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# Plagiarism in Journal Articles

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Every May a flock of journal papers fly into my office for review. I attribute this migration of journal articles to my desk to the fact that many Associate Editors are professors, and they finally have time to send out the reviews when the semester is over. This year, I got quite a stack in the May-June period. Consequently, I had to decline to review several of the submitted articles. I tend to be most loyal to IEEE AP-S, then to IEEE, then to other journals of interest, and the rest fall into a category of "I don't usually review." I got so many to review in May that I just let them pile up on my desk for a few weeks. I started looking through them when I discovered some out-of-the-ordinary submissions.

I found two articles sent to two completely different journals that were nearly identical. The titles were similar and the authors the same. All but one section were word-for-word identical. I guess the authors figured that if they submitted this work to two completely different journals at the same time, they could get both published without being discovered. They probably never figured on getting the same reviewer for both journals. I sent the same review to both journals – does that mean I plagiarized?

In another journal article, I noticed that the title sounded very familiar. I took a peek at the PDF file, and the words in the article sounded familiar. I looked at the figures, and they were copies of figures I created several years ago. I searched my files, and found that these authors had copied word-for-word an article that I published many years earlier. They even used my results. In fact, they scanned the pictures and put them in their paper (the pictures were blurry). I've had this happen to me before, where someone copied my work and submitted it to another journal. Of course, these authors did not reference me. I'm thankful to the sharp Associate Editors that send me the journal articles to review.

I pointed out these problems to the Associate Editors of all three journals. Two journals were IEEE, and the Associate Editors were very responsive. The Associate Editor for the non-IEEE journal did not seem to care. It was very clear that the two articles submitted to IEEE publications will not be published.

What drives people to cheat like this? In all the cases I have encountered, the culprits were professors and graduate students. The pressure to publish is extremely high. People look for shortcuts. Many universities count the number of publications, and sometimes weight the publications by the journal Impact Factor. Few administrators are capable of distinguishing great work from copied work from poor work. They usually can count, though, so numbers determine how well you do as a professor.

What were the odds of me catching these "illegal" submissions? What if I had declined to do the reviews? I certainly was justified, given all the journal reviews I had piled up. Should these authors be blacklisted? Should they lose their IEEE membership? These authors not only wasted their time, but they were also very inconsiderate of my time as a reviewer. I'm concerned that there may be many of these papers slipping through the review process. There are far too many journals to keep up with. Even if the authors get reprimanded by one journal, what will stop them from submitting to another?

I'd like to hear some comments about these cases. Have you had any interesting reviews lately? I'm concerned that this may be a bigger problem than most of us realize. How do we handle it?

[Editor's note: Readers may also be interested in the related editorial on duplicate submission, duplication publication, and plagiarism, elsewhere in this issue. WRS]