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Plagiarism as Literacy Practice: Recognizing and Rethinking Ethical Binaries

In this article, I assert that plagiarism is a literacy practice that involves social relationships, attitudes, and values as much as it involves rules of citation and students' texts. In addition, I show how plagiarism is complicated by a discourse about academic dishonesty, and I consider the implications that recognizing such complexity has for teaching.

In the academy, we often don't consider the complexity of plagiarism, understanding it as a problem that we can, at best, prevent or, at worst, punish. Within our own field, scholars are constructing more complicated representations of plagiarism, particularly through arguments that question and critique common understandings of plagiarism.[1] What I would like to suggest is that plagiarism is a literacy practice; plagiarism is something that people do with reading and writing. As with all literacy practices, plagiarism is "an activity, located in the space between thought and text" and "in the interaction between people" (Barton and Hamilton 3). Plagiarism becomes plagiarism as part of a practice that involves participants' values, attitudes, and feelings as well as their social

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relationships to each other and to the institutions in which they work. What we count as plagiarism depends on the context in which we are working. For example, in some contexts using another writer's work on the part of an "author" may be acceptable while using another writer's work on the part of a "student writer" may be unacceptable and understood as plagiarism. Given that plagiarism involves social relationships, attitudes, and values as much as it involves texts and rules of citation, I think that we can better recognize the work that our students present to us if we also recognize that this work involves negotiating social relationships, attitudes, and values. In addition, we can better prepare students for writing in a variety of situations, particularly situations outside first-year composition, if we teach plagiarism as negotiation.

From this perspective, the work of negotiating plagiarism is also the work of negotiating identity for students. What makes plagiarism even more complicated is that it is embedded in an ethical discourse, a discourse about what is ethical or honest within the academy. And the effect of this discourse, which situates students within a binary of honest or dishonest, creates several interrelated problems: the work of regulating plagiarism is also the work of regulating students' identity for professors and administrators, the categorical labels associated with plagiarism are inaccurate, the ability to negotiate plagiarism as a practice and performance is compromised, and some kinds of work are not acknowledged or considered valid.

Ethical Discourse and Representations of Plagiarism

It is not difficult to see traces of a discourse of ethics in how plagiarism is represented and understood in a variety of contexts. Common understandings of plagiarism, both inside and outside the academy, link it to being dishonest and stealing another's ideas. Representations of plagiarism in the popular press show it as a moral dilemma. Television news specials often feature segments on the rise of cheating in high schools and colleges. Cheating and plagiarism are often written about in news stories and editorials. In one such story, an entire town's morality was questioned when students from Piper High School in Kansas were caught plagiarizing. Jodi Wilgoren describes the effects the association with plagiarism had on the town in an article for the *New York Times*:

> A sign posted in a nearby high school read, "If you want your grade changed, go to Piper." The proctor at a college entrance exam last weekend warned a girl wearing a Piper sweatshirt not to cheat. A company in Florida faxed the school asking for

> a list of students—so it would know whom never to hire. At Tuesday's board meeting, as five television news crews rolled tape, a woman worried that the community has been "stamped with a large purple P on their foreheads for plagiarism." (A1).

Within higher education, plagiarism is also seen as a sign of immorality. Rebecca Moore Howard points out that plagiarism is connected to morality through university policies, even while it is defined as a textual practice: "Universities' policies describe plagiarism in moral terms when they classify it as a form of 'academic dishonesty.' At the same time, though, these policies often define plagiarism in formalist terms, as features of texts" ("Plagiarisms" 797). Clearly, plagiarism is informed by a discourse of ethics through university policies, through common understandings of the term, and through representations of plagiarists as not only dishonest but also as capable of infecting others with dishonesty. Situated within the framework of ethical discourse, plagiarism cannot be fully understood, I want to suggest, without understanding how literacy practices are given meaning through discourses and are caught up in issues of identity.

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Historically, plagiarism was not linked to an ethical discourse until the late nineteenth century. At that time, two discourses about plagiarism were developing: one a professional discourse that linked authorial responsibility to acting honestly within society and another a student discourse that linked student responsibility to other students and to engaging in college life outside of classes (Simmons 45). This linking of plagiarism with ethics is also explored in Howard's article, "The Ethics of Plagiarism." She suggests that as mass literacy increased, as more students began to enroll in post-secondary education, and as composition courses became commonplace, "authors were asserting that original writing demonstrated the good character of the writer, whereas derivative writing was the hallmark of the debased reading that the masses appreciated" ("Ethics" 83). In addition, Howard notes that as the distinction between high and low literature became more prominent, a notion of "high" morality was connected to an author who created original works ("Ethics" 84). Howard argues that plagiarism was a means of gatekeeping:

> By unifying disparate textual practices [such as patchwriting, cheating on exams, and buying term papers] under a single heading called "plagiarism" and by locat-

> ing this "plagiarism" category under the larger heading called "academic honesty," we establish an ethical basis for highly disparate textual practices. By establishing an ethical basis for the textual strategy called "patchwriting," the notion of plagiarism operates as an instrument of exclusion, a means of insuring that the Great Unwashed (a term that not surprisingly originates in the 19th century), whom composition instruction allegedly empowers, will in fact leave college in the same sociointellectual position in which they entered—all in the name not of intellectual class, but of personal morality. ("Ethics" 85)

Here, then, Howard points to what is at stake with plagiarism: the marking of students for inclusion or exclusion depending on their "fit" with the discourses that define what counts as plagiarism.

Currently, plagiarism is often situated as an ethical issue. This is evident in academic honesty codes, which prescribe correct behavior universally as though there is one set way to cite and document that good, honest, and *ethical* students will follow. In regard to such policies, students' choices are limited. They are often reduced to rule following as a way of achieving morality. This sense of morality is similar to what Zygmunt Bauman calls an ethical morality—an ethical morality is one in which morality is a state of being that can be achieved by rule following rather than by deciding and then acting on what one believes to be good in a given situation. In an ethical morality, individuals have no moral responsibility; they are only responsible for following ethical rules. Ethics becomes "a code of law that prescribes correct behaviour 'universally' " (Bauman 11).

Typically plagiarism is characterized as a matter of ethics (following—or not following—rules) rather than choices (deciding what would be "good" in terms of attributing sources). In both unintentional and intentional cases, students are characterized as making a choice, but only a choice of following the rules or not rather than a choice of how to represent themselves and the knowledge they are using and constructing. Drawing on Linda Brodkey's understanding of poststructuralist theory and discourse, I do not want to argue that plagiarism constitutes a discourse but rather that "traces of discourses" (13) can be uncovered in the meanings we assign plagiarism and in the textual features that mark (or not) plagiarism. The traces of this ethical discourse complicate the literacy practice of plagiarism and can, for example, turn a missing quotation mark into a sign of dishonesty.

Because plagiarism is situated within an ethical discourse and because literacy practices, such as plagiarism, involve identity negotiation, to avoid plagiarism is to perform honestly in ways that American academics will recog-

nize. Acquiring a discourse is acquiring "a sort of identity kit which comes complete with appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognize" (Gee *Social Linguistics* 127). In this way, plagiarism cannot be separated from identity negotiation, from taking on the role of "honest student," particularly for students who are from other countries like Lin (an international graduate student) whom I discuss in this article and for American students who are not already situated in American academic discourses. Avoiding plagiarism is done not through rule following but through repeatedly carrying out what counts as citation in a context similar to the context in which citation will be required. In the same way that dancers repeat dance steps in preparation for a performance until they can perform without consciously thinking about those steps, writers need to cite repeatedly and correctly (figuring out the how, when, and why for each situation) before they can perform that citation without thinking about it.

Before continuing with my discussion of how an ethical discourse informing understandings of plagiarism complicates the practices of citation and plagiarism for students and for instructors, I want to acknowledge that many composition programs *do* address citation and plagiarism as complex textual practices at the same time as providing students with a class in which to practice their use of sources. Many composition courses engage students in learning about citation and plagiarism through discussions of the rhetorical purposes of citation, through practicing incorporating material from sources and citing those sources. Importantly, these courses are places where students are often *not* punished for misuse of sources. At the same time though, we often do not discuss plagiarism and citation as a matter of identity, as practices through which students can construct and convey an identity. In addition, while policies for composition programs and courses often characterize misuse of sources as legitimate failed performances, it is important to recognize that composition policies and courses are situated within institutional settings and subject to discourses about writing, students, and academic honesty that do not always make such distinctions. And it is these discourses that students will have to negotiate as they write and use sources outside of the site of composition courses.

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Ethical Discourse and Negotiating Plagiarism: Regulated Identity and Unrecognized Work

Given the complexities of avoiding plagiarism, it is important to understand how the traces of an ethical discourse compromise students' abilities to negotiate plagiarism as a practice and performance. This difficultly is particularly evident in two areas: the way student identity is regulated and the way certain kinds of work are not recognized. In addition, in both of these areas, inaccurate categorical labels are often assigned to students.

To understand how identity is regulated through plagiarism, it is important to understand that most academic honesty policies and most professors make little distinction between intentional and unintentional plagiarism, particularly outside the space of first-year composition. Regardless of intent, students are responsible to document correctly, and if they do not, they will be punished. Alice Roy's survey of faculty attitudes toward plagiarism suggests that any textual features that look like plagiarism are viewed as signs of dishonesty or deception on the part of the student:

> Most faculty interviewed in this survey did not distinguish between [intentional and unintentional plagiarism], and one rejected outright the possibility of unintentional plagiarism, on the part of students or anyone else. Rather, they saw acts and instances of plagiarism stemming either from a failure of *ethos*, deceiving and lying, or an attack on *pathos*, injuring someone through taking and stealing. (60–61)

This insistence on 1) seeing plagiarism as an ethical issue, 2) judging what counts as plagiarism using textual features and at the same time punishing the person "behind" the features, and 3) labeling that person as dishonest are signs that plagiarism is doing the work of identity regulation—marking some students as outsiders when they do not properly perform a literacy task and then punishing them for not being the right kind of person.

With regards to plagiarism, the student is positioned as though he or she has made an unethical choice (i.e. the student has chosen to be dishonest by not following the rules of citation). At the same time, faculty and administrators' judgments about text are *not* supposed to take into account intent. This suggests that plagiarized text can signal one and only one choice: a refusal to follow the rules. And it suggests that the text can convey one and only one identity, a dishonest student. In this way, the student's abilities to negotiate his or her identity is limited and almost all but closed down once an accusation of plagiarism is made because a plagiarized text can only convey one choice and

one identity. Judith Butler argues that understanding identity as performative, "opens up possibilities of 'agency' that are insidiously foreclosed by positions that take identity categories as foundational and fixed" (187). This understanding of identity, based in Butler's work on gender, can contribute to the practice of identity negotiation within the university by encouraging interpretations of student work that include more flexible identity categories. However, within the ethical discourse that informs plagiarism, identity categories are fixed: students may occupy one—and only one—of two categories: honest or dishonest. This regulating of available identity categories is particularly evident in the treatment of unintentional plagiarism. Despite the understanding that plagiarism may be accomplished unintentionally, the student who unintentionally plagiarizes is positioned and punished as dishonest.

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In Butler's understanding of identity, "the 'doer' is variably constructed in and through the deed" (181). This suggests, then, that if we only understand students who plagiarize unintentionally through an ethical discourse about plagiarism, we can only understand them as dishonest. This is because the doer is defined in the doing and "the doing" of incorrect citation or documentation within the ethical discourse informing plagiarism says the doer (the student) is dishonest. In this way, we can see how student identities are read off of textual features, using mainstream values and understandings. Also, we can see how this reading becomes caught up in identity regulation, particularly as plagiarism is connected to academic juridical structures, as students are punished for being the wrong sort of person.

Along with regulating identity and constricting students' ability to negotiate their identity as part of the literacy practice of avoiding plagiarism, the ethical discourses informing plagiarism, particularly the binaries of plagiarism, also affect what is recognized as work. Binaries are so confining in discussions of plagiarism particularly because they tend to obscure the work of identity negotiation and the performance of identity through literacy. The ideology of the American work ethic is connected to plagiarism in part through the effects of an ethical discourse that constructs the act of plagiarism as an attempt to get out of work. Such an attempt clashes with the American work ethic, which places value on doing work and then being rewarded for that work. This ethic, as applied to plagiarism, operates as somewhat of a logical oppo-

site: one plagiarizes to get out of doing work and, therefore, should be punished.

Both inside and outside the academy, plagiarism is often understood as an attempt to get out of work. The common-sense view is that students steal from the product of someone else's work and deceive the instructor so that they don't actually have to complete the assignment. This view accounts for the upset reactions on the part of many teachers who feel betrayed (by the student's deception), angered (by the student's laziness), and disappointed (by the student's lack of learning). Moving away from this common-sense view, scholars (Rose 1999, McLeod 1992) suggest that some plagiarism results from students' unfamiliarity with the course material and citation practices or their "desperation" to meet a deadline (Wells 1993) while others characterize some acts of plagiarism as "patchwriting" (Howard 1995), piecing together material from sources as a way of learning to write for a particular discipline. I, too, would like to suggest that texts, which might seem to demonstrate a lack of "work" on the part of a student, can be better understood, in some cases, as demonstrating "work" when understood through concepts of "work" that are not situated in an ethical discourse.

It is often easy to overlook the work involved in moving from one discourse to another, which is the type of tacit work involved in learning to properly cite and document within an academic discipline for students, both American and international, who aren't already situated in the discourses of that discipline. This tacit work involves such tasks as a student having to translate from one language to another (for multilingual students not fully comfortable with English) or from one discourse to another (for students not fully situated in academic discourses). These aspects of work, acquiring a discourse and through doing so taking on a new identity, are discussed extensively in James Paul Gee's writing on social discourses and literacy. He maintains, "Americans tend to be very focused on the individual, and thus often miss the fact that the individual is the meeting point of many, sometimes conflicting, socially and historically defined Discourses" (*Social Linguistics* 132). In missing this fact, particularly in regard to plagiarism, what might better be understood as a failed discourse and literacy performance is sometimes understood as an act of dishonesty and an attempt to avoid work.

Clearly, the amount of work required for a person to be able to communicate through an unfamiliar discourse can be quite burdensome. This is due to what Gee views as the effect of discourses: Discourses do not simply commu-

nicate meanings from one person to another but in fact shape what meanings and identities an individual can convey. For Gee, this work of making "social worlds" is called enactive and recognition work:

> Out in the world exist materials out of which we continually make and remake our social worlds. The social arises when we humans relate (organise, coordinate) these materials together in a way that is recognisable to others. We attempt to get other people to recognise people and things as having certain meanings and values within certain configurations or relationships. Our attempts are what I mean by "enactive work". Other people's active efforts to accept or reject our attempts—to see or fail to see things "our way"—are what I mean by "recognition work." ("The New Literacy Studies" 191)

And this work is an ongoing process: acquiring a social identity (such as an honest student) and being recognized as having that identity is decided "provisionally as part and parcel of shared histories and on-going activities" (*Social Linguistics* 131). Importantly, Gee demonstrates that it is only in school that we "act as if there are all at once, and once and for all, tests of identity" (*Social Linguistics* 131). For example, we treat citation and plagiarism as all or nothing propositions when we use the category of unintentional plagiarism. Defining the act of improperly citing as academic dishonesty, albeit unintentional, and, often, including a mark on a student's permanent record to indicate a dishonest student, is one such "once and for all" test of identity. Students' opportunities to practice citation and the performance of honesty are closed down when their improper citation is read as a sign of dishonesty, rather than as a sign of an authentic beginner engaged in the work of acquiring a new discourse.

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Given the amount of work and complexity involved in acquiring a new discourse, it seems obvious that a student (undergraduate or graduate) who is an authentic beginner in a literacy practice will not always be able to enact and to be recognized as the right kind of student. Because of this difficulty, we need to recognize the work our students are presenting us not just through our own cultural and academic models of work but also through a broader understanding of work—an understanding that accounts for identity negotiation as an aspect of literacy.

Experiencing Plagiarism: Lin's Case

In what follows, I give an account of one student's experience with plagiarism. I use Lin's story as an example of how a discourse of ethics shapes the category of plagiarism and what effects this ethical discourse has on students working to avoid plagiarism. While Lin is an international graduate student and while his case might seem extreme to those of us who more commonly work with first-year students on plagiarism and citation, it is an important example for two reasons. The first is that it shows how students who are "outsiders" to the academy, which includes both American and international students, might experience plagiarism. The second is that it shows how we might rethink our own practices for teaching about plagiarism in light of students' experiences within the university, particularly experiences with writing outside of first-year composition. This is of particular importance because while instructors of composition courses often have nuanced understandings of plagiarism, other instructors outside of composition programs are often more concerned with disciplinary conventions than the complexities of literacy practices. As a result, students often face different expectations for their writing, of which they may not be aware and for all of which composition courses cannot possibly prepare them.

Lin was a third-year PhD student in engineering enrolled in a graduate course outside of his department. He came from Hunan Province in China and was well known and well liked at the writing center where I first met him. Writing coaches and writing center staff spoke highly of his affable nature. I began to work with Lin at the end of Spring 2001 after he had been accused of plagiarism by the professor of the course in which he had been enrolled.

For his final project (the project for which he was accused of plagiarism), Lin was to write a survey of literature on a particular problem within the field and give a presentation on this work. His presentation was well received by the professor, and she later commented (during the hearing I attended) that she knew Lin understood the material he presented. About three to four hours after his presentation, Lin received an email from the professor notifying him that he had plagiarized his paper and that the professor had made a formal accusation of plagiarism with the dean of students. Lin was shocked.

Lin then came to the writing center and talked to his coach who had been working on spoken English with him. She was surprised as well that Lin had been accused of plagiarism. While the coach had listened to Lin's presentation, she had not seen his paper and didn't realize he had any citation problems. It is common in this writing center for international graduate students

to come solely to work on spoken English and not bring in any writing or reading. The coach explained to Lin that the charges were very serious, and she even called the assistant dean of sudents on Lin's behalf. The assistant dean told her there was nothing that could be done: Lin would have to go through the academic honesty hearing process.

Following the email from his professor and his realization of how serious the charges of plagiarism were, Lin wrote a letter to the professor and the dean saying that he had done his citation incorrectly. Basically, he had used direct quotations from his sources but did not mark them with quotation marks. He did place a number behind each section of uncited material, which corresponded to the list of works cited and indicated the source from which the text was taken. There was also little of Lin's own words, either commenting on or paraphrasing the sources he used.

Lin then met with the dean of students to discuss the plagiarism charge. At this point, Lin was told that because he had admitted to plagiarizing, his case would proceed to the next step: he would have a further hearing to determine the penalty he would receive for the plagiarism. This is when I became involved in Lin's case and began to work with Lin. We met to discuss the charges of plagiarism and to prepare Lin to speak at his hearing. This included my explaining exactly why his paper was considered plagiarized and discussing what he would say at the hearing to explain his perspective while still taking responsibility for the plagiarism. As the date approached, Lin asked that I attend the hearing with him.

At the hearing, the administrator from the office of student affairs first described how the hearing would proceed and then explained the charge that Lin was facing. Next, the professor was allowed to describe her understanding of Lin's paper and her concern with his citations. Then Lin was allowed to explain how he understood the assignment and why he had plagiarized. At this time, Lin accepted responsibility for making a mistake and explained that he had never written a major paper in America and had misunderstood differences in proper citation between China and America. He also said that he worked very hard on the paper, both in reading material and arranging it. In explaining what he thought the assignment asked him to do, Lin said that he was supposed to show the teacher that he understood the knowledge of the field. He did not think he needed to show her his opinion of this particular problem in the field. In addition, Lin did not use quotation marks around direct quotes because he didn't realize he needed to for this type of assignment. He assumed the professor would know that these were taken from other

sources. To him, that was the point of the assignment: to show the professor his familiarity with these sources.

Following the hearing, Lin returned to China for the remainder of the summer. He was going to be married and would return to school in the fall. While Lin was in China, he emailed me with the news of his hearing: He was to receive a warning on his permanent record and would fail the course with no chance of rewriting the paper to receive credit. The professor decided that she would not let him rewrite because then she would have to let two other Chinese graduate students in the course (who were also accused of plagiarism) rewrite their papers as well. Later, I learned that she did agree to let Lin retake the course and earn a different grade. At the time of our interview, Lin was thinking about retaking the course. As part of his penalty, Lin was also supposed to work with the writing center to learn proper American documentation styles and then with the assistant dean who would check that he could properly cite. Lin's warning was the least penalty he could receive. The administrator overseeing the case said the warning indicated that the plagiarism was done in poor judgment but not with the intent to deceive.

The Binaries of Plagiarism and the Regulation of Identity

The way in which the binaries of plagiarism work to compel students to regulate their identities and accept inaccurate labels can be seen in the way that Lin's sense of his identity complicated his ability to properly document and to be recognized as honest. Because Lin recognized himself as honest, he didn't realize he was not aligned with the ethical discourse of academic honesty or that there was an opportunity for him to be recognized as dishonest within this discourse. This can be compared to American students who, for the most part, are taught that anyone can plagiarize at any time and therefore students must always be careful to be honest while, at the same time, students are often cast as dishonest. It reminds me of the first-year, American student I worked with in the writing center who told me he would not quote any sources in any papers because he might make a mistake and be accused of academic dishonesty. In Lin's case, he didn't know he needed to learn anything about being honest within an American university because he had always been honest in his schooling to this point. It is telling, though, that Lin's recognition

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of himself as an honest student conflicts with what I have been told in conversations with administrators and faculty is the "coffee pot" view of international students at this university (and what may be a common representation at other universities): that they are sneaky, and they cheat. Because of the binary of plagiarism and attitudes toward international students at this university, Lin's use of language (leaving off quotation marks, not using his own words) was only "culturally intelligible" (Butler) as plagiarism and, therefore, Lin's identity was only "culturally intelligible" as a dishonest student. As I discussed above, often any textual features that look like plagiarism are interpreted as signs of a student's dishonesty—without the need to account for a student's intention.

Despite the fact that Lin had always performed honestly to this point, the change in context and discourse in which he was operating contributed to him getting the performance wrong. Both because he misread the context (thinking the assignment was not a situation in which he should carefully document) and because he didn't understand that his identity as an honest student could be compromised with this new discourse of academic honesty, Lin's performance meant he was dishonest. To use Butler's description of identity: Lin was performing honesty within the rule-bound discourse of academic honesty that inserted itself into the mundane signifying act of writing a survey of literature and produced the effect that Lin could only be understood by the professor as dishonest.

As Nancy Grimm suggests, in order to assert the type of agency Butler's account of identity allows for, we "need to be able to redescribe what appear to be failed performances" (72). To allow for a space in which students can practice citation and identity negotiation, we need to be able to describe unintentional plagiarism in ways other than as academic dishonesty. Returning to Butler's work on identity, to allow the construction of the subject of academic honesty policies to stand as is would be to allow that construction to "[proceed] with certain legitimating and exclusionary aims" (5)—aims that mark some students, particularly students who are not as aligned with the discourses of higher education, as unfit for inclusion in the university.

In Lin's case, this push toward identity regulation can be seen in his willingness to admit he was wrong—that he had plagiarized even though at the time of his writing the paper he thought he was doing what the assignment required. In fact, in an interview with me, Lin describes moving from feeling shocked that he could be seen as dishonest to accepting that he had plagiarized:

> I was totally shocked. I never received this kind of charge before. I was always an honest student, a good student. I couldn't understand how this could happen to me. I talked with my housemates. All Chinese students. They were surprised. We also thought there must be something wrong with the charge. A mistake or something... After carefully reading the plagiarism policy I realized I did wrong, and it is very serious. And I don't want to argue about the charge. I care more about the results.

Here, then, Lin's case illustrates one way identity regulation occurs. A student, faced with a trial to prove that he didn't plagiarize and that he is honest, accepts being seen as having plagiarized (and therefore being seen as dishonest) in hopes that the penalty for his mistake will be less severe. I have been told by administrators that disciplinary actions taken against students who admit to plagiarizing are less severe than the actions taken against students who are proven to be plagiarizing (i.e. students who, upon being accused, do not admit to committing plagiarism and who therefore require a hearing to establish guilt).

Identity is also regulated in regard to plagiarism because concerns about plagiarism create the opportunity for professors and administrators to be concerned with and, if deemed necessary, to work to alter (through punishment) students' identities. In the hearing for Lin's penalty, the overriding concern of both the professor and the administrator was that the student be able to perform honestly because of the consequences for both the professor's reputation and the university's reputation. This concern not only manifested itself in the hearing but also in the penalties Lin received, that is, that he would go to the writing center to learn proper citation and then demonstrate his ability to properly cite by taking a test administered by the assistant dean.

The Binaries of Plagiarism and Obscuring Work

Another way the ethical discourse of plagiarism operates is to support readings of students and texts using mainstream values that obscure the work a student might be undertaking. In writing his paper, Lin thought he was engaging in the work the professor required for the assignment. He read over thirty journal articles and arranged them to show his understanding of them and the problem on which he was focusing. He also attempted to cite this material. His understanding was that he was completing homework, as opposed to a more formal assignment or a publishable work. In our interview, discussing the work he did, Lin said,

> That term paper took me a lot of time, 30 papers I read thoroughly. I obtained the knowledge about the field I'm working on from these papers. I spend a lot of time on writing that paper . . . on the writing, on the arrangement of the materials. I also put maybe the partial citations, and when I finished, I think I did a good job.

What Lin sees as work and as writing, the professor sees as plagiarism because in this writing Lin did not convey his opinion and did not contribute his own words.

In part, these different understandings of what counts as work within this writing assignment is a cultural conflict, based in different understandings of literacy. It is not uncommon for students from China to be unpracticed at giving their opinions in school assignments. As Helen Fox points out, many students "coming from societies that are not based on [an] assumption of equality tell me that they must often stifle the critical thoughts and ideas that arise in their minds" (*Listening* 56). Reading Lin's work without this knowledge of other cultures, it is easy to see where his lack of an opinion looks like a sign that he was trying to get out of work rather than a sign of deference to the professor's expertise and position of power. In part, this conflict over what counts as work is also based in different expectations of graduate level work. As an administrator explained in the hearing I attended, summarizing and arranging material is considered undergraduate level work. To be considered graduate level work, an assignment must include an original contribution. So not only is Lin negotiating differing cultural expectations; he is also coping with differing expectations as a graduate student. This, too, is a conflict between literacy and culture in that what counts as original in the United States is not what counts as original in many other countries. Again, as Helen Fox points out, original work for many cultures is better understood as traditional wisdom by Americans.

In Lin's case, the work he did complete (reading thirty scholarly journal articles in a nonnative language and arranging material from them in a way to show his understanding of the field) didn't count because it didn't fit the American model of academic work for an American graduate student. This is a model that only defines work as an original, individually-produced good within the disciplinary economics of the academy. Within this model, the work of acquiring knowledge of a field and learning how to communicate through unfamiliar discourses in a nonnative language is ignored. Also, within this model, the work of identity negotiation, whether that of an authentic beginner or an "outsider," is similarly ignored.

This conflict in models of work highlights how literacy practices such as plagiarism are not simply located in text. Rather, in this case, the plagiarism is located in what Lin and the professor take to be their relationship. For Lin's part, this meant incorrectly thinking the professor would recognize his use of sources as honest work for a graduate student. For the professor's part, this meant incorrectly thinking Lin was trying to get out of work because he thought she was not expert enough to recognize his work as that of other scholars. In other words, a text that, to Lin, demonstrates his familiarity with sources and his hard work is a text that, to the professor, demonstrates plagiarism and an attempt to fool her.

In contrast to our common-sense view of plagiarism—that it is a textual practice that can be taught solely by working with rules for documentation on written texts—Lin's case demonstrates that teaching about plagiarism needs to start with a focus on practice—not text. When I first saw Lin's paper and learned that he was accused of plagiarism, I thought that his wrong doing was a matter of leaving off quotation marks: a "wrong doing" that could have been fixed simply through making the right textual marks. However, as I worked with Lin and participated in his hearing, I realized that because plagiarism works to regulate identity and because it is situated in an ethical discourse, simply adding quotation marks was not enough. Instead, what Lin needed to convey in his paper was that he was an honest student capable of graduate level work. And to convey this, Lin needed not only to make the right marks on his texts but also to perform honesty and acquire a new discourse. He needed, then, *practice* in what it means to be a graduate student and what counts as work for American graduate school. What I realized as well is that Lin's case wasn't simply about him being an international student or a graduate student but that the work he needed to do in acquiring a new discourse, practicing that discourse, and then successfully performing in that discourse was work that many students—American and international, undergraduate and graduate—engaged in as part of their education.

The Identity Work of Teaching Citation and Plagiarism

Plagiarism policies and many administrators and teachers involved with plagiarism cases often don't recognize plagiarism as connected to a discourse, as taking on an identity that can't be taught or acquired just through textual features and teaching of those features or conventions. Because of misunderstandings of citation and plagiarism and because of misrepresentations of students, administrators and teachers often misread what students know and under-

stand about plagiarism, what they need to learn about citation, and the space they need to be given to practice performing the identity that will allow them to get being a student "right," especially in regard to plagiarism. While composition programs do work toward addressing some of these complexities, there is more we can do. In particular, we can continue to deepen our understanding of plagiarism as a literacy practice, and while doing so, we can also recognize that we are situated in a network of competing discourses. In this context, it is not enough for students to be taught the "rules" and "mechanics" of citation. Instead, they need to be taught the significance of citation for their identity as honest students (if they are going avoid plagiarism) and how to read the context (which defines when it is necessary to cite and what will count as citation) in which they are working. This means that discussions about plagiarism with students need to start with discussions of what is at stake for their reputations—even if they have always been honest. Students need to know that not citing even a single sentence may be read as a sign of dishonesty on their part. In addition, students need to know that acceptable citation in one context might not be the same in another context (for example, not citing material might be acceptable in a presentation but not in a written assignment). The problem with teaching citation and plagiarism as rule following is that it is not enough for students to know the textual practices of citation. Rather, students need to know citation and plagiarism as literacy practices—as complicated ways of making meaning—with which they have to get the whole thing right: to know when and where and how to enact the appropriate socially-situated identity (that of an honest student) at the appropriate time.

The problem with teaching citation and plagiarism as rule following is that it is not enough for students to know the textual practices of citation. Rather, students need to know citation and plagiarism as literacy practices—as complicated ways of making meaning.

Rather than instruction in "the mechanics of citation," Lin and other students not aligned with discourses of the academy, including many American students, might better benefit from discussions of citation and plagiarism through a metalanguage. This metalanguage would follow the purpose outlined by a group of international literacy scholars known as the New London Group: "The primary purpose of the metalanguage should be to identify and explain differences between texts, and relate these to the contexts of culture and situation in which they seem to work" (24). Part of this metalanguage discussion for Lin could have included talk about the differences between papers written in a graduate class and papers that are published. In this example, a

person practiced in citation (such as a professor or writing center coach) might have helped Lin understand that the survey of literature he was writing, while "homework," was also a demonstration that he was beginning to enter into a field as a scholar capable of publishing and, therefore, his performance needed to demonstrate his ability to cite, particularly as a means to show that he understood and respected the knowledge of the field. In this way then, Lin's experience with citation and plagiarism might have led not to a punishment (because Lin didn't correctly follow the rules) but to an understanding of the meanings that citation can convey depending on the context. This metalanguage could be used with all students to explain differences rather than to impose them: "The metalanguage is not developed to impose rules, to set standards of correctness or to privilege certain discourses in order to 'empower students'" (New London Group 24).

This idea of learning as a matter of examining a text in context *and then* making decisions about how to communicate as opposed to communication as rule following is similar to Bauman's suggestions for morality in postmodern times. Rather than achieving an ethical morality through following rules, individuals must continually question what is moral depending on the relationship and context in which they are acting. Understanding literacy practices, such as plagiarism, in this way suggests that rather than expecting proper citation and student honesty to follow from academic honesty policies, teachers and administrators might do better to teach citation and the performance of honesty as situated in relationships between texts, individuals, discourses, institutions, and cultures. This would mean discussing why citation matters to American academics and the ways citation is connected to disciplinary economics of higher education. In addition, this would mean discussing the possible meanings that can be attached to literacy practices such as citation—meanings that range from conveying a writer's expertise to conveying a writer's dishonesty.

Connecting Bauman's understanding of morality (as relational and changing) to Barton and Hamilton's understanding of literacy (as relational and dependent on context), I see that it is not only possible but *desirable* to teach literacy practices, particularly those practices that are seen as moral absolutes, as *practices* rather than as skills that result from rule following and the stable and singular identity of an honest person. Teaching plagiarism and citation as literacy practices would allow for choice. For example, teachers and students might discuss the choices a writer makes in using knowledge from a variety of sources; they can question in what circumstances to use scholarly research

and citation as opposed to a more proverbial knowledge that cannot be cited or they might discuss ways to incorporate different types of knowledges into academic writing. As part of this discussion, both teachers and students might begin to understand what is gained and what is lost within different practices of citation. Teaching plagiarism and citation as literacy practices would also allow for shifting between different contexts. For example, through discussions of plagiarism and practice with citation, students and teachers might better recognize the arbitrary nature of many rules of citation, and they might better understand how these "rules" change and are modified from discipline to discipline and from genre to genre. And, ultimately, recognizing the need for the practice of identity performances and discourse acquisition—particularly as they are so influential in how we read each other—might help to create spaces in the university where outsiders can more easily become insiders without fear of punishment *and* without leaving behind identities that aren't aligned with values and understandings of higher education. For example, through these discussions about plagiarism as a literacy practice, we might better recognize when what seems to be the "wrong" choice made by a dishonest student (i.e. plagiarism) can more usefully be understood as a culturally and socially situated use of knowledge that doesn't fit with and cannot be accounted for by American-academic cultural and social uses of knowledge. Rather than punishing the student for that use of knowledge, we might work with the student to teach him or her the American academic conventions at the same time as we learn the conventions (and the values attached to them) of the student's culture and discourse community.

Note

1. In particular, the works of Lisa Buranen, Rebecca Moore Howard, and Margaret Price have pointed to the impossibility of defining plagiarism. For example, Burnanen argues the following: "One of the major problems with the word *plagiarism* itself is its use as a kind of wastebasket, into which we toss anything we do not know what to do with: it can refer, at various times, to outright cheating (for instance, purchasing a research paper and presenting it as one's own work); to appropriating large blocks of text without attribution; to omissions or mistakes in citations; to paraphrasing an original too closely; to collaborating too closely" (64). In addition, Howard argues that plagiarism regulates not only textuality but also sexuality through the gendered metaphors that are part of the discursive construction of plagiarism in her article, "Sexuality, Textuality: The Cultural Work of Plagiarism."

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