of universal gravitation does not convey an original idea. This new way of expressing it might not be copyrighted, but the idea being stated in a new way is not original.

The term ‘original’ means “‘first in time, earliest,’ from the Old French *original* ‘first’” (13c.) and directly from the Latin *originalis*, from *originem* (nominative *origo*) ‘beginning, source, birth,’ from *oriri* ‘to rise’ [and the term ‘new’ derives from] the Old English *neowe*, *niowe*, earlier *niwe* “new, fresh, recent, novel, unheard-of, different from the old” (*Online Etymology Dictionary*, 2001-2017). So, is research for a new application of existing theories (that ended up in as effective solution) considered original research? In our opinion, the answer might be a “yes” or a “no”. It is a “yes” if we are referring to the research for a *solution*, and it is a “no” if we are referring to the theory that was used in the solution. Is applying a case study to the solution of a *new* similar case, via analogical thinking, an *original* research? Is it a *new* research based on original research? These questions are just an example of many others related to the difference between the notions “original” and “new”. Some academics shrug their shoulders when faced with this kind of questions and what they frequently reply is “what you are asking for is answered in peer-review processes. But, do we really know what a peer is? Is there any consensus regarding who might be the peer of whom? Consequently, in our opinion, universities and organizations trying to define self-plagiarism should also address the similarities and the differences between the notions of new and original because using any of these terms or both of them might be ambiguous and generate more hidden problems than provide solutions when defining what self-plagiarism is. In this very short article, we think *there might be self-plagiarism in both cases: the newness in expressing an idea and in its originality*. This is why we associate self-plagiarism with deceiving or the intention of deceiving regardless of the newness of the expression or its content, i.e. the idea being expressed. This means that **paraphrasing** should explicitly be informed to the readers, the reviewers, and the editors; especially if paraphrasing another author.

The lack of consensus is also found in the interpretation of the word ‘original’ in the phrase *original* research, not just in the word “research’ for theories, explanations, or solutions that include the application of already published research or knowledge. For example, is structuring one’s own previous research in a more comprehensive whole an original research? Should we consider just previously published parts of a more comprehensive research as original research? What about a *synthetic* (relational, systemic) research, where the identified *relationships* and the new *whole* are the results of the new research? Should original research be implicitly identified with *analytical* research? What about cross- and inter-disciplinary research presenting *new relationships*, via analogical thinking, of previously published disciplinary research by the same author?

## Legal and Ethical Self-Plagiarism

Legal, ethical and economic issues contributed to the controversy that might be found regarding the right answers to questions like the above ones. Sometimes, these three domains are confused or not explicitly referred to. Economical issues of the publishers have been unintentionally (some would say intentionally) slipped in the academic world as a matter of ethics. This and other issues have caused conceptual confusions. Consequently, it is advisable to explicitly provide the context in which an affirmation or a reflection is being made.

The American Society for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) published an article authored by *Michele S. Garfinkel, Manager of the Science Policy Programme at EMBO, the European Molecular Biology Organization, where he affirms that* “while concerns about plagiarism may be primarily about stealing, in self-plagiarism the real preoccupation would appear to be about **misrepresentation.**” (*A Fresh Look at Self-Plagiarism*, 2015) [Italics and emphasis added]. The **objective** in self-plagiarism is to deceive and misrepresentation is its **means**, or among its means.

According to this conception of self-plagiarism, in order to re-contextualize a previous publication or to integrate it into a larger work, to update and correct a previous published work, etc., an author whose objective is to reach more readers via other publishing venues should upfront and explicitly, inform the reader and the editor about such **intention**. He or she should state his or her intention explicitly at the beginning of the new publication or at the beginning of the section of a larger publication, where some texts of a previous publication are inserted. In any case, reference to the original publication should necessarily be made. Otherwise, it might be a consequence of a deliberate misrepresentation aimed to mislead and deceive. He or she must declare explicitly his or her intentions in the main text, as a footnote, or combining both. In some cases, a previously published text might be used as an appendix, which should include the respective reference to the previously published article or book, while taking into account the copyright that might have been signed with the previous publisher.

If an author publishes again a previous work with the purpose of artificially increasing the number of his or her publications so that he or she can get a benefit, such as an academic promotion, a grant, prestige by means of deceiving his/her department chair, colleagues, students, grantees, etc., then he/she is actually **‘stealing’** something that does not belong to him/her, and consequently this is certainly an **“intellectual theft”** and, hence, by definition, self-plagiarism, even in its etymological sense.

Other conceptions of self-plagiarism may give rise to some questions such as the following: Is reusing one’s work again self-plagiarism, when there is no copyright infringement and no deceiving act or intention? Is self-plagiarism the using of the same idea or text while alerting explicitly that it has been used previously in a less comprehensive context or for another kind of readership? If so, how an author can take his published work to other audiences? How can a retired senior researcher or academic integrate his previous works into a new comprehensive and unified whole? Is he or she restricted to reference his previously published work with a lack of consideration to the reader’s convenience? Should he publish his previous works in an integrated collection or as archipelagoes of previously published papers? Couldn’t he or she use his own ideas and texts in the context of an integrative new whole encompassing a compendium of his or

her research, academic, and/or professional life? What about an updated second edition of his/her books? Is this self-plagiarism? What about publishers who, with the corresponding copyright, publish the same paper in another venue for more potential readership? Is this plagiarism or self-plagiarism?

Some academics believe that it is acceptable for an author to submit the same paper to two different journals at the same time as long as, if both are accepted, a statement like this is used in both publications: “This article is also published as “paper’s title” in journal “journal’s title”, vol. x(x), pp. zz.” Even with some academics and some journals accepting this practice, Bretag and Mahmud (“Self-Plagiarism and appropriate Textual Use?”, 2009) are explicitly emphatic about the issue of *deceiving regarding the newness and the originality of the article*. They affirm that “it is clearly unacceptable to submit the same paper to two different journals with the *intention* of the paper being perceived as two separate, *original pieces*. The issue here is not whether the paper is being published twice, but whether the author’s *intention is to deceive*” (p. 194) [Italics and emphasis added]. Consequently, the author should inform the editors, upfront, that the paper is being sent to another journal in order to avoid academic misconduct and thus self-plagiarism. This is an example of *being legally correct, but ethically wrong* unless at least one of the editors informs the author upfront that the article should not be sent to more than one journal in the same period of time. A double or multiple submissions, in this case, would be both ethically wrong and illegal.

This is another instance in which deception or the intention of deceiving is what characterizes self-plagiarism, not the fact that both papers were published cross-referencing each other, but the fact that the same article was submitted at the same time and the author failed to inform the editors about this double submission. *It is not the publication of the same text, but deceiving the editors or the intention of deceiving them what defines self-plagiarism. Deception or the intention of deceiving is, in our opinion, the defining characteristic of self-plagiarism in the ethical and academic misconduct contexts. How and whom you deceive is what prompts the variety of types of self-plagiarism.* This is why reuse of one’s text or prose might be 1) legal but unethical, 2) illegal but ethical (as for example in an unfair interpretation of the copyright agreement or attorney skills shown in interpreting the fair-use in a way that benefits the copyright holder), 3) illegal and unethical, and 4) legal and ethical.

In order to circumvent any potential legal problems in the future, some authors are avoiding publishers that require exclusivity in the signed copyright agreement. Regarding this issue, Garfinkel (2015) affirms that “Many authors now are choosing to publish under copyrights *that allow almost any re-use of articles*, as long as the article is cited.” (p. 2)

### **Recommendations to Avoid Self-Plagiarism in Republications**

Langdon-Neuner (“Publication more than once: duplicate publication and reuse of text,” 2008), Editor-in-chief of *The Journal of the European Medical Writers Association* (Vienna, Austria), affirms that “Two methods have been used by authors to increase the number of publications from a single study. One is the republication of papers that are identical to or similar to the original paper reporting the same body of research. The other is separate publications reporting parts of a single piece of research. In this second method, authors

break down their work into what has been called the least (minimum) publishable units. The distinction between the two methods can be blurred, but *the hallmark of dishonest authors in both cases is the omission of cross-citations to the other publication(s), i.e. covert duplication.*” (p. 1) [Italics and emphasis added]. Once again, it is evident that *the most relevant characteristic is deception or the intention of deceiving.* Even in the situation of accepting it as ethical, a total duplication in the publication of the same article in different journals at the same time and not cross-referencing them is what defines an act of self-plagiarism.

Langdon-Neuner (2008, p. 3) draws the following conclusions:

“... Authors should be advised that:

Republication of an article is only acceptable if the journal that published the original consents, and publication is accompanied by a statement that the article is a republication.

Republication of parts of an article is acceptable provided that the articles report on different data or use different analysis of the same data and provided that the articles cite each other and the source of the data is clear, and

Upon submission to a journal, the editor is informed of the existence of related submissions or publications, even if they are in a different language” [this evidently includes journals with readers from different disciplines]

*All these conclusions and recommendations are in harmony with the characterization of self-plagiarism as related to an act or the intention of deceiving and agree with our conclusion above regarding what should an author do in order to avoid such misconduct. Consequently, we endorse the advice given above by Langdon-Neuner (“Publication more than once: duplicate publication and reuse of text,” 2008, p. 3). This piece of advice is among the clearest we could find in the literature.*

### **Difference between Legal and Ethical Plagiarism**

Pamela Samuelson (“Self-Plagiarism or Fair Use?”, 1994, p. 21) affirms that “self-plagiarism is sometimes both unlawful and unethical. Other times it is unethical but not unlawful. There are also times when reuse of one’s own material is fair, both as a matter of law and as a matter of ethics.” She mentions three of the four possibilities we listed above. A publication in order to be lawful 1) should not infringe the copyright of a publisher and 2) should not cause economic harm to the publisher because of a deception based on announcing something new and original, which really is not. In order to be ethical, it should not be based on a deception intended to what might be called intellectual theft; i.e. not-deserved academic promotion, grant, recognition, prestige, etc. According to Samuelson, copyright infringements might be less legally serious in self-plagiarism than in plagiarism. She affirms that 1) few legal cases of self-plagiarism and 2) and (up to 1994, when she wrote the article) “Gross Vs Seligman (decided in 1914) seems to be *the only case in U.S. copyright history in which the owner of a copyright won an infringement lawsuit against a self-plagiarism.*” (Samuelson, 1994, p. 22) [italics added]. She affirms that

“some copyright lawyers might assert that even though there aren’t many self-plagiarism cases, there are plenty of cases in which self-plagiarism has been found to be an infringement. A self-plagiarist, they affirm, will stand in no better position than any other plagiarist when facing a copyright infringement. I would disagree—she affirms—, at least in the contexts other than employer/employee copyright disputes.” (Samuelson, 1994, p. 23).

In a legal context, there seems to exist a 30% rule of what might be considered self-plagiarism. Regarding this issue, Samuelson affirms of having heard “reports that some people use a 30% rule (i.e., a rule of thumb) that if one reuses no more than 30% of one’s prose in another article, that’s OK. This strikes me—she affirms—as a gray zone, and I would not recommend any greater reuse than this, and very likely would recommend less than that, unless one has sought permission for the reuse.” (Samuelson, 1994, p. 24).

In an ethical context, we found lower consensus regarding a rule of thumb for what might be considered an accepted level of prose reuse in another publication. I personally recommend zero tolerance, i.e. to reference any chunk of text used in a previous publication, no matter how many words are included in the text being reused. But, I understand that this extreme rule conflicts with the problem of self-citation because some editors would not accept a large number of self-referencing. Consequently, in general, a trade-off should be made taking into account the author’s intellectual interest and objective, but subject to the restrictions of what the respective university, organization, or journal editor considers unethical behavior.

From an ethical perspective, we do not recommend any reuse of one’s own previously published prose without making the corresponding reference. In order to avoid a stylistic or narrative confusion, when reusing one’s own texts, in an update, for example, or in another context, it is ethical to avoid quotation marks as long as the respective adequate reference is made. For example, it is ethical to use an adaptation of one’s own text or to insert it in another context (e.g., a section in a larger publication or as a chapter in a book) as long as the reader is informed upfront of this fact so *no misrepresentation or deception is intended*.

But, it is important to notice that from the ethical perspective, it usually depends on the specific academic organization, its written and non-written rules, and on the respective academic or disciplinary culture. This is why we think that each academic or research organization should make it very clear and explicitly written what they consider an academic fair use of previously published text by their researcher and/or professors. They should also be clear and explicit about the meaning of the word “publication”. Is posting an article on the web considered publication? Are the posts of one’s own blog regarded as a publication? Is posting an article in, for example, academia.edu (a community of more than 40.000.000 members), Research Gateway, considered a previous publication and consequently should not be published again in the proceedings of a conference or in a journal? Is publishing what is called a pre-print in the arXive considered a previous publication? What kind of publications are we talking about, when we refer to self-plagiarism in the ethical dimension?

Is ethically acceptable that an author reuses texts previously used in his/her dissertation in a journal publication? According to our perspective, it is ethical and not to be considered self-plagiarism if and only if the corresponding reference is made. How about reusing texts the other



way around, i.e. to use, in the dissertation, texts previously published in a journal? From an ethical standpoint, the respective reference should be made in order to avoid being perceived as a self-plagiarist, but legal issues should be considered if the journal is not an open online journal and the respective copyright had been transferred to the publisher.

Is publishing the same article in another language self-plagiarism? Again, the answer would be the same: no, as long as the reader and the editor are informed upfront about this issue via referencing the previous publication, in order to avoid misrepresentation, deception or the intention of deceiving.

The word “self” should also be defined. What would be “self” for a published article with two or more co-authors? Is it ethical for one of the co-authors to use the same text without referencing the original article? From our perspective, a co-author who does that is *guilty of misconduct in two dimensions: as a plagiarist and as self-plagiarist*. This is why an academic organization should also explicitly define what “self” means in the context of plagiarism and self-plagiarism.

### **Self-Citations**

To avoid self-plagiarism, or being perceived as a self-plagiarist, it is required to reference previous publications. The more publications an author has, the more the odds of increasing the number of self-citations. Unless a scholar or researcher is publishing an archipelago of non-related papers, the more publications a research has, the more the number of his/her self-citations would be, i.e. the more consistent the research life of a scholar or scientist is, the more self-citations he/she would have in coming publications. Consequently, the more systemically productive a scholar or researcher, the older he/she is, and the more honest he/she is regarding self-plagiarism, the more self-citations he/she would have in future publications. This fact results in a paradox because the more self-citations an author has, the more he/she might be perceived as *inflating* his/her own citation rate, dubious self-aggrandizing, “unsavory kind of academic egotism, etc.” (Hyland, 2003)

Consequently, a trade-off should be made by the author when simultaneously trying to

1. be honest and/or avoid being perceived as a plagiarist;
2. **connect** past with future texts via **common** texts;
3. work on a systemic research, report it in related articles, instead of publishing non-related articles representing knowledge isles or archipelagoes;
4. avoid a) being perceived as a plagiarist or b) *inflating* own citation rate, dubious self-aggrandizement and an “unsavory kind of academic egotist.”

This trade-off depends on the author’s intellectual interests and purposes and his/her organization’s and editor’s policies, rules, and restrictions. Consequently, this trade-off is both subjective and objective (context and situation).

Blatant end-means confusion has been increasingly distorting the perception of the real reasons an author might have for self-citation. Bibliometrics and Scientometrics irreflexively used in academic promotions and research grants have been contributing to this distortion because

whereas citation might represent an adequate indicator of academic performance, self-citation does not. Pichappan and Arasvady (“The other side of the coin: The intricacies of author self-citations,” 2002, p. 285) affirmed “Author self-citations have been mostly viewed from evaluation aspects only, that is, too adversely. Since the author self-citation measure for evaluation is unacceptable, there is a tendency to over-expose the drawbacks of it. Author self-citations cannot be rejected in toto, as they have a complex nature and require careful interpretations.” This is one of the unintended consequences of confusing ends with means, a measure with which the author is being measured. It is not correct to use self-citations as evaluative indicators, but anyhow they are being incorrectly used. Consequently, the author is paying the price of such a mistake made by those who are evaluating his academic performance. This end/means confusion is making more difficult the above trade-off that authors should make. Based on this situation, Pichappan and Arasvady (2002) explored the reasons that authors might have when making self-citations and found that “those reasons are different from references in general.” (p. 286). They found the following reasons an author might have for self-citing

- “to increase the visibility of earlier work, (for example, when an author cites his/her earlier work published in a less visible journal, in a widely circulated journal, he/she invites attention of the users to the earlier one;
- to keep the paper to stand in the literature. Authors prefer to keep the papers as eternal and to move them in citation cycle;
- to alert forthcoming work [forward citation] to market the poorly cited or uncited work;
- to increase the validity of earlier arguments by providing further data and evidence;
- to familiarize the methodology or formula, etc., proposed earlier, in order to establish ‘mastery’ in an area; to convince peers and users; referencing can increase the persuasiveness of a scientific paper; and
- to inflate one’s own citation rate (but no author would elicit ... )” (Pichappan & Arasvady, 2002, p. 286)

We would add to Pichappan’s and Arasvady’s (2002) list the following reasons:

- Being honest in the sense of avoiding any unintended deception or misrepresentation
- Avoiding being perceived as a plagiarist, while re-purposing and re-contextualizing the same text published before in order to add meaning to it because a new context provides new meanings. The same means might be effective for a different objective, and the same objective might be achieved by other means.
- It is known that the meaning of a text is mostly provided by the context, i.e. the more contexts the same text has, the more enriched and comprehensive its meaning is.
- Publishing *new relationships* of, and *new inferences* from, ideas published previously, i.e. the *whole* is new, but *all the parts*, all the building blocks are not new.

- To ***connect*** different wholes with ***common*** parts, different contexts with common texts. The best metaphor I can find to express this idea is the commonalities that different things must necessarily have in order to provide an integrated curriculum or syllabus. These are not a non-related set of courses and a course is not a non-related set of topics.

In an educational ***systemic design***, relationships and commonalities should be included among the topics of a course and among the courses of an educational program. Avoiding commonalities between topics in a course or among courses in an educational program proved to be less effective regarding the educational objective of delivering an integral, integrated, and integrative education. Researching and writing, previous to publishing, are self-educational processes and, as such, should be integrated. Reading is also a self-educational process; hence, it might be facilitated by the commonalities identified among different articles, especially if they are from the same author. This might make ***less efficient*** the learning process acquired by reading articles written by the same authors, but certainly might be ***more effective***. It has been constantly proven the endless benefits of redundancy, especially as a procedure of correcting errors, so why not take advantage of this effectiveness in academic publishing if adequate self-references are being made in order to avoid deceiving the reader, the editor, the promotional committee, etc. and, hence, avoiding altogether academic misbehavior and self-plagiarism.

### **A Potentially Controversial Reflexion**

It is known that the more texts in which a work has been read, the clearer and more comprehensive the meaning it generates in the reader. This is the way in which babies learn a language. *Mutatis mutandis*, the more different contexts a text has been written and read in, the clearer and more comprehensive the meaning of such a text is. Consequently, the repetition of some texts in different contexts might be more ***effective*** in the self-educational process of writers and readers, but certainly less ***efficient***. So, what is the reason to avoid using same texts used in a previous publication if no deception is intended? This is just a reflection that might be accepted by some authors, readers, and editors, but not by others. It is a *doxic* issue, not an *epistemic* one. It might be accepted or not; but, in any case, ***it does not represent self-plagiarism as long as no deception is generated or intended***. Peer reviewing is a doxic system or procedure that supports academic publishing and is used as an epistemic selector, by means of supporting the decision of an editor regarding what papers to publish and what not to publish. Consequently, if an editorial decision is based on reviewers' doxa, why a scholar cannot base the way he or she prefers to communicate his/her epistemic findings via his/her individual doxa or reflection-based and educated opinion, if he/she is not deceiving, or intending to deceive, the editor, the reader, or any promotional committee? The editor has the right to reject an article that includes texts from previously published articles, but *this would be a decision based on editorial rather than on ethical grounds*. The author cannot be charged with plagiarism or perceived as a plagiarist as long as he or she is not generating or intending any kind of deception.

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