

# Plagiarism and raj persaud essay sample



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BUSTER**

The following essay aims to research the background to the story of Raj Persaud, a TV psychiatrist who was recently convicted of plagiarism in June of 2008 after initially being accused in 2005. It will aim to put this story into perspective against what has been said about plagiarism in the plagiarism lecture. It will attempt to define plagiarism, outlining the points made in the plagiarism lecture; to outline the accusations made against Dr Persaud with his reasons for what occurred and to outline their consequences, putting the whole into some kind of perspective. It is important to understand that there are many areas to consider when discussing plagiarism, some of which will be explained and put into context with regards to Raj Persaud and his own experience of plagiarism.

Plagiarism is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as ‘to take and use as one’s own the thoughts, writings and inventions of another’. (OED, 2008) Brunel Senate endorse this, adding that ‘it includes the incorporation of another person’s work from published or unpublished sources, without indicating that the material is derived from these sources’. (Brunel Senate Regulation 6, 2007). Plagiarism therefore is

- \* Taking another’s work
- \* Using it as your own
- \* Failing to give the necessary accreditation

Dr Raj Persaud is a 45 year old consultant psychiatrist who has written numerous articles for newspapers, magazines and journals and appeared in television and radio programmes, most notably Radio 4’s ‘All in the Mind’.

He was brought before the General Medical Council to answer charges of plagiarism and ‘unfitness to practise’.

Helen Pidd of the Guardian explains in an article that Persaud was investigated due to “multiple allegations of plagiarism” (Pidd, 2005).

The first accusation arose in September 2005 from a magazine ‘Progress in Neurology and Psychiatry’, where it was said that a large amount of Raj Persaud’s writings were copied from an American academic Thomas Blass. A more recent allegation came from an article written for the British Medical Journal by Raj Persaud. The article was a review of a biography of social psychologist Stanley Milgram also written by Thomas Blass. Large sections of professor Blass’s work was quoted directly with only a small percentage of words being altered. (See Appendix 1).

Another accusation came from a column released on June 30th 2005 in The Independent called ‘Scientology’s Relationship to Psychiatry’. In this article nearly 50% was an exact copy of a paper called ‘The Globalization of Scientology, Influence, Control, and Opposition in Transnational Markets’ by Stephen A. Kent.

A number of allegations arose from Dr Persaud’s 2003 bestseller, ‘From the Edge of the Couch’. He was accused of plagiarising work from four research papers including the work of Professor Bentall. A spokesman from the British Medical Council said ‘There is a genuine possibility that in copying extensively from other authors without adequate acknowledgement, he acted dishonestly..... There is no suggestion that Persaud attempted to pass off the research of others as his, rather it is alleged that he wrote about

research, copying the researchers words and failed to give the necessary attribution'.

Dr Persaud initially explained his omissions by claiming that the alleged plagiarisms of Professor Blass in 'Progress in Neurology and Psychiatry' were due to 'cutting and pasting errors' and these had led to his 'failure to acknowledge his sources'. (Pidd 2005). He stated of his article in the 'Times Educational Supplement' that he had 'not seen the final version before it went to press and that subeditors must have taken out the quotation marks and citation at the bottom'. Following a letter of complaint about the article on Scientology's relationship to Psychiatry where the work of Stephen A Kent was not credited, the Independent wrote a letter of correction in November 2005 saying that the mistake was a 'production error'. Raj Persaud said that he had sent a copy of his book to Dr Bentall claiming that 'the absence of any subsequent complaint from Dr Bentall as giving implicit permission to write about the work on this occasion'.

In 2008 Raj Persaud admitted to plagiarising people's work in his book 'From the Edge of the Couch' and other published articles. He was then subsequently suspended from practicing psychiatry for three months. He claimed that he never intended to do this and thought he was acknowledging other authors sufficiently.

There are different forms of plagiarism. These include firstly - using other peoples ideas and thoughts as your own, and secondly - simply copying work exactly from a published or unpublished source without acknowledging it. It appears that Raj Persaud is guilty of both of these forms of plagiarism. An

example of when Raj Persaud copied ideas without acknowledging their source is when he copied Thomas Blass in the book 'Neurology and Psychiatry'. When Raj Persaud copied the work of Stephen A Kent it was more obvious as he copied the text almost exactly without any kind of reference. This is also what he did with the review of 'The man who shocked the world'. Both of these are good examples of plagiarism by copying.

Plagiarism may be both accidental or intentional, although all plagiarism is claiming ownership of someone else's material, however accidental, which is theft and must be treated as so. As this is the case, both accidental and intentional plagiarism is treated the same so it must be avoided at all costs. By following good academic practice it should be relatively easy to avoid plagiarism by accident. The correct procedures to avoid plagiarism are as follows:

- \* Writing down sources while researching
- \* Making sure that all ideas are written in your own words or in quotation marks.
- \* Embedding references while writing the draft
- \* Making sure all references are up to date
- \* Checking everything is referenced by proof-reading
- \* Making sure that if someone else proof-reads, you check the final draft before print.

Not following these procedures will most likely lead to accidental plagiarism. When researching for a paper, a large volume of other people's work is normally studied. As this is the case if the references are not written as the paper is being researched and written, an individual reference could easily be left out. It is much easier to make this kind of error when using other people's ideas. It is not as likely that this would occur when directly quoting someone or another paper.

Accidental plagiarism can happen due to production error. If the person who writes the paper does not see the final draft before it goes to print then it is possible for references or quotation marks to be left out and not noticed. Raj Persaud claimed to be the victim of this kind of error. Raj Persaud also in another case claimed that a simple cutting and pasting error was responsible for the lack of a reference when quoting Thomas Blass's work in one of his articles. This kind of error can occur when someone other than the author proof reads the work. This should not and is not allowed to be used as an excuse however.

Raj Persaud always claimed that he plagiarised accidentally stating that the main reasons he personally did not pick up on these errors was due to a large amount of stress from deadlines. He is quoted saying to the General Medical Council (GMC): " I realise I should have been much more careful when I started writing the book. At the time, given the stress I was under, given the deadlines and my other work, I thought I was adequately attributing work. It was not my intention to pass off other people's work as mine."(The Times/2008)

In conclusion, plagiarism is treated in the academic world with zero tolerance. This is for several reasons. Plagiarism is, and should be considered as theft as ideas are as much the property of the author as material goods. If plagiarism is not treated in such a harsh manner, it would become a lot more widespread which in the end would lead to slower progress and a lack of new ideas due to people with the new ideas being reluctant to publish or not being recognised for their work. If work can not be attributed to an author how can ideas be tested or challenged by the author's peers hence progressing scholarship and understanding. It is the duty of every academic, no matter what their place or situation, to understand what is meant by academic rigor and procedure and, as has been demonstrated by the case of Raj Persaud, ignorance or accident may be a reason but cannot be an excuse for plagiarising the work of another.

The following extract shows the article that was written by Raj Persaud and the original article from which the information was taken. It can be seen that the wording solely differs in the highlighted areas. This extract was taken from The Guardian newspaper, published in 2005.

Raj Persaud's review of *The Man Who Shocked the World: The Life and Legacy of Stanley Milgram* by Thomas Blass, as printed in the *British Medical Journal*, August 6.

"The subjects in Milgram's original series of tests believed that they were part of an experiment dealing with the relation between punishment and learning. An experimenter - who used no coercive powers beyond a stern aura of mechanical and vacant eyed efficiency - instructed participants to

shock a learner by pressing a lever on a machine each time the learner made a mistake on a word matching task. Each subsequent error led to an increase in the intensity of the shock in 15 volt increments, from 15 to 450 volts. Actually the shock box was a well crafted prop and the learner an actor who did not receive shocks. Most of the subjects continued to obey to the end-believing that they were delivering life threatening 450 volt shocks - simply because the experimenter commanded them to.

“ Milgram’s study demonstrated with brutal clarity that ordinary individuals could be induced to act destructively, even in the absence of physical coercion, and humans need not be innately evil or aberrant to act in ways that are reprehensible and inhumane ... Milgram’s obedience experiments teach us that, in a concrete situation with powerful social constraints, our moral sense can all too easily be overwhelmed.”

Extract from “ The man who shocked the world”, an article written by Thomas Blass, Ph. D., Professor of Psychology, University of Maryland, Baltimore County, and published by Psychology Today (March-April 2002):

“ The subjects believed they were part of an experiment supposedly dealing with the relationship between punishment and learning. An experimenter - who used no coercive powers beyond a stern aura of mechanical and vacant-eyed efficiency - instructed participants to shock a learner by pressing a lever on a machine each time the learner made a mistake on a word-matching task. Each subsequent error led to an increase in the intensity of the shock in 15-volt increments, from 15 to 450 volts. In actuality, the shock



box was a well-crafted prop and the learner an actor who did not actually get shocked.

The result: a majority of the subjects continued to obey to the end - believing they were delivering 450 volt shocks - simply because the experimenter commanded them to. [The study] demonstrated with jarring clarity that ordinary individuals could be induced to act destructively even in the absence of physical coercion, and humans need not be innately evil or aberrant to act in ways that are reprehensible and inhumane ... Milgram's obedience experiments teach us that in a concrete situation with powerful social constraints, our moral sense can easily be trampled."