

Research Article

A Content Analysis of Inclusion in NCERT's Exploring Society: India and Beyond (Class 6 Social Science Textbook)

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Abstract

Background: This study presents a comprehensive content analysis of inclusion in the National Council of Educational Research and Training's (NCERT) Class 6 Social Science textbook "Exploring Society: India and Beyond" (2024 edition). **Important:** This study examines how the textbook addresses various dimensions of inclusion: disability; equity; diversity; and social, economic, and cultural aspects. Research finds the answer of question how representation of disability in the educational materials. **Method:** To conduct research on the best method to use a systematic chapter-by-chapter analysis, the textbook demonstrates strengths in representing inclusion contents, such as women's contributions, constitutional provisions for marginalized groups, disability representation, critical examination of social hierarchies, and balanced regional representation. **Key findings:** The findings suggest that textbooks provide a foundation for understanding India's diversity and culture, and also fully prepare students to participate in the complications of inclusion and exclusion in Indian society. Textbook not fully represent the idea of inclusion, because not any content related to representation of disability. **Conclusion:** Research analysis contributes to the future discourse and discussion on inclusive education practices in India and offers insights for enhancing inclusive content in textbooks for growing minds.

Keywords

NCERT Textbooks, Inclusion, Content Analysis, Disability, Equity, Diversity, Social Science Education

1. Introduction

Textbooks are important for shaping students' understanding and narratives of society and their atmosphere. Textbooks serve as repositories of knowledge and powerful tools for developing socialization that communicates cultural values, norms, and perspectives of social changes [3, 30]. In different societies, such as India, textbooks have the potential to either activate or criticize existing social hierarchies and discriminatory practices. The inclusion of diverse perspectives in

textbooks is, therefore, of educational and social importance, and the representation of different social groups.

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) is the major institution responsible for developing textbooks and educational materials for school education following the national curriculum framework in India. NCERT textbooks are commonly used in different countries and are used as models for state education boards. The re-

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cently published “Exploring Society: India and Beyond” is a Class 6 Social Science textbook developed under the direction of the NEP (National Education Policy-2020) framework, which emphasizes inclusive education as a core principle of the educational system [23]. This research offers a comprehensive content analysis of inclusion in the NCERT Class 6 Social Science textbook [24], examining how it addresses different (six) perspectives of inclusion: disability, equity, diversity, and social, economic, and cultural aspects of inclusive education. The analysis is particularly relevant in the context of India’s commitment to inclusive education, as expressed in the RPWD Act (Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act-2016); the NEP; and various international guidelines, including the UNCPRD [22, 32].

This study explores how inclusion is addressed within the NCERT Class 6 Social Science textbook (Exploring Society: India and Beyond) [24] by focusing on the key research questions. First, how do textbooks represent and address sensitivity to disability? Second, also investigate which textbook promotes equity across dimensions, such as gender, socioeconomic status, and regional diversity. Third, we analyze the inclusiveness of textbooks’ representation of India’s diversity in the concepts of religion, language, culture, and region [31]. Fourth, it explores how textbooks address social inclusion, especially regarding marginalized communities. Fifth, it examines the coverage and presentation of economic inclusion in the textbook. Finally, we examine how cultural inclusion is combined, with particular attention paid to indigenous knowledge systems and the country’s cultural heritage. Through this inquiry, this study contributes to the broader discourse on inclusive education in India and offers evidence-based insights for improving the inclusivity of educational materials and textbooks.

1.1. Literature Review

Textbooks are not unbiased; they reflect the specific worldviews and ideologies of society [2]. The content of textbooks, language, and imagery can challenge or support the social hierarchy and exclusion. Kumar [18] found the evolution of NCERT textbooks in post-independence India, highlighting their findings on shifting political ideologies and social priorities in textbooks. Despite efforts to enhance inclusivity, representing India’s diversity remains a challenge. Bhattacharjee [7] analyzed NCERT Social Science textbooks for classes 6-8, observing progress in gender representation but identifying strong understated stereotypes. As cultural documents, textbooks reflect societal values and norms. Chakravarti [10] argued that Indian textbooks often privilege dominant narratives against different social groups, marginalizing Dalits, Adivasis, and religious minorities, thus supporting social hierarchies. Similarly, Gupta [13] observed that textbooks frequently present sanitized versions of history, omitting conflicts and contradictions that limit students’ understanding of the complex realities of the past.

However, the representation of disabilities in Indian textbooks is limited. Ghai [12] noted that disability is often framed through medical or charity models, rather than rights-based perspectives. International scholars such as Hodkinson [15] and Beckett [6] have emphasized authentic representations to challenge stereotypes and foster inclusive mindsets. Mehrotra [21] argued that the absence of disability perspectives in Indian curricula reinforces marginalization and limits the recognition of disability as human diversity. She advocated integrating perspectives on disabilities across subjects. The RPWD Act mandates inclusive education, making such representation critical. Singal [28] highlighted that inclusive education requires curricular and pedagogical reforms, including textbook content, to challenge stereotypes and to promote positive attitudes.

Gender bias is widely documented in textbooks. Blumberg [9] identified global patterns of female underrepresentation and stereotyping. In India, Manjrekar [20] noted improvements in NCERT textbooks, but highlighted persistent traditional gender role depictions. Bhog et al. [8] found that, despite some inclusion, gender stereotypes persist in economic and civic contexts, advocating for more diverse, stereotype-challenging portrayals.

Socioeconomic representation has been understudied. Apple [2] noted that textbooks often reflect middle-class norms, potentially alienating economically marginalized students. Sleeter and Grant [29] emphasized representing varied socioeconomic experiences to promote equity. Velaskar [33] found that Indian textbooks often overlook structural socioeconomic inequalities, limiting students’ understanding, and reinforcing stratification.

India’s religious and cultural diversity presents unique challenges in textbooks. Batra [5] found that NCERT textbooks navigate tensions between secular aims and religious representation. Madan [19] argued that dominant traditions are often privileged, marginalizing others. Jaffrelot [16] linked textbook content, particularly Muslim representation, to national identity debates. Xaxa [34] critiqued the portrayals of tribal communities as exotic or static, calling for recognition of their dynamic roles in Indian society.

1.2. Theoretical Framework

This study integrates critical pedagogy [11], multicultural education [4], and the capability approach [25, 27] to analyze textbooks. Critical pedagogy views education as a tool to challenge oppressive social structures and foster emancipation. Freire [11] critiques “banking education,” where knowledge is deposited into passive students, reinforcing hierarchies. Instead, critical pedagogy promotes critical consciousness, enabling students to question oppressive systems. Textbooks from this perspective can either be liberated by representing diverse perspectives or dominated by perpetuating existing power structures.

Multicultural education emphasizes equity through diverse

educational content. Banks [4] outlined five dimensions: Content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture. Content integration, which is central to textbook analysis, incorporates diverse perspectives into core narratives and promotes inclusivity and equity across social groups.

The capability approach [25, 27] evaluates educational materials based on their potential to enhance students' freedom and opportunities. Sen defined capabilities as opportunities to live valued lives, whereas Nussbaum emphasized critical thinking and affiliation. Within this framework, inclusive textbooks expand their capabilities by fostering critical engagement with social structures and encouraging connections across diverse groups, ultimately supporting equitable education.

1.3. Methodology

1.3.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative content analysis methodology to examine inclusion in the NCERT Class 6 Social Science textbook, as a sample used "Exploring Society: India and Beyond" [24] latest edition. Content analysis is particularly suitable for systematically analyzing textual and visual materials to identify patterns, themes, and meanings [17].

Qualitative content analysis allows for a nuanced examination of both explicit and implicit messages in the educational materials. Unlike quantitative approaches, which focus primarily on frequency counts, qualitative content analysis enables researchers to interpret the meanings conveyed through text and images and situate these meanings within broader social and cultural contexts [26]. This approach is particularly valuable for examining inclusion, which involves not only the presence or absence of diverse representations, but also the quality and context of those representations.

1.3.2. Data Source

The primary data source was the complete 240-page

NCERT Class 6 Social Science textbook "Exploring Society: India and Beyond". This textbook consists of 14 chapters organized into five themes: 1. India and the World: Land and the People (Chapters 1-3) 2. Tapestry of the Past (Chapters 4-6) 3. Cultural Heritage and Knowledge Traditions (Chapters 7-8) 4. Governance and Democracy (Chapters 9-12) 5. Economic Life Around Us (Chapters 13-14).

The textbook was selected for analysis because it represents the most recent curriculum revision under the NEP, and NCF, which emphasizes inclusive education as a core principle. As a Class 6 textbook, it also represents students' first formal introduction to Social Science as a distinct subject, making it particularly influential in shaping their understanding of society and its place in it.

1.3.3. Data Analysis Procedure

- 1) The analysis followed a systematic chapter-by-chapter approach:
- 2) Each chapter was extracted and read multiple times to gain familiarity with the content.
- 3) The text and images were analyzed using an analytical framework to identify the manner in which each inclusion dimension was addressed.
- 4) The findings were documented for each chapter and dimension, noting both the explicit and implicit inclusion themes.
- 5) Patterns across chapters were identified in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of how textbooks address inclusion.
- 6) Strengths and gaps in inclusion were synthesized based on the overall analysis.

This systematic approach ensured that the analysis was comprehensive and rigorous [1], covering all the chapters and inclusion dimensions. By examining both explicit and implicit inclusion themes, the analysis captured not only what the textbook explicitly states about diversity and inclusion but also the implicit messages conveyed through examples, images, and narrative structure.

1.4. Findings

Table 1. Inclusive contents in the Textbook: "Exploring Society: India and Beyond" in various dimensions.

Dimension	Key Findings	Examples/Evidence
Disability Inclusion	Consistent absence of disability representation	1. No explicit mentions in text 2. No images of individuals with disabilities 3. No discussion of disability as an aspect of diversity 4. No accommodations in activities
Gender Equity	Uneven representation across chapters	1. Strong in governance chapters (reserved seats in Panchayats) 2. Recognition of women philosophers like Gārgi 3. Traditional roles persist in economic contexts

Dimension	Key Findings	Examples/Evidence
Socioeconomic Equity	Limited critical analysis of inequalities	4. Limited critical examination of structural barriers 1. Acknowledges diverse occupations 2. Emphasizes the dignity of all labor 3. Insufficient engagement with economic justice 4. Minimal analysis of access barriers
Regional Equity	Northern regions predominate	1. Northern focus in historical/cultural chapters 2. Limited representation of southern/northeastern regions 3. Imbalance reinforces cultural hierarchies
Religious Diversity	Strong in cultural chapters, limited elsewhere	1. Detailed coverage of Vedic, Buddhist, and Jain traditions 2. Acknowledges folk/tribal religious contributions 3. Limited discussion of intersections with economics/politics
Linguistic Diversity	Acknowledged but underexplored	1. Mentions 325 languages and 25 scripts 2. Limited exploration of implications 3. Primarily uses English and Sanskrit terms
Cultural Diversity	Recognition varies by region	1. Acknowledges diverse practices 2. Notes folk/tribal contributions 3. Northern traditions are more prominent 4. Limited critical examination of cultural hierarchies
Social Inclusion	Explicit in governance, limited elsewhere	1. Discusses reserved seats for SC/ST in Panchayats 2. Limited engagement with experiences of marginalization 3. Minimal critical analysis of social hierarchies
Economic Inclusion	Represents diverse activities, limited analysis of barriers	1. Covers primary, secondary, tertiary sectors 2. Acknowledges the informal economy 3. Limited exploration of access barriers 4. Insufficient examination of economic disparities
Cultural Inclusion	Recognizes indigenous knowledge	1. Acknowledges tribal belief systems 2. Notes interaction between tribal and mainstream traditions

1.4.1. Overview of the Textbook

“The Exploring Society: India and beyond” is systematically organized into five thematic sections encompassing geography, history, cultural heritage, governance, and economics. The textbook adopts a narrative-driven approach, integrating interactive features such as “Let’s Explore” and “Think About It” to stimulate critical thinking among students. Visual aids, including illustrations, photographs, and maps, have been extensively utilized to enhance engagement and comprehension [30]. The pedagogical framework emphasizes active learning and critical inquiry; each chapter opens with “Big Questions” to contextualize the content and concludes with summaries, activities, and project-based tasks.

1.4.2. Disability Inclusion

A critical analysis of the textbook revealed a persistent

absence of disability representation in all the chapters. There are no explicit references to persons with disabilities in the main text nor are there any images depicting individuals with visible disabilities. Additionally, disability has not been discussed as an aspect of human diversity. This omission is particularly striking in the chapters that address diversity, community participation, and inclusion.

However, significant opportunities to incorporate disability perspectives have been missed. For instance, Chapter 8 (“Unity in Diversity” or “Many in the One”), which comprehensively explores India’s diversity, fails to recognize disability as a dimension of human variation. Similarly, chapters on governance and democracy (Chapters 9-12) do not address disability rights or the participation of persons with disabilities in the democratic processes.

Furthermore, the textbook’s activities and exercises lack accommodation and consideration for students with disabilities. The pedagogical approach does not acknowledge di-

verse learning needs or offer alternative methods for content engagement. This gap is particularly concerning in light of India's commitment to inclusive education, as articulated in the RPWD Act and NEP. Such omissions risk perpetuating the marginalization of disability within social discourse and limiting students' understanding of disability as a facet of diversity.

1.4.3. Equity Aspects

Gender Equity

Gender equity is unevenly represented in textbooks. The governance chapters (9-12) exhibit the strongest commitment to gender inclusion, particularly through discussions of women's reserved seats in Panchayati Raj institutions. Chapter 11 explicitly states that at least one-third of all seats in Panchayats are reserved for women, ensuring their participation in local governance."

Cultural heritage chapters (7-8) acknowledge women's contributions to philosophical thought, featuring narratives about female philosophers such as Gārgi. Chapter 7 notes the importance of questioning, regardless of whether the questions originated from men, women, or children.

However, traditional gender roles persist, especially in economic contexts (Chapter 14) where women are more frequently depicted in domestic or caregiving roles. While the textbook makes efforts to include women, stereotypical representations and limited critical examination of gender inequalities remain. There is minimal discussion on the structural barriers that women have historically faced and the ongoing challenges to gender equity in contemporary India.

Socioeconomic Equity

The textbook incorporates examples from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, particularly in chapters on economic activities and community structures. Chapter 13 ("The Value of Work") highlights the dignity of all forms of labor, emphasizing that every contribution to society deserves respect, irrespective of remuneration.

However, the textbook offers a limited critical analysis of socioeconomic inequalities and their effects on access to resources and opportunities. While economic diversity is acknowledged, there is insufficient engagement with the issues of economic justice or structural factors that perpetuate inequality. For example, Chapter 14 discusses various economic activities, but provides a minimal analysis of how access is influenced by caste, class, or geographic location. This oversight may restrict the students' understanding of the complexities of socioeconomic stratification in India.

Regional Equity

Efforts to represent India's regional diversity are evident through examples, case studies, and visuals. However, there is a notable predominance in the northern regions, particularly in the historical and cultural chapters. For instance, Chapter 7 ("India's Cultural Roots") primarily focuses on northern and central traditions, while Chapter 6 ("The Beginnings of Indian Civilization") emphasizes sites in north-

ern and western India, with limited attention to southern findings. This imbalance may reinforce the existing hierarchies of cultural representation and limit students' appreciation for India's full regional diversity.

1.4.4. Diversity Representation

Religious Diversity

Chapters dedicated to cultural heritage (7-8) represent India's religious and philosophical traditions robustly. Chapter 7 offers detailed discussions of Vedic, Buddhist, and Jain traditions, highlighting both their differences and shared concepts such as dharma, karma, and the pursuit of enlightenment. The textbook also acknowledges the role of folk and tribal religious traditions, and notes the dynamic exchange of ideas and practices.

However, religious diversity is less explicitly addressed in chapters focusing on governance and economics. There is limited discussion on how religious identity intersects with economic participation or political representation, potentially constraining students' understanding of the multifaceted role of religion in Indian society.

Linguistic Diversity

India's linguistic diversity is briefly acknowledged with Chapter 8 referencing the "People of India" project, which identifies 325 languages and 25 scripts across the country. However, there has been limited exploration of the implications of linguistic diversity in education, governance, and cultural expression. The textbook primarily utilizes English and Sanskrit terms, with minimal incorporation of other Indian languages. This may inadvertently privilege certain languages and restrict the students' understanding of India's linguistic richness.

Cultural Diversity

The textbook recognizes a range of cultural practices, particularly in chapters on cultural heritage. Chapter 8 highlights the diversity observed in travel-varying landscapes, attire, cuisine, languages, and scripts. Folk and tribal traditions are acknowledged as integral to Indian culture, with Chapter 7 emphasizing the reciprocal influence between these and mainstream traditions [14].

Nevertheless, representation is not consistently balanced, with northern traditions featuring more prominently than those from the south or northeast. There is also limited critical discussion on how cultural differences have historically been ranked or marginalized within the dominant narratives of Indian identity.

1.4.5. Social Inclusion

Representation of Marginalized Communities

Governance chapters (10-12) explicitly address constitutional provisions for the representation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, with Chapter 11 noting seats reserved in the Panchayats. Outside governance, however, there is limited explicit representation of historically marginalized communities. While social diversity is acknowledged, text-

books do not deeply engage with lived experiences of marginalization or exclusion.

For example, Chapter 5 (“India, That Is Bharat”) touches on the evolution of Indian identity but offers limited discussion of how marginalized groups have contested or negotiated this identity. Similarly, Chapter 8’s discussion of “unity in diversity” lacks a critical examination of the power dynamics shaping which forms of diversity are recognized.

Social Hierarchies

The textbook briefly addresses traditional social structures, such as the Vedic society’s occupational categories, but provides a limited critical analysis of social hierarchies and power dynamics. This restricts students’ understanding of historical and contemporary social inequalities, and may limit their capacity to engage with issues of social justice.

Social Justice Themes

The themes of social justice are implicit, particularly through discussions of equality and democratic participation. Chapter 10 underscores the importance of equal participation in the decision-making processes. However, textbooks can more explicitly address social justice issues, including structural barriers that have historically limited the participation of marginalized communities.

1.4.6. Economic Inclusion

Diverse Economic Activities

Economic chapters (13-14) offer a comprehensive coverage of various occupations and economic activities spanning rural and urban contexts. Chapter 13 stresses the value of all forms of labor, challenging occupational hierarchies, and promoting respect for all work. The informal economy, which employs a significant share of India’s workforce, is also recognized.

Economic Opportunities and Disparities

While the textbook discusses different economic sectors, it provides a limited analysis of the barriers to economic participation for various social groups. There has been minimal exploration of how factors, such as caste, class, gender, and geography, influence access to economic opportunities. The absence of a deeper examination of economic disparities may constrain students’ understanding of the challenges faced in contemporary Indian society.

1.4.7. Cultural Inclusion

Indigenous Knowledge Systems

The textbook acknowledges the contributions of indigenous knowledge systems to the Indian culture. Chapter 7 highlights the reciprocal influence between tribal belief systems and mainstream religious traditions, emphasizing the sacredness of land in tribal worldviews. This recognition is vital in challenging the marginalization of indigenous perspectives and affirming their significance in India’s cultural heritage.

2. Discussion

2.1. Patterns of Inclusion and Exclusion

The analysis revealed distinct patterns in the NCERT Class 6 Social Science textbook treatment of inclusion. Notably, the text excels in depicting religious and cultural plurality, highlighting women’s achievements across various sectors, and outlining constitutional measures for marginalized groups. Nevertheless, it exhibits pronounced deficiencies in portraying disabilities, critically interrogating social hierarchies, and ensuring a balanced regional coverage. These findings indicate that the textbook’s inclusivity is uneven, while certain facets of diversity are foregrounded and others receive scant or no attention. Such disparities mirror broader societal tendencies to recognize some forms of diversity more readily than others. Furthermore, the textbook’s approach tends toward description rather than critique, offering a limited exploration of the power relations that sustain exclusion. This descriptive orientation may curtail students’ grasp of structural inequities and persistent challenges in realizing inclusive practices in contemporary India.

2.2. Disability as the “Absent Presence”

A particularly notable omission is the virtually complete absence of disability-related content in the textbooks. This lacuna is striking given India’s legislative commitment to inclusive education under the RPWD Act and NEP. By excluding persons with disabilities from narratives and visuals, the textbook effectively renders them invisible—a phenomenon Slee [30] termed “absent presence.” Similarly, Ghai [12] noted that disability remains largely omitted from Indian educational resources. This silence not only perpetuates marginalization but also forfeits an opportunity to foster inclusive attitudes. Research indicates that authentic representations of disability can disrupt stereotypes and engender empathy [6], current textbooks neglect to leverage this potential.

2.3. Gender Representation: Progress and Persistent Challenges

While the textbook makes commendable strides such as discussing women’s reserved seats in Panchayati Raj institutions and featuring female philosophers, it nonetheless perpetuates certain stereotypes by situating women primarily in traditional economic roles. Bhattacharjee [7] observed parallel trends in earlier NCERT texts, noting improvements in explicit gender inclusion along with subtler stereotypical depictions. Moreover, although the textbook acknowledges women’s participation, it offers a limited critical analysis of the systemic barriers that have historically constrained female agency and continue to impede gender equity. This gap may hinder students’ appreciation of both the progress achieved and enduring complexities of gender-based exclusion.

2.4. Regional Imbalance and Cultural Representation

The textbook disproportionately privileges examples and case studies from northern India, reinforcing the established hierarchies of cultural centrality. Madan [19] critiques such homogenization, arguing that it elevates dominant traditions while marginalizing others. Consequently, students may have a skewed understanding of India's regional plurality and the value of its diverse cultural practices. By failing to fully integrate the southern and northeastern perspectives, the textbook lacks the opportunity to cultivate a genuinely inclusive national narrative.

2.5. Implications for Students' Understanding of Inclusion

These patterns have significant consequences for learners' socialization. The exclusion of disability content may narrow students' conceptualization of human diversity, while regional biases can shape perceptions of cultural legitimacy. Conversely, the strength of portraying religious diversity and constitutional inclusivity provides a foundation for a more comprehensive understanding of pluralism. However, a predominantly descriptive stance limits students' ability to critically assess structural inequalities and envision their roles in fostering social justice. Emphasizing democratic engagement and community participation may empower learners; however, a deeper critical examination is needed to equip them to challenge exclusion and inclusion in their communities.

3. Conclusion

This research insisted on content analysis of the Class 6 Social Science Textbook *Exploring Society: India and Beyond* published by NCERT, which reveals a complex understanding of inclusion. While the textbook validates a strong point in representing religious and cultural diversity, recognizing women's contributions, and discussing constitutional provisions for marginalized social groups, significant gaps exist in disability representation, critical examination of social hierarchies, and balanced regional representation in textbooks.

These findings highlight that, although the textbook provides a foundation for understanding India's diversity and culture, it may not fully prepare students to engage with the complexities of inclusion and exclusion in Indian society. This textbook approach reflects broader societal patterns in which certain dimensions of diversity are more readily recognized and valued than others are. Enhancing inclusivity in educational materials and textbooks requires attention to both the explicit and implicit forms of exclusion and discrimination. This involves integrating diverse perspectives and experi-

ences, while critically examining the social structures and power dynamics that shape inclusion and discrimination. As India continues to pursue the goals of inclusion articulated in NEP, textbooks will play a crucial role in shaping students' understanding of diversity and inclusion. By addressing the gaps identified in this analysis, future textbooks can better support students in developing the knowledge, skills, awareness, narratives, sensitivity, and attitudes towards the different social groups needed to build a more inclusive society.

Abbreviations

RPWD Act	Right of Persons with Disability Act- 2016
NEP	New Education Policy- 2020
UNCPRD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
NCF	National Curriculum Framework- 2023

Author Contributions

In the development of this paper, Akhilesh Yadav has collected data, analyzed the data, drafted the manuscript, and revised the first draft.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

This study complied with the human research regulations of the University of Delhi (DU), India, and the Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS), obtaining ethical approval from both DU and KVS. All participants provided their informed consent to participate in the study.

Consent for Publication

Additional informed consent was obtained from all individual participants for whom identifying information is included in this article.

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Data Availability Statement

The data supporting this study's findings are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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