ORIGINAL RESEARCH

A reflexive exercise to promote cultural humility among doctoral nursing students

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ABSTRACT

Background: The U.S. population is becoming increasingly diverse; however, nursing remains a predominantly Caucasian profession. To promote positive outcomes among diverse patients, nurses must rely on rigorous transcultural research. When conducting research with people different from oneself, knowledge of one's own values and beliefs is a necessary first step. In Transcultural Nursing Research, a required doctoral course, the first assignment is a reflexive exercise followed by online discussion about one's personal culture and the origins of values and beliefs. Objectives: To (a) examine students' responses to a reflexive exercise for evidence of cultural self-awareness, cultural humility, and insights gained and (b) assess the effectiveness of the teaching method.

Methods: The setting was online within the Learning Management System (LMS), Blackboard. Participants: The sample consisted of twelve doctoral students enrolled in Transcultural Nursing Research. Methods: Student consent was obtained after course grades were submitted. Data was extracted from the LMS, de-identified, coded, categorized and collapsed into themes.

Results: Four themes emerged from the data: "different versus familiar", "cultural experiences", "memories" and "reflections and implications".

Conclusions: Posts reflected insight into cultural awareness, values and humility. Students identified growth opportunities for themselves and their children. Suggestions for future education and research are presented.

Key Words: Transcultural nursing, Nursing research, Graduate nursing education, Qualitative research

1. Introduction

The U.S. population is becoming increasingly diverse. By mid-century the number of non-Hispanic whites will decline while Hispanic and Asian populations will more than double and Black, American Indians, and Alaska Natives will increase by more than half.^[1] By 2043, the US will be a majority-minority nation; non-Hispanic whites will comprise the largest group but no one group will make up a majority.^[1]

Unlike the general population, the nursing profession remains primarily white non-Hispanic.^[2] Meeting cultural

needs might reduce health disparities and improve patient adherence.^[3] Therefore, nurse educators are challenged to prepare undergraduate and graduate students to effectively understand patients' values, treatment choices, and needs regardless of cultural background. Likewise, nurse researchers must be equipped to conduct research with people different from themselves. Research methods adapted and respectful of diverse populations will foster reliable and rigorous findings.^[4]

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN)

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set forth Cultural Competency Competencies for Graduate Nursing Students. [5] Two core and seven specific competencies are presented in Table 1. Competencies direct students to reflect on their cultural beliefs and values in order to create reliable and valid transcultural research. To help students work towards attaining these competencies the authors developed a required doctoral course, Transcultural Nursing Research (TCNR). The course goal is to build a community of nurses who lead through the use of culturally relevant scholarship,

knowledge, and technology to improve the health status of diverse communities. Course objectives appear in Table 2. The online course engages students in a variety of learning activities including face-to-face discussions (via video conferencing software), an asynchronous group debate regarding ethical constructs pertinent to research completed in a third world country, and critical evaluation of two studies for which the sample's culture was different from that of the researchers.

Table 1. AACN cultural competencies for graduate nursing students

Core Graduate Cultural Competency	Specific Graduate Cultural Competency
Provide leadership to educators and members of the healthcare or research team in learning, applying, and evaluating continuous cultural competence development.	*Critically reflect upon self and others to enhance the progression along a cultural competency continuum. *Mentor students and members of the healthcare or research team in the application of culturally competent practice principles. *Supervise other nurses and personnel using principles of inter-cultural communication. *Create educational curricula and experiences to foster continuous cultural competence development and to optimize interactions with diverse patients.
Conduct culturally competent scholarship that can be utilized in practice.	*Generate data-based research and theory to explain and predict the outcomes of culturally competent care. *Use ethical standards to conduct research studies and quality assurance interventions to improve culturally competent patient care. *Develop culturally competent research design, methods, data interpretation, and reporting of findings in collaboration with diverse populations

Table 2. Transcultural nursing research course objectives

- Discuss historical events in transcultural research and the implications for current programs of research.
- Assess and analyze culturally relevant issues related to conducting meaningful research within a particular culture.
- Identify how research practices may be adapted for different cultures.
- Identify the outcomes of nursing research including the dissemination of findings within the context of culture.

In order to work effectively with people from diverse cultures, one must first examine one's own cultural values and beliefs. [6] The objective for TCNR Module 1 is to "Reflect on and discuss one's personal culture and the potential impact on transcultural nursing research." An assignment directs students to complete a reflexive exercise. Questions encourage students to identify their own cultural group, how various groups were perceived when they were growing up, messages given about people different from themselves and from whom those messages originated. After completing the exercise, students post responses to at least two prompts on an asynchronous discussion board and respond to one colleague's answer. Examples of prompts include "What

was the most significant thing you learned from this activity?" And, "Did you think of something that you had not remembered in a long time? Explain."

1.1 Literature review

Several concepts related to working with different cultural groups were identified including cultural sensitivity, cultural competence and cultural humility. The focus of this article is cultural humility which involves continuous self-reflection and critique, decreasing power imbalances between, and maintaining respect for people from different backgrounds.^[7] Cultural humility involves admitting when one does not have an answer, promoting partnerships across cultures,^[7] and "requires embracing the belief that one's own culture is not the only or best culture".^[8]

1.1.1 Teaching/Learning methods and outcomes

Various teaching/learning methods were used to promote cultural-related outcomes. Creative approaches included forums and workshops, [9,10] service learning, [11] role playing, [12] simulation, [13,14] theater, [15] reflexive photography [16] and clinical experiences. [8,17,18] Outcomes included the impact of international education experiences, [11] perceptions or definitions of cultural competence, [12,13,17] cultural

sensitivity,^[10] knowledge, behavior change,^[15] global perspective,^[18] and cultural humility.^[8] Two quantitative studies^[10,17] used established tools to measure outcomes pre and post intervention with both studies reporting significant findings. Undergraduate students who attended a four-day immersion on an Indian reservation reported significantly lower perceived cultural competence while those who attended a two-week experience had significantly higher perceived cultural competence after the experience.^[14] A significant increase in openness to diversity, the variable selected to measure cultural sensitivity, was reported after a cultural diversity forum.^[10]

1.1.2 Self-reflection

"Ethical and cultural dilemmas require introspection of personal and professional values to provide culturally congruent care". [19] Critical self-reflection was identified by a national panel of experts as the sixth best practice to promote cultural sensitivity. [6] Most learning activities described involved some form of reflection such as journal responses to open-ended questions or debriefing after simulation. Self-reflection strategies promoted analysis of beliefs, attitudes, and reactions [6] and writing promoted critical thinking and self-understanding. [20]

Teaching/learning methods designed to impart cultural outcomes among nursing students were creative and impressive. Two themes emerged: reflection is a necessary part of developing cultural humility and writing engages students in reflection. No literature was located that described teaching methods aimed at increasing doctoral nursing students' cultural self-awareness and humility for the purpose of conducting rigorous transcultural nursing research. The purposes of this study were to (a) examine students' responses to the reflexive exercise for evidence of cultural self-awareness, cultural humility, and insights gained and (b) assess the effectiveness of the teaching method.

2. METHODS

2.1 Design

This was a qualitative descriptive, retrospective data analysis.

2.2 Sample

Twelve students provided informed consent and completed the demographic questionnaire. Ages ranged from 29 to 63 with a mean of 46. Ten were white-non-Hispanic and one each was African-American/Black and Hispanic; two participants were male. The mean number of years as a nurse was 22 years (range five to 41.5). All participants had traveled outside the US, half had lived in another country, five spoke a language other than English and seven had taken courses or

sensitivity,^[10] knowledge, behavior change,^[15] global per- continuing education on cultural competence. All reported spective,^[18] and cultural humility.^[8] Two quantitative stud- working with people different from themselves.

2.3 Procedures

Institutional Review Board approval was obtained from the University committee. Students completed the reflective exercise and participated in the online asynchronous group discussion the first week of the semester. After course grades were submitted, faculty sent an email to students explaining the study and requested consent to extract their discussion board posts for analysis purposes. Twelve students consented and completed a demographic questionnaire via a Qualtrics survey. Discussion Board posts were extracted and all identifying information removed.

2.4 Data analysis

Two experienced qualitative researchers independently analyzed the data using NVivo qualitative data analysis software as described by Creswell. Narratives were read several times to obtain an understanding of details as well as the whole. The data were coded into the smallest category of information and initially grouped by interview question. Some data spontaneously emerged from the narrative and did not necessarily represent response to a specific question. As Creswell suggested, these codes were grouped into related categories. Categories were reviewed for similar content, collapsed, and themes labeled. A code book was created including the theme, category, brief description and examples.

3. FINDINGS

Four themes emerged from the data: "different versus familiar", "cultural experiences", "memories" and "reflections and implications". Categories within the theme, "different versus familiar", included "when I was different", and "children and difference". The "memories" theme included the categories "messages", "lack of exposure to diversity", and "family power".

3.1 Different versus familiar

General comments about difference and familiar focused on emotional responses and behaviors toward those like or unlike themselves. "Everyone is more comfortable around things that are familiar to them" remarked one student and another added that "comfort often breeds a certain complacency that makes one oblivious to the world around them". Another emotional response was "fear ... a normal reaction to uncertainty" or people who are different. It was also recognized that emotional responses "stop us from experiencing many wonderful things" or cause people to "be so entrenched in our beliefs that we feel the need to denigrate those that hold different beliefs". On the other hand, "incursions of dif-

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ference" result in awareness of what is outside one's comfort zone and cause a "self-revelation that can be exhilarating".

Students recognized *different* social, racial, ethnic, and religious groups. These included political, generational, socioeconomic, rural versus urban, and LGBT. High school "cliques ... preps, ropers, and cheerleaders" were recognized as *different*. The assignment made students aware of cultural groups they had not previously considered: "I never really thought about wealth creating a different culture but of course it does".

Students acknowledged assumptions and misconceptions made about people who are different. A lack of knowledge was credited as the source of misconceptions. One student tries "not to make assumptions but take everyone at their proven individual worth . . . to learn about a person and their essence". Some differences were accepted and tolerated while those that were intolerable were viewed in light of the fact that not everyone "was supposed to be like me".

When I was different. Students were asked to reflect on a time when they were different from group members and what helped or hindered them from feeling more welcome. One student described many experiences as "more fiction than reality" and a time when he was racially profiled while shopping. He coped with humor and not taking it personally – reminding himself that his reality and that of the person who profiled him were separate.

International experiences were cited as examples of times when students were different. A Caucasian student who served in the Peace Corps in Africa stated that being different is a source "of pride and always brings out the best in me even after having PTSD from the experience". For this student, the activity "brought back memories and strength gained". A student from Mexico described faculty and other students who made fun of how she spoke; they made it a point to make her feel different. While on a military mission in West Africa, a Caucasian student was different not only because of her ethnicity, but also because she was an officer and nurse. The intersection between military rank and the physician/nurse relationship prompted discussions about traditional authoritative roles. As an American in Albania. another student felt "exhausted from having to figure out how to do even the smallest task ... and stupid even though I knew I wasn't. What helped was holding on to my identity and allowing others to help me". This student also described the "ego trip" of being an American overseas and the need to "value the resources and benefits of being an American, yet not let nationality be the currency of identity, dignity, or value".

Religion was another source of difference. One student was "the brunt of many religious jokes and false societal beliefs". These experiences strengthened his faith and "allowed me to view others' faith and religious beliefs openly and sparked my interest in learning and appreciating other religions". Finally, gender was the basis for feeling different. One student reflected that as a male nurse he is frequently profiled as "Ms. X or Madam ... all because my name has RN or nurse associated with it".

Children and difference. Students reflected that children were open to diversity until adults intervened. One student remarked "When I was kid I didn't care about color, or cultural differences. I just wanted friends. My kids are the same way ... they are literally blind to the differences". At a son's birthday party, "One friend was from India, another from Vietnam, one was second generation from Lebanon and a fourth Caucasian. (My son) had more cultural interaction at the age of nine, than I had by my senior year of high school". Although children were exposed to greater diversity, responses were not always positive. Another student's six-year-old daughter told him "one of my friends told me that I can't play with them because I am not white". The student commented "These were six year old. I highly doubt her 'friend' just woke up one morning and decided on this".

3.2 Cultural experiences

Students described transcultural experiences and responses to those experiences. One student depicted her "ego deconstruction" while working with Mexicans influenced by Mayan and Santeria cultures. "No one cared that I was a well-trained nurse, no one knew what a master's degree meant, or cared about all my experience. I was an obvious outsider and the locals did not trust me professionally or otherwise". The experience brought on "profound loneliness and depression". Because she was not able to communicate in Spanish, she listened and learned that people liked her as a listener and that she "learned about concepts of impermanence, reverence, and stewardship. People judged me not by the licenses or titles but the contents of my heart, my intentions, and the kindness I showed". The experience taught her to "make humility the cornerstone of my nursing care".

Professional transcultural experiences included exposure to different cultural groups while working in a hospital, medical missions or traveling with colleagues in the US.

I remember walking into the (OB) unit when several women were in labor and hearing 'Oy, oy, oy' in one room and 'Oh sweet Jesus, help me' in another room. It was an incredibly pivotal few months in my life. I learned so much about these two cultures – both of them formerly

unfamiliar to me.

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A Caucasian student related a time when traveling with an African-American colleague to an area where the population was predominantly Caucasian. The colleague was noticeably fearful in a restaurant where all other patrons were white. The student assured her she was safe and reflected that she had never experienced fear based on race. A public health mission working with a Native American tribe provided transcultural nursing opportunities for another student.

Two students reflected on childhood experiences with people who were from different cultural backgrounds.

Many of my friends growing up were Hispanic ... because of our shared religion and values. I enjoyed the closeness and trust among family, reliance on faith to get through hardships, hard work ethic, and cooking as a way to bring family together.

Another reflected that her friends represented "a variety of cultures, races, and religions, from poor, middle-class, and wealthy families". She attended a variety of churches including Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist as well as temple with her Jewish friends.

A student "never knew how much I did not know" before a study abroad course. It was the student's first time traveling internationally. She "was so confused about some of what I saw and experienced that I couldn't determine how I felt until well after our trip". She concluded "those three weeks had more of an impact upon my cultural perceptions than most of the rest of my life and I am very grateful for the opportunity".

3.3 Memories

Students were asked to reflect on factors which impacted the formation of their cultural values and beliefs such as where they grew up, messages they received about people different from themselves and family values. These prompts stimulated various memories categorized as messages, family power and lack of exposure to diversity.

Messages. Parental messages and role modeling about people who were different varied considerably. Students described the values instilled by their parents such as "the importance of trust, respect, appreciation, acceptance, and empathy". Students stated, "I learned to value hard work and appearances" and "opportunity was there for anyone willing to work hard". One student listed several lessons learned from her parents: "Hardships and troubles incurred by our friends, and how these individuals were still good people despite

society's beliefs; appreciate all that you have; believe in people, no matter their background, and trust them until proven otherwise". Positive family messages were evident in many descriptions. One student stated, "I was brought up to see differences as superficial ... behind the facade was a human identical to the one before and the one after. We are all the same". Another student observed:

(Growing up poor) provided me humility and sensitivity for many people. I grew up in neighborhoods with varying cultures. My best friend in elementary school was black and I enjoyed his family very much. My mother received much grief from others for allowing me to do so. We moved between four different towns growing up, and the difficulty of making new friends provided me with sensitivity and awareness of others.

Another student of the Baptist faith related, "my parents encouraged me to learn about different religions and traditions ... They believed there were many paths to God and that I should choose the path that is best for me". One student gave a graphic example of positive parental influence when she described the following incident:

I recalled being bullied by a few of the Caucasian girls in my class when I shared my lunch with her (African-American classmate) because she had no lunch money or food of her own. One girl came up behind me and poured an entire carton of milk on my head and made cruel and rude comments about my choice of a friend, commenting on the color of her skin. The teacher said and did absolutely nothing. I remembered my mother coming to school the next day at lunchtime to offer the teacher some words of advice in front of the entire class. My mother had no difficulty speaking her mind.

However, not all students experienced positive parental messages. As recalled by one student, "I was naturally curious and questioned things in school and at church, which never went over well and embarrassed my parents. Questioning the norm did not fit in with the family appearance value". Another student stated, "Messages I was given as a child were that Black and Hispanic people are poorer and less educated than me. I was not necessarily taught to feel sorry for them or that they deserved my pity". This same student described an eye-opening event later in her teenage years when she met a Black person from the North.

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Gone were the accent and dialect I was used to. I could not help but be taken aback. My whole paradigm about Black people was being shattered. I kept watching this woman's mouth as she talked and tried to detect some sort of poor, Southern dialect but to no avail.

Family power. Several students expressed surprise by the extent of influence received from their family. "With this activity, I realize how influential my family is. I [grew] up in a really traditional Mexican family". Another student described this phenomenon eloquently,

As much as I thought I was not influenced by my parents "appearance" value, it was a huge part of my ego structure. This exercise helped me to see my values come full circle. I thought I had rejected my parent's value of appearances. I could not see it in myself until I was challenged and confronted by another culture. It shows how deeply imbedded and impressed we are by our cultural upbringing.

One student was surprised that upon reflection, she realized that "my childhood had a tremendous impact on my current thoughts and beliefs". As the student's mother ages and "she slowly but surely struggles with memory loss" her assumptions become more stereotypical. "I had forgotten altogether what my mother was really like when I was growing up... this exercise helped me remember many stories and lessons I unfairly dismissed. This was truly a surprising and eye-opening realization".

Lack of exposure to diversity. Several students shared that they had limited exposure to cultures different from themselves while growing up because cultural diversity did not exist in their communities. One student shared that "I do not recall ever having a conversation with anyone other than a Caucasian individual until I went to college".

Another student recounted that she grew up in a completely Caucasian small town in Northern Oklahoma with a Native American village located next to the town. There was no interaction with the Native American community. The student recalled, "instead of collaborating on community development, promoting an exchange of ideas, and providing real-life cultural learning experiences, our school, many parents, and the community as a whole kept us segregated".

3.4 Reflections and Implications

The eye-opener experience proved to be a positive motivator for students. "The Diversity Eye-Opener Activity" was

a wonderful exercise in self-reflection and self-discovery. It helped me assimilate my parents' influence on many of the thoughts, values, customs, and beliefs I accept today". Similarly another student stated,

I realized how my grandparents, growing up in the depression, World War II, and post-war era had even learned to let go of some of their preconceived ideas about individuals from other cultures. I realized how far I had come in my short 27 years and I needed to embrace more open-mindedness, as well, despite my upbringing.

It was evident that students embraced the notion of increased openness to cultural diversity and cultural humility by identifying future activities and actions for themselves. For instance, a student described her personal goal as:

What I need to work on is making an effort to get out of that comfort zone. If the opportunity presents itself, I need to make more of an effort to get to know those that are different. It is quite possible that I have inadvertently missed some excellent opportunities to meet some pretty interesting people because of my 'comfort zone'.

The idea of learning how to know others was expressed in these examples, "we need to try to know the person instead of stereotype. We can learn from each other and build a better and culturally diverse country" and "diversity is good and we all have something of value to give regardless of the way we look or speak".

Several students addressed the influence and insights gained of interacting with other cultures. "Now, when I talk to and treat refugees and immigrants in Dallas, I remind myself that their uncertainties and confusion are not a reflection of their intelligence". This same student shared:

Someone commented that since I had lived in a foreign country, I must know what foreigners experience coming to the US. I realized that I have no idea, actually. It is dangerously easy to think that my experience makes me an expert and, therefore, I can presume to know more than I do.

Another student related her experience from a recent study abroad trip:

Many times I felt like the people (Taiwanese) there held us in higher esteem because we were Americans. That was hard for me to get past because I live back here in the recesses of my brain

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and I know my weaknesses and imperfections. I know that I have lived a life of excess that many others will never know. However, my hope is that I do not ACT like that to others. Seeing the people in Taiwan treat me as if I deserved more respect because of my citizenship was humbling and made me feel a little ashamed.

The importance of learning about an individual's cultural background was underscored. The process involved "asking questions with an open heart ... and knowing, based on the situation, how to word the questions".

After realizing the extent of parental influence, several students expressed how their personal beliefs and actions influence their own children. "It is so important to point out some of the difference we have, and make sure that they (my children) know that differences are good!" and "we don't want the kids to think being different is bad. We want them to be excited about the fact that we are all different … I need to have thoughtful and fun conversations about being different a little more often" and finally, "I want my children to embrace different cultures and different people, not just assume that we are all the same".

4. DISCUSSION

The purposes of this study were to (a) examine students' responses to the reflexive exercise for evidence of cultural self-awareness, cultural humility, and insights gained and (b) assess the effectiveness of the teaching method. Many students' initial response to the activity was that they had limited exposure to people from different cultural backgrounds until adulthood. However, students also described childhood friends from different cultures. The fact that students did not recognize or identify transcultural experiences growing up is interesting and was reinforced by postings that described how their own children fail to see difference. Failure to see difference might represent a "minimization" Development Orientation that masks cultural differences. [22]

Students realized culture reaches beyond ethnic or geographic boundaries. It was agreed that perceiving difference is learned and upon reflection students recognized their role and responsibility in teaching their own children about and engendering appreciation for cultural differences. Students recognized that perceptions of difference can elicit emotional responses that might cause one to become comfortable and complacent which in turn prevents personal growth. No previous literature described student reflections of their personal culture, values, beliefs and from where these factors originated.

Positive and negative reflections were shared in response to the question about when students were different from others. Students coped by finding humor, asking for and accepted help, and put others' response into context. Regardless of whether the experience was positive or negative, students reported experiences promoted growth in terms of inner strength, sensitivity to others, faith, understanding and insight. Reflecting on times when one felt different might illuminate power differentials that can occur when doing research with people from other cultures. Reducing power differentials promotes disclosure and reliable data. [4]

The reflexive activity provided students an opportunity to consider the origins of their beliefs and values. Messages students received about people different from themselves were attributed to parents. Parental teaching, role modeling, and the sociocultural family structure instilled humility, sensitivity to, belief in, and respect for others. Some were surprised about the depth of influence parents had. Growing up, one student questioned family values yet now realized the power of those beliefs and how they are in fact a part of her current identity. Another was reminded of her mother's part in teaching her to appreciate those who are different, values she had inadvertently credited to education and life experiences. Evidence of students' self-reflection supports previous recommendations.^[6]

In response to the reflexive exercise, students shared insights and identified future actions to promote cultural humility. A greater sense of awareness, appreciation for and need to learn from people who are different was acknowledged. Not making assumptions about people who are different or behave in a way that communicates difference were identified as desirable practices. Some recognized the need to step out of one's comfort zone and experience the exhilaration of meeting different people.

Although students recognized growth potential and identified ways to promote transcultural humility, how the experience will translate to intercultural development or application to conducting transcultural research is not known. Based on these findings and considering the program goal of building a community of nurse scholars prepared to improve the health of diverse communities through rigorous research, additional learning activities to enhance intercultural development will be implemented. When the course is offered in the future, students will complete the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI),^[22] a reliable and theoretically-based instrument that measures intercultural development. Intercultural Development Inventory results represent monocultural to intercultural mindsets including phases of denial, polarization, minimization, acceptance, and adaptation. After complet-

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ing the survey at the beginning of the semester, students will meet individually with a qualified IDI administrator to review results and develop an individualized Intercultural Development Plan (IDP), aimed at facilitating intercultural competence. During the semester course assignments will direct students to select and complete guided exercises from their IDP. Six months after the course, students will again complete the IDI and scores will be compared. It is hoped that the process will help students move out of their comfort zone, promote intercultural development and the ability to create and complete rigorous transcultural nursing research.

5. CONCLUSION

Because of their interaction with diverse patients, nurses must rely on rigorous transcultural research. The first step in conducting rigorous transcultural research is knowing one's own cultural values, beliefs and the origins of those values and beliefs. The reflexive activity revealed students' cultural awareness, sensitivity and humility. The process also revealed growth potential and students' suggested specific actions that might promote intercultural development. In an effort to meet the goal of preparing nurse scholars to conduct transcultural research that will promote positive health outcomes of diverse populations, we will require and measure the impact of additional targeted learning experiences.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST DISCLOSURE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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