

PLAGIARISM and Avoiding Plagiarism: Four Examples

This is the Original Material – Published in a Journal Article and Found Online

The state's historically increasing indifference to victims is reflected in the changing criminal justice role it assigns to them. One reflection of this indifference is found in the modification of the victim's role from a person who has been harmed in some way to one who provides emotional credibility to the prosecution. In this fashion, the state ignores actual harm and instead focuses on the offender, exacting the price for transgressing the legal codes. Such a process, where the victim is concerned, lacks satisfaction and reduces him or her to a secondary role. Real harm has thus been subordinated to theoretical conceptions of legal harm and the definition of a victim becomes an artificial one. (p. 260 in M. McShane & F. P. Williams III, 1992, "Radical victimology: A critique of the concept of victim in traditional victimology." *Crime & Delinquency*, 38/2: 258-271).

The images conveyed by official definitions of the victim are composed largely of middle-class symbolism. These images of the victim partake of an understanding of crime, and the criminal process, from a distance. Removed from the reality of crime as an endemic feature of American life, most middle-class citizens can only understand crime, and their own victimization, as irrational, senseless phenomena. For the middle class, the victim and offender are part of a strict dichotomy, a mutually exclusive set of categories. The offender cannot be viewed as victim, nor can the victim be viewed as offender. (McShane & Williams, p. 261).

This is Student A's Paper: (UNACCEPTABLE)

The state's historically increasing indifference to victims is seen in the changing criminal justice role it assigns to them. One reflection of this indifference is found in the modification of the victim's role from one who has been harmed in some way to one who provides emotional credibility to the prosecution. The state ignores actual harm and focuses on the offender, exacting the price for transgressing legal codes. This process, for the victim, lacks satisfaction and puts him or her in a secondary role. Real harm has been subordinated to theoretical concept of legal harm and the definition of a victim is an artificial one. The images conveyed by official definitions of the victim are made up mostly of middle-class symbols. These images of the victim only understand crime, and the criminal justice process, from afar, removed from the reality of crime as part of American life. Most middle-class citizens only understand crime, and their own victimization, as senseless phenomena. For the middle class, the victim and offender are part of a mutually exclusive set of categories. The offender cannot be viewed as victim, nor can the victim be viewed as offender.

COMMENT: The material above is an obvious and deliberate case of plagiarism. Not only is there no citation, but the material is taken almost word for word. Students often mistakenly believe that if they just alter a word or two, that it is not plagiarism. It is. You must paraphrase the material entirely in your own words. One way to do this is to read the material and then put it somewhere in a backpack or drawer and

recall what idea you were interested in from that piece, what you wanted to respond to that the author said. Another important feature of learning to avoid plagiarism is to only write down your reaction to the article, your own comment on it or critique of it so that what you are writing is original and only refers to the article source or branches off of that cited idea.

This is Student B's Paper (UNACCEPTABLE)

Over time, the state's indifference to victims has increased and is seen in the changing criminal justice role it assigns to them. One place we see this indifference is in the modification of the victim's role from someone who has been harmed in some way to one who provides emotional credibility to the prosecution. Here, the state ignores actual harm and focuses on the criminal, exacting the price for breaking the legal codes. Such a process, where the victim is concerned, lacks satisfaction and reduces him or her to a supplementary role. Real harm seems to be subordinated to theoretical notions of legal harm and the definition of a victim becomes an artificial one. The images conveyed by official definitions of the victim are made up largely of middle-class symbols. These images of the victim reflect a view of crime, and the criminal process, from a distance. Removed from the realistic feature of crime as a part of American life, most middle-class citizens can only understand it, and their own victimization, as confusing, senseless phenomena. For the middle class, the victim and offender are in two very separate and distinct categories. The offender cannot be viewed as victim, nor can the victim be viewed as offender (McShane & Williams, 1992).

COMMENT: Although more of the words are changed and a citation is given at the end of the material, this is still plagiarism as the structure of the material, the framework of the ideas is still basically conveyed as originally written by McShane & Williams. Words are merely substituted and the authors' original ideas are still for the most part, left sequentially in place. Significant phrasing from the original material is used and needs to reflect the extent of the quotations used. This does not represent proper paraphrasing and would be unacceptable as written. See the next two examples for more guidance on how the material could be used in a way that would not constitute plagiarism.

This is Student C's Version: (ACCEPTABLE)

To many writers in criminology, the role of the state in both tending to victims and punishing offenders could be confusing to the public. It has been noted that historically, victims have not even been recognized by the state which marginalizes them in the process of emphasizing criminal convictions. This often means that the victim's role changes "from a person who has been harmed

in some way to one who provides emotional credibility to the prosecution” (McShane & Williams, 1992: 260). The district attorney may be so worried about having a winning record of convicting offenders that he or she ignores the needs of the victim and “reduces him or her to a secondary role (McShane & Williams, 1992: 260). This is very disappointing to the victim who may not even report a crime the next time it happens.

The student clearly understands the material in the published article and is using it to support his or her own ideas about what effect the state’s manipulation of the victim might affect the system in the long run. The student relies on quotes but they are properly cited and fit well into the points that are being made. Even the introductory phrase, “to many writers in criminology” helps set the stage that the student is responding to the existing literature – that ideas are being gathered from outside readings that are being incorporated into this paper. It is a good technique to use.

Student Version D (ACCEPTABLE)

In discussing the way the state uses the definitions of victims and offenders for their own purposes, McShane and Williams (1992) argue that much of the focus of the criminal justice process is on offenders and making sure that they are convicted for their crimes rather than on healing the victim. They contend that the victim is no longer the one who needs justice, but the one who helps the prosecutor win his or her case. The authors further claim that the average person only sees people as either the clear-cut categories of offenders or victims and does not see how offenders can be victims too or that victims can be partly responsible in any criminal event. This means they ignore the complexity of life circumstances that many poor and inner cities families experience in that one day they may be committing an offense and the next day be victimized. Most people, according to (McShane & Williams, p. 261) only view crime through their own middle class experiences.

This version demonstrates that the writer clearly understood the material and was able to explain it in his or her own words and did not rely on quotes. The student was able to extend the citation by continually referring to ideas that belonged to McShane & Williams without having to repeatedly use the citation. Thus, “they contend” and “the authors further claim” serve to show the reader that the student is still referring to the article with a less direct but effective reference. The paragraph concludes with a direct reference back to the piece to insure that the readers are clear on the source. This is very effective use of academic material as the student is identifying the source right up front and ensuring that the reader understands whose ideas the subsequent materials refer to. The use of the page numbers to identify a more specific location for the point, even though it is not a direct quote, is a good technique and should be used in all of your papers.