

Closeout for M01020006

In February 2001, a reviewer¹ of an NSF proposal² alleged the PI³ and/or co-PI⁴ (the subjects) plagiarized material from a source paper⁵ that was not correctly cited.⁶

Although the reference in the subjects' proposal cited the journal that published the source paper incorrectly, everything else—the page number, the authors (including ordering), title, and year—was correct. Given all the correct information, and that the journal cited was very similar to the journal in which the paper was published, we concluded that it is more likely the incorrect listing was an error by the subjects rather than an attempt to misdirect any reviewers.

The allegedly copied material consisted of approximately four sentences and one figure (the figure is a schematic), mostly in the introductory section of the proposal. While it is true that the material in the introductory section was not cited to the source paper, the subject provided a citation in a later part of the proposal that was related to the research discussed in the source paper. Technically, the figure itself was not referenced, but the subjects cited the source paper in the sentences before and after the sentence that mentioned the schematic figure. The subjects also cited the source paper by its first author's name twice in this paragraph. The subjects specifically differentiated their proposed research from the research described in the source paper. Therefore, we concluded that the subjects' apparent use of the source paper material represented an ethical breach, but did not rise to the level of misconduct. We believe that this ethical breach warrants a cautionary letter to the subjects.

This inquiry is closed and no further action will be taken on this case.

cc: Investigation, IG

¹ [footnote redacted].

² [footnote redacted].

³ [footnote redacted].

⁴ [footnote redacted].

⁵ [footnote redacted].

⁶ [footnote redacted].