Episode 7 – Copycats and Consequences: Plagiarism and the Boundaries of Originality

Carly Culver
Hi and welcome to this episode of the VICTVS podcast. my name is Carly Culver, and I'm joined this week by my colleague Ben Clayson. Hello. How are you doing? Very well. Thanks. How are you? Yeah. I'm good. Here on the VICTVS podcast, we discuss all things education, technology, exams, assessments, and everything in between. And today's hot topic is plagiarism.

Ben Clayson
Yes, a topic very dear to our hearts.
So, Carly, how do we? Well, first of all, to start with, how do we define plagiarism?

Carly Culver
So I've got the OED definition in front of me. It says the practice of taking somebody else's work or ideas and passing them off as one's own. Which I think is quite a good, simple definition, but I think it probably is quite a spectrum there.

Ben Clayson
Yeah. From what I've seen, every organisation, particularly higher education institutions, universities and so on, tend to have their own internal definition of plagiarism. but they all seem to have similar themes, which are, first of all, that it's intentional. It's an intentional copying of somebody else's work. And secondly, it's doing that without attribution. So no credit being paid at all to the original source.

And I suppose in our field of work, what we, or what we see and what we're concerned about is when these things are being done by people with a view to, gaining an advantage, an unfair advantage in an assessment or exam scenario. But, yeah, it's, I think interpretation is quite an interesting and deep question in relation to this because, yeah.

How exactly do you define it? At what point does it turn from being inspiration?

Carly Culver
That's exactly, that was the question that I had. I think there are definitely examples of where you can be even unconsciously inspired by the people's work, and that comes into your own work through to, you know, actual plagiarism, where it's a legally defined thing where your breaking somebody's copyright, for example.

I think that's everything in between is, you know, it's not easily definable necessarily sometimes. But that's why organisations do, you know, that's why it's really important that organisations do have definitive definitions of what they think plagiarism is. So people know where the by, where the boundaries are. And that's different from sector to sector as well of course.

Ben Clayson
Yeah. Because I think, Vanilla Ice with Ice Ice Baby, when you hear that and compare it to, Under Pressure by Queen. I thought the two, I thought the Vanilla Ice had sampled Queen and that it was a direct sample and that was the point was that he was sampling a tune, that he liked that he said that he changed one bass note in it and therefore it wasn't, a copyright infringement.

I believe they settled out of court in the end. But I don't think you can say you took inspiration from something and then replicate it, 99.9%, and then claim that what you've created is original.

Carly Culver
I think it's, I think something like musical or the more creative industries, it's probably even more difficult than when we're talking about something like an essay or an academic paper. Because like the, the concept of inspiration does come a bit more. But music's a great example where it happens constantly that, you know, that's a slightly older

example, but it's been happening since music's been created. I was reading I was reading about that before this podcast, and, I think it's interesting now how artists are tackling that problem.

So, It can go one of two ways sometimes it's exactly that, court settlements, big copyright battles and huge settlements being made. or often nowadays what happens is that the kind of the new artist, the artist that's sampled it or reused someone's chords or something like that end up, just having to sort of credit the previous artist and then hence royalties are shared and things like that.

So it's almost kind of like seeing if they can get away with it and then going, oh no, I've been caught, whoops i better, I better quickly just credit somebody else, which, is an interesting model.

Ben Clayson
Nobody would do such a thing. I mean, you know, heaven forbid that anybody would listen to, one of their, competitors' or, industry colleagues' podcast and then just copy the content, 100% and, you know, including guests and so on. You know, because things like that just surely would never happen.

Carly Culver
Well, what do you think about the phrase, then? imitation is the best form of flattery in that, in that respect and respect to plagiarism as well.

Ben Clayson
I think the is a, high degree of, truth in that sentiments. And I think it's absolutely fair to say that you've taken inspiration from things that you've experienced and witnessed because, you know, where would we be without it?

I think where it becomes problematic is when you mentioned earlier people can engage in unconscious copying and unconscious plagiarism. And, that has to be forgiven because it's a, you know, entirely natural. I think if you're, really keen and also, it's quite disappointing for someone if they think that they're engaged in an original thought to then have it pointed out to them that actually they've copied someone else's work without even realising it, because then they effectively have to begin again.

But I think that's where it comes back to when we're chatting about the definitions and the expectation that, oh, I only have to prove effectively that there is intent to copy someone's material. And then you would have to establish a motive which would be in most cases financial gain, but also potentially sort of reputational standing and I think that's yeah, I think it's an interesting question, particularly for students who are, of university age who are, you know, engaged in, literature reviews and so on.

And then they're being asked to come up with something original, or to have an original insight. combining other people's ideas is a form of original insight. And, you know, and then coming up with your own work, but, yeah. I think it's well, the question then is around the burden of proof and how exactly you establish that somebody has been engaged in, genuine plagiarism. But I think that that's where historic examples obviously come in handy because, you can see what other people have done in the past.

Carly Culver
Any the examples that stand out for you?

Ben Clayson
I have a few. How about yourself? Do you have any?

Carly Culver
Yeah. Well, when I, when I asked my colleagues about, what does plagiarism mean to them, any sort of famous examples that they'd thought of, the one that several mentioned, was the Melania Trump speech made in 2012.

So she did a speech at the, Republican convention, and then through the use of sort of video merging, it was shown to be basically word for word, the same as one that Michelle Obama had made several years previously, which obviously has got lots of interesting implications considering they're on different sides of the fence in American politics.

Ben Clayson
Sounds very much like fake news to me.

Carly Culver
But yeah, that's like I said, it's just interesting that that's the one that everyone's caught onto that it was, another American, political example where Joe Biden's initial, presidential campaign back in the 70s got totally nixxed because he was found to have plagiarised a speech from the British Labour Party at that time. So, apparently its rife in American politics, which isn't really much of a surprise.

Ben Clayson
No. and I have a. Yeah. I mean, I have a couple of political examples myself, but one that I found that was very interesting is an artist, called Roy Lichtenstein, who's very famous for, was very famous for, pop art, but clearly stole, various artworks and, or inspiration ideas for, his art from other people and then failed to credit them and, did extremely well out of it. And I think it's important because we specialise in exams and assessment delivery, at global scale. We tend to think about that kind of academic plagiarism, probably more than in other areas of life. But the fact is that it is a phenomenon that occurs across all sorts of different industries and areas of life where you might not expect it.

And then, interestingly, stepping back in time a touch. Saddam Hussein back in the day. They, he and his regime, they presented a 12, I believe it was a 1200 page document. Which criticised the, United Nations, declarations of reports into Iraq and its, weapons of mass destruction and so on, but it was proven to be completely plagiarised.

And the, the, Iraqi regime had actually plagiarised parts of the UN's document, which was interesting. but then similarly, the British government at the time, under Tony Blair, they published a document called "Iraq: it's infrastructure of concealment, deception and intimidation", and much of that was proven to be plagiarised from an academic in the U.S. And, it was considered to be quite embarrassing because, this was this document was very much part of the case against Iraq and the fact, and the reason why we ought to take action against the country. So, yeah, politics seems to be quite keen on it. And then the people seem to be quite happy to say, sorry, we didn't realise, but by then, potentially the damage is done because it's published in the newspapers.

Carly Culver
yeah. Exactly. Do you think the motivations for people doing it often in politics are different? You know, you've mentioned one of the motivations you mentioned earlier was like financial gain. Obviously, that's somewhat linked. If you're a politician. But also is it just laziness? Is it just I didn't I mean, I feel like laziness has to be sometimes a bit of a driver for, for plagiarism.

Ben Clayson
yeah. Laziness is an interesting, interesting one because you're saying, well, why would somebody be lazy enough to just copy somebody else's work? They could be under pressure to get things done. That's kind of why, I mean, like, like lack of time, like lack of time, lack of resources, like, politics is very fast moving, and I suppose it raises questions around whether politicians are actually just sort of trying to respond to, or, you know, to present responses which are then going to be in the media in front of the public and so on, rather than actually doing any deep thinking and deep research into any particular topic.

Yeah, I think I think with politics it's hard to know exactly why and I imagine it would be difficult to get that answer from any politician that might have been found to be plagiarising other people's content. I think with creative works, it's possibly easier to, to imagine the motivations. So, I know that, one famous case is, Mrs. Beaton's cookery book.

Yeah. In which she plagiarised, lots of recipes from other authors and, and she, she made various grammatical mistakes, which proved that it was a direct copy from somebody else's. And actually, when she died, her husband carried on publishing updates to the book, on her behalf, as if she was still alive. which is possibly a form of plagiarism, or certainly misrepresentation.

Carly Culver
Yeah, certainly. I don't think is that's interesting because then that if they're stealing from less well-known people, that really highlights one of the dangers of plagiarism, one of the negative impacts of plagiarism, which is the fact that you're stealing potentially revenue streams, recognition, things like that from the people that you have plagiarised from, Right? You're stealing their fame essentially, and then all of the benefits that come with that.

Ben Clayson
Yeah. And I think that the, stealing of work in order to gain or, you know, economically gain and have an advantage financially, that's really predictable and kind of, you know, it's very easy to see that happening and why, the motivation is quite clear.

I think when you start talking about recognition and you go down, you know, you start thinking about things like ego and, those types of drivers, then things become, for me at least, harder to understand. It's harder to understand why somebody would or how somebody would find themselves in a position where they think it's acceptable to, pass off somebody else's work.

One example that I know of is that time in 2015, at VICTVS, we, created a web page for a product that was on our own website that we had built and created from scratch. We were selling that product and we noticed, I think after a couple of months, that a web page appeared on a competitor's website that was 100% verbatim copy of our web page.
All of the text was exactly the same. So they were clearly doing it with a financial motive. I don't think there was any sort of, ego based motive. They were just trying to, make money and capitalise on what we had come up with.

Carly Culver
Yeah, they'd seen what we'd done is working, apparently. So they're just gonna be lazy and. Yeah. And, copy our good ideas, I guess.

Ben Clayson
And so we ended up, involving lawyers. And, that then, they effectively just disappeared, took the page down. but I think, I think if memory serves me correctly, the first thing they did was change about 20% of the copy. In order to then suggest that it hadn't been, direct plagiarism, even though there was 80% of it was still totally, plagiarised.
So, yeah, it was, that was an interesting example that we came across.

Carly Culver
That's, that nicely sort of brings it back to, like I said, more what in our day to day work at VICTVS, we, would deal with which is more academic integrity and plagiarism in that context in terms of assessments and examinations and things. So, obviously there's a really wide variety of techniques used, especially kind of, tech based stuff.

So what's what's your view on that? You know, this, there's there's a million and one plagiarism checkers out there in the, in the world on the internet. So what's your view on those and how their being used by students these days.

Ben Clayson
Yeah I mean they're very much a, standard feature in universities and colleges all over the world now. Which is a good thing and I think it's interesting to look at, the potential benefits for individual students to use those plagiarism checkers to help check their work as they're going, as they're progressing through, any particular project or publication,

because it can highlight to them, if they are accidentally going down the reach of unconscious, plagiarism, and the copying of other people's material.

The only problem with that is it creates additional work for the students, which is, effectively a higher degree of quality control of your own work, than I would have expected when I was at uni.

Carly Culver
Yeah, exactly. I, I think like, tools like that were definitely being used when I did my degree, for example.
But I don't remember it being like such a keynote topic. you know, that like, for example, you know, some of the big software that's available out there in the market, definitely essays that I wrote was put through those things, and those tools are still being used, like I said, very commonly by lots of universities and things. I just I looked into a few of the sort of outcomes of that. Obviously generative AI is like the hot topic. It's 2024. And, one of one of the big software companies said they ran 200 million papers through their software last year, and 11% of them had at least 20% generative AI generative text in them, supposedly, you know, so that opens an interesting conversation that I don't want to go down too much down the wormhole of AI. We've covered that in previous episodes.

But, something else which I thought was really interesting that came out of that study that I read, was the fact that 1% of papers were flagged as false positives. But when you're dealing with 200 million papers or 2 million papers and then what the impact of a false positive would have, obviously there's a perceived positive impact of a true positive because you're highlighting somebody who's doing something nefarious. But then the impact of a false positive could be even more extensive. Right?

Ben Clayson
Yeah. And I remember reading that somebody had put, the entire works of Shakespeare through a plagiarism detector, and it's highlighted, I think 30% of Shakespeare's work is being plagiarised. Which brings the question right back to, that kind of point of, you know, what is plagiarism? Because, did he know, for example, if it if that's correct, do you know, did Shakespeare know that he was writing, copying other people's source material or was it unconscious or, you know, nobody will know. yeah. Because I think the assumption is that because there was, you know, written materials then were so inaccessible, so expensive and so hard to find and so on that it wouldn't be as easy to plagiarise as it is now. But who knows?

Carly Culver
But then also, because written materials weren't as available, it was harder to cross reference materials so he could have easily stolen again from somebody lesser. Lesser known than him. Also, part of my mind goes to the fact that surely it's Shakespeare. So who has been massively referenced across the entire internet and all of the source material that these checkers use.

So it's like reverse plagiarism in a way. Yeah, I don't know, but, yeah. Well, it brings up, it brings up interesting topic of like language as well, because we were talking about like old, old English in his in his works, obviously. And I think like people who are using, well English isn't the first language that's especially, a problem with these, some of these online, online plagiarism checkers, because again, it increases the level of false positives.

I read a study where It increased it from like the 1%. I mentioned that it's like 60%. Yeah. For people that were, writing in a language that wasn't their first language, if that's English or otherwise. And that in itself brings up the dangers of solely relying on a piece of software to do this work for you.

Ben Clayson
Yeah. And I think, the generative AI question is interesting because if you I believe that if you create software solutions that can identify when somebody has used generative AI to, produce a piece of text, especially something like, coursework or a dissertation, and it's successful and it keeps identifying people that have done so, then that will drive an increase in the work to essay mills and to the, types of services that exist that allow people to do your work for you,

and you pay somebody else to write your dissertation because then it will, assuming that you employ somebody good, it will, pass plagiarism detection because it won't be plagiarised. It will be a good quality piece of research. and you're able to submit it in your own name and, receive your certification.

Carly Culver
Yeah. And then go on to be a doctor and cut somebody open.

Ben Clayson
I think, yeah. When it comes to I think yeah, then that's kind of the next question is then you say, okay, so you have to, understand the degree of risk that applies to each different sort of qualification and scenario. Because you could argue that the risk to anybody's physical health, for example, and general well-being of Vanilla Ice copying, Queen was quite low. However, they would argue that the financial risk was really huge that they'll give us some money, which is legitimate. But, is that as serious as, somebody, fraudulently, achieving a certification that makes them a danger to other people? No. Obviously not. But so then the awarding organisations, academic institutions obviously take multi layered approaches to securing their assessments and awarding and I think that therefore the software is a really important part of the larger response, but I don't know, what do you think about the, the software solutions.

Carly Culver
Yeah I think like I said, it's it's part of it. It has to be part of it. But it's well, as with any tool like that, as long as it's being used in the manner it's intended rather than, you know, people who just of think, well, they can just chuck in any essay and then they just take the, the percentage outcome as wrote and then they, you know, so that needs to be more steps along that process. And so there needs to be deeper interrogation of whatever text that is, I think talking to the student or the person, that's wrote the paper as well, you know. Yeah. Like there was an interesting example, exactly of this of I think it was a professor at Texas A&M University a few years ago. He used ChatGPT, and he put in all of his students essays and asked it how plagiarised are these essays.

And obviously its not, its kind of again, reverse plagiarism. It's not the intended function of thought of that software. And it spat out, oh, yeah, they're all plagiarised. So he just emails them over in the middle of their, graduation ceremony and says, oh, sorry, you've all failed the course because you've all submitted this plagiarised, things.

It all got revoked eventually. So that's what I'm saying. It shouldn't really, the software and the outcome of what the software spits out shouldn't be the be and end all of an investigation into something like that. Their has to be a human element in all this aswell, in my view.

Ben Clayson
Yeah. And I don't think, many awarding organisations see, any one device as the be all and end all because, the nature of, academic dishonesty and, unintentional, copying, plagiarism, but also legitimate fraud. The complexity is that these are problems are always evolving as technology and practices evolve. And so it's important that the methods around assessing them are also evolving and, and that they are holistic rather than just relying on one particular approach.

Carly Culver
Yeah. I saw a great term around this called disguised plagiarism. And that's exactly that. It's fully intentional, malicious plagiarism that is fully designed to get around the measures that the software devices, software programs use. So some things like instead of, well, the obvious one, be inserting your text and putting, commas around it, but you make the commas white and tiny. So then it's not. It's the plagiarism software sees it as a quote.

So it doesn't take it as plagiarism. It's obviously, it feels it's attributed to somebody else as a quote would be in an essay, but in reality a marker looking at the paper wouldn't see something like that. And similar things, you know, inputting wodges of text, as an image. You know, I had a quick check before today and there's hundreds and hundreds of forum posts all about exactly how to beat the software.

So that definitely I think, comes to your point, it's a race, it's always a race. It's always the case with anything to do with cheating or exams and assessments. We we know that it's always about, yeah, the cheaters and the people that are trying to to kind of meet that, just edging towards each other. Yeah.

Ben Clayson
It always makes me think that if only these people put all of this energy into legitimate work, then they'd be really hugely successful. Perhaps they are anyway, which is good food for them.

Carly Culver
Reading through the forum posts, people sort of saying like, well, why do I need to submit an essay about, I don't know, World War One, when I've already got an offer to work at some tech firm as a as a cybersecurity expert. And I'm like, yeah, kind of you are kind of proving that you could hack software. So maybe those skills are going to be more marketable in 2024 than knowing about World War One, but that's a whole other conversation.

Ben Clayson
Yeah. And I think designing education and assessment programs that, actually meet the requirements of the students as they then change and progress into, you know, workplace roles is obviously something that, universities and everybody awarding organisations are all constantly working on to make sure that their qualifications have relevance and, and future proof. I think going back to the question around generative AI is very interesting because the, the debates about, you know, how much of it is plagiarism, given that it is plagiarising or copying everything that it finds in the internet and then rephrasing things, but that leads into a whole bigger conversation about, therefore not every thought must be a plagiarised thought.

Carly Culver
I was going to say that's exactly what academics have been doing, they literally read other people's thoughts and think, oh, that's good, ill add a little bit on top of it or reformulate it, or apply it to something else. Like that's how human thought works.

Ben Clayson
because you're having these claims coming up now where you have generative AI being used to create music, but using the voices of other people, other established artists. And, you know, is that plagiarism because you can have generative AI creates a set of lyrics, for a haunting country and western or, sorry, country music, ballad. And then, you can have yet another generative AI create the actual song for you, but using the voice of Taylor Swift or whoever you like.

Carly Culver
That's very good country and western knowledge. Surprising actually.

Ben Clayson
is it? Good, because I have no idea who she is.

I think that, you know, then the question would become. Will. Who do you then take that claim to be? Cause, who's responsible for the generation of that piece of work?

Carly Culver
Yeah. Is it is it ChatGPT? Is it Microsoft?

Ben Clayson
Is it the publisher or is it the person pressing buttons in their bedroom. And then.

Carly Culver
It's going to evolve into a really complex legal situation around copyright, I think in the future, you know, because copyright is the legal way that we control plagiarism, isn't it? Really? And I think across all fields, you know, academic creative, if it's going to really become a hot topic in that field as well, because yeah, like I said, who who do you go after. Who do you sue?

Ben Clayson
Yeah, and I think the the best responses that I've seen so far from various artists that have been asked about this is that they have sort of chosen to defer to the line of imitation being the sincerest form of flattery, because, that way they can effectively identify music that is or appears to be them, and then points out that that's not actually them. And if somebody likes it, fine, and you could say that you're using my likeness and so on. Yes, of course you could. But it would probably come across as mean-spirited and yeah, what exactly are you going to do about it? If it's somebody sitting in their bedroom who isn't making a fortune out of a song, but simply had a nice idea for a particular type of song, they wanted to hear their favorite artist perform.

Yeah. and, yeah, I think that's a very complicated, debate, but really interesting. And, I like the idea of, people being able to create their own personalized art based on their favorite artists.

Carly Culver
okay. I'm trying. I'm trying to think of combinations in my head here.

Ben Clayson
Yeah, yeah, it's just straight down. Yeah. The..

Carly Culver
I would say like Snoop Dogg Christmas album, but I'm pretty sure that's been done already.

Ben Clayson
Yeah. Well, yeah. So yeah. Copyright. Yeah. Yeah.

Carly Culver
If it hasn't been done already I'm going to ask him, good stuff.

Ben Clayson
I think the, the psychology and motivations are, very interesting, questions around plagiarism. I think fear of failure is a huge one, and really significant for an awful lot of people. Yeah. Nobody wants to fail to obtain a degree or I think other academic qualification that they might be doing.

And the, we know there are people who are extremely bright and very, very good at their job, know their subject matter inside out, but who are bad at doing exams. Yeah. Because their, their first response to being asked a question in an exam will be to question the question and the creation. Yeah. Or the construction of the question instead of to immediately understand and recognise what the question is actually trying to ask.

And a lot of that can come down to personal preference and personal approach, and so when you go into an exam, and you don't know really what you're going to find, then yeah, there's the, you know, we all know that uniquely human experience of being terrified going into an exam, even though, you know, the you know what, you know, you know, the, you know, the subject matter. Yeah. You know, that it's there in your mind, but whether or not you can access it within a specified time limit. Yes. And, you know, you could be having a bad day. Be late on the bus. Yeah.

And then I think you mentioned earlier about, languages and foreign language and, you know, people who might be trying to respond to questions that are in their second or third language. And writing in any language is extremely

difficult, writing in English, writing, well, very, very difficult. But then writing in a language in a way that will answer a question that's in an exam is a difference.

Carly Culver

When your English level is being assessed as well, you know, when that's the thing that's being assessed. It's not whether, you know, he was the king of England, it's can you answer the question with perfect grammar and spelling and with the right context and all those things like, I can't imagine the pressure of doing something like that.

Ben Clayson

And then adding in, kind of you might have concerns, even though it might not even be valid, but you might have your own concerns about your own time management and planning skills. because exam skills exam days skills are something that we talk about a lot as well, for candidates who need to prepare to do a kind of an assessment, you know, on a particular day. Of course they may just have a lack of commitment and not actually be very committed to achieving anything in relation to that particular qualification. Like you said, that kind of probably ties in with the laziness question and sort of you know, as a motivation for why you might plagiarise. you're not really committed to…

Carly Culver

I'd like to think most people who've made a decision to go into, you know, higher education or go into, you know, learning more as an adult have made some sort of commitment themselves to the education and the process of education, which will inevitably involve assessment if you want it to mean anything.

Ben Clayson

But it can be difficult can't it to sort of know what you want to be doing with the rest of your life.

Carly Culver

Yeah, at 16 or whatever.

Ben Clayson

Yeah. I think if you know for a fact that you want to be a doctor from the age of 18, then, that's so nice. You know, for you, that's very comfortable position to be in. Not insofar as you'll have to do a lot of work, but at least, you know I have an idea. Whereas other people, I think you can find yourself approaching degrees, other academic qualifications, thinking that it might be something that you like. and but then life can happen and you might a year later or two years later, be struggling with your motivation.

Carly Culver

Yeah, your sort of stuck in that position until you get out the end of it.

Ben Clayson

And yeah. And then also you mentioned, earlier that there is a, a real phenomenon which is people downplaying the significance of plagiarism. You know, why does it really matter? Yeah. You know, why does it matter? And if all these politicians are plagiarising each other and very successful artists and musicians are, and all the kind of, pop culture heroes that you have, it can be perceived as, you know, plagiarism is rife. Then why should I bother?

Carly Culver

Yeah. Why shouldn't I get on the bandwagon and just use, an essay farm or, you know, ChatGPT to write my next work report for VICTVS. I won't I promise.

So, coming off the back of your sort of point about the fact that fear of failure is a potential motivator of somebody plagiarising somebody else's work, what do you think that people can do on an individual level? Or what we can do on sort of a organisational, societal level to combat those motivators?

Ben Clayson

Yeah. As we've discussed, there's a lot of motivation. So fear of failure, but also the kind of, sheer economic reality of people trying to win financially by copying other people's work and, We were talking earlier about motives. And, you know, what drives people?

Why did Mrs. Beaton's cookery book, why was that? Yeah.

Carly Culver

Why did she steal from others? Yeah.

Ben Clayson

Yeah, exactly. It's stealing. It is theft. And so how are these people? Because it's so clearly so prevalent. How are people able to justify and, ignore the fact that they are stealing, material from other people? And, you know, then you the question is, yeah, how can somebody stop themselves or address an attitude that they have that suggests that this is okay?

And it's obviously a very complex question, but, Dr Jim Loehr, who is a, he has a doctorate in psychology and is a full member of the American Psychological Association. So he spoke recently on the Knowledge Project podcast. Okay. And he was talking about how over the course of his career of many years, decades, of coaching, coaching elite athletes, you know, people who are number one in the world. And, he's talking about how they have a very kind of, focused sort of career where they're focusing on being the best. and the danger with this is that you can get to the point that you're effectively at the end of your career as a professional athlete. And then what?

Carly Culver

Yeah, especially if it's like 25 or 30 or something like that.

Ben Clayson

Because you've clearly still got a lot to give. And, also, you have to bear in mind the fact that professional sports are, a field in which cheating and trying to gain an unfair advantage is totally rampant, you know, all over the place. When we're talking about financial motivation, that's like a a pond effect isn't it, its not just for the person themselves.

Carly Culver

Its for the team. It's for all the kind of gambling betting industries. It's for all of the investments that go along with it. So yeah, that's huge.

Ben Clayson

And so he's talking with his athletes about, not necessarily these questions of integrity and so on, but more about kind of what, you know, he's coaching them for mental health and mental resilience under the pressure and dealing with all of the complications of becoming a celebrity, the number one sportsperson in the world. And then those lessons he's passed on to the wider public through his books. But he was talking about how his books have evolved over the years and how he now talks to these athletes from day one about, how they are going to live, after they have become number one in the world. because the question really is, who do you want to be?

Because it's less a question of whether you can be number one in the world, because if you're operating at that level, you may become number one, or you may become number two. But, you know, you're kind of right up there at the very, very highest level. so that's potentially kind of happened already. But the question that he's posing to people are not just pro-level athletes, but everyone is who do you want to be?

Because where do you want to be? And no matter how you determine your own success, his point is that if you want to be living a truly successful life, then first of all, you need to establish the values that matter the most to you, so that you can help define your own purpose and your motivations for yourself that tell you what kind of person you want

to be. Because careers finish, you won't be number one in the world at anything for a particular, you know, for the forever.

Carly Culver
Forever. Yeah, exactly. and you won't be.

Ben Clayson
You know, my point is, you won't be at university forever. You won't have qualifications forever. If you do have qualifications or you've gained qualifications by plagiarising and cheating your way through, then it may well be the case that somebody finds out. And so if we're talking about how you can address questions around integrity and personal, your personal approach to, copyright and plagiarising material, then I think that people need to ask themselves what sort of person they actually want to be at the end of this because, you know, will they consider themselves to be living a truly successful life if they build an empire out of sand, which turns out to be based on fraudulent activity?

Carly Culver
Yeah. Because you think there's going to have to be at some point regardless of what the fraudulant activity, you know, what the plagiarism, whatever the misconduct was, there is going to at some point in their life when they actually need to know the information that they've plagiarised. For real if they're actually pursuing you know, a goal based on that achievement. So, you know, this is.

Ben Clayson
Yeah. And we live in the information age when people find things out, people are willing to put the time in to dig deeper and understand the reality. And so, yeah, Lance Armstrong, you know. Yeah. good example. and so many others. when everything they've achieved is undermined by,

Carly Culver
yeah, by one moment of poor motivation

Ben Clayson
or a lack of character.

Yeah. Yeah. and I think, a very interesting book is The Road to Character by David Brooks. it's not preachy. It shows examples of people throughout history who have, demonstrated character in ways which doesn't necessarily result in them having fame and fortune, but, certainly means that they lived very virtuous lives, and then I would also recommend reading anything by Robert Greene.

Carly Culver
I think I echo your sentiment that I would like to think that people get caught out. I don't think there are many people in life that get through their entire lives maintaining a secret or a lie. And I think your point about kind of like, especially in our sector, like the, the technology, the methodologies are evolving all the time. So even if you haven't been caught now, that could be something that happens in five years time that reveals something about you. So I yeah, I really agree with that. And also just personal motivations, to have personal motivations. Like I personally wouldn't feel as much sense of success if I'd cheated my way to a result, whatever large or small. I think satisfaction and, yeah, sense of personal achievement really, really plays into it. And I'm not sure how you could have that if you hadn't been fully ethical and had some personal integrity while trying to achieve those things.

So I think that wraps up our conversation today on on plagiarism. we've just touched on that, but also quite a lot of other topics, motivations, academic integrity, exam security, misconduct, all of those things. If people are interested, we've got several other podcasts I think they'd be interested in, and we'll link them in the bio below. But also, of course, if you've got questions about any of these topics or want to find out more than please do contact us at VICTVS.co.uk

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A transcript of this podcast will be available on our website and you can follow us on all of the social media. Thanks for Ben for joining me today and for, giving us some great examples of plagiarism through the ages.

Ben Clayson
No problem. Thank you and goodbye.