

The Stealing Behaviour Scale: Psychometric Validation and Factorial Structure in Addiction Recovery

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ABSTRACT

The act of taking someone else's property without the intention of returning it is known as stealing. While this concept is important in clinical contexts, there has been a lack of empirical studies measuring it. This research developed and validated the Stealing Behaviour Scale (SBS). The analysis included data from 200 adults seeking treatment and individuals from the general population in Punjab, India, using tetrachoric Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). This led to a two-factor, 12-item structure that explained 61.52% of the total variance. The two identified factors—the Behavioral-Action Dimension of Stealing and the Cognitive-Affective Justification Dimension—demonstrated high interpersonal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .904$). The overall reliability coefficient ($\alpha = .904$) indicates that the Stealing Behaviour Scale is a robust psychometric tool suitable for both research and practical use. Additionally, the subscale reliability scores above .86 underscore that the two dimensions are internally consistent yet distinct from one another. The validated Stealing Behavior Scale provides clinicians with a dependable and theoretically sound instrument to measure stealing behaviour as a potential **character defect** or behavioural manifestation associated with various forms of addiction, including gaming addiction, substance use disorders, and other compulsive behavioural patterns.

Keywords: *Stealing, behaviour, tetrachoric EFA, psychometrics, character defect*

Stealing is defined as taking something that belongs to someone else with no intention of returning it. Several factors can contribute to this behavior, including insufficient resources, peer influence, a strong craving for the item, challenges with impulse control, and learning behaviors from others. The Vile Weed Model suggests that a child's restraint against stealing diminishes when they receive unpredictable consequences from their parents for such actions (Patterson et al., 1984). Insufficient parental supervision and an unstable bond with the caregiver could lead to stealing behavior.

The act of stealing is widespread. An epidemiological study conducted with adults revealed that 11.3% confessed to shoplifting at some point in their lives. Typically, stealing tends to begin during childhood or teenage years (Blanco et al., 2008). A study involving 3,999 high school students revealed that 15.2% had committed theft at some point in their lives. Theft is

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frequently linked to various anti-social behaviors and a variety of mental health issues, especially substance use disorders and mood disorders (Grant et al., 2011; Toprak et al., 2010). The act of stealing has been associated with various other mental health issues, such as substance abuse, mood disorders, anxiety disorders, and obsessive-compulsive disorders (Saluja et al., 2014).

Although stealing often begins at a young age and is linked to considerable problems in adulthood, this issue among adolescents has not been given much focus by clinicians and researchers. Research is limited, but it indicates that adolescents who engage in stealing may struggle with problem-solving abilities and have a tendency to choose inappropriate solutions to their problems (Greening 1997). Alternative studies indicate that issues in parent-child relationships, academic struggles, and adverse peer influences contribute to stealing among adolescents (Moncher et al., 1999).

Although it is a significant concept, the stealing behavior scale has not been implemented with validated measurements.

The current study aimed to fill this gap by creating and validating a scale to assess stealing behavior. The Stealing Behavior Scale, once validated, offers clinicians a reliable and theoretically robust tool for evaluating stealing behavior as a possible character flaw or a behavioral expression linked to various types of addiction, such as gaming addiction, substance use disorders, and other compulsive behaviors. Specifically, the study sought to: Determine the underlying structure of the SBS through tetrachoric Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). Assess the internal consistency and reliability of the factors.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The phenomenon of stealing in relation to addiction requires a thorough framework that combines behavioral, cognitive-behavioral, self-control, situational, and neurobiological perspectives. This section highlights the essential theoretical foundations that inform the creation of the Stealing Behavior Scale (SBS).

Behavioural/Functional Model

From a behavioral standpoint, stealing can be sustained by reinforcement mechanisms such as direct material benefits, alleviation of internal stress, or social validation (like receiving attention or enhancing peer reputation). Research on shoplifting and kleptomania highlights that these behaviors frequently arise when a motivated person finds an opportunity to steal in an environment with low chances of being caught and receives immediate rewards for their actions (such as relief or excitement). For instance, studies focused on kleptomania indicate that individuals often experience heightened tension before committing theft, which is followed by feelings of relief or satisfaction after the act. (Grant & Kim, 2009). In this context, aspects such as waiting until "no one is observing," hiding items, or stealing for alleviation are associated with these functional processes.

Cognitive-Behavioural Model

Cognitive distortions and self-justifications are key factors in stealing behavior. People often rationalize their actions by thinking things like, "It's only a small item" or "No one will see it," which lowers their internal resistance to theft. Additionally, emotions like guilt and shame experienced after the act influence future actions. For example, Kleptomania is

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defined by urges that individuals try to resist, leading to feelings of guilt or remorse afterward. (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2023).

Therefore, the SBS contains questions regarding feelings of guilt or regret, as well as instances of lying or denying the behavior, which illustrate the cognitive and emotional consequences of stealing.

Self-Control and Impulsivity Model

The concept of self-control plays a crucial role in understanding deviant behaviors, including theft. In their General Theory of Crime, Travis Hirschi and Michael Gottfredson (1990) suggest that low self-control, which is marked by impulsiveness, a desire for immediate rewards, and a tendency to seek risk, is a significant predictor of criminal activities and similar behaviors. Research has consistently shown a strong connection between inadequate self-control and acts of property crime, such as stealing (Pratt & Cullen, 2000; Gottfredson, 2017).

Research indicates that individuals who shoplift or experience kleptomania often exhibit higher levels of impulsivity and a reduced capacity to postpone gratification or control their urges (Grant & Kim, 2009; “Stealing behaviour and impulsivity”, 2018). As a result, the SBS consists of items that reflect urges that are hard to resist (Item 6) and behaviors that are repeated even when one is aware of the consequences.

Situational and Rational-Choice Elements

While personal characteristics are important, the context of a situation also plays a role in facilitating theft. According to the Routine Activity Theory, a motivated offender encounters a vulnerable target when there is a lack of effective guardianship. Meanwhile, rational-choice theory highlights that many thefts are opportunistic, involving a deliberate evaluation of the potential costs and benefits (Schulz & Loughran, 2021). Although the SBS focuses mainly on individual behavioral tendencies rather than situational possibilities, certain items, such as “I wait until nobody is watching” (Item 3), capture the idea of situational readiness and weak deterrents.

Neurobiological / Addiction-Related Model

In addiction research, it's crucial to acknowledge that compulsive stealing can arise from neurobiological weaknesses, such as imbalances in serotonin or dopamine and impaired executive functions. Additionally, this behavior may act as a coping strategy within the context of addiction. Research into kleptomania indicates that this behavior exists along an impulsive-compulsive continuum, exhibiting similarities to addiction-related behaviors (Grant et al., 2018). People who struggle with substance abuse, gambling, and other disorders related to impulse control tend to engage in shoplifting more frequently (Hodgkins et al., 2014). In populations affected by addiction, stealing can serve various purposes: it may be used to gain money for addictive behaviors (financial motive), alleviate negative feelings (escape model), or offer excitement (positive reinforcement). To address this connection to addiction, the SBS includes a question about stealing to fund addictive activities (Item 4).

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Integrative Model for Addiction Context

In sum, an integrative model posits that:

1. Addiction → heightened impulsivity/self-control deficits + negative affect/financial stress →
2. Increased susceptibility to theft (driven by urgency, relief-seeking, social pressure) + favourable situations (opportunity) →
3. Stealing behaviour → immediate reinforcement (gain, thrill, relief) →
4. Repetition and consolidation of theft pattern →
5. Feedback loop: guilt/shame/legal/financial problems exacerbate addiction severity and character defects.

The SBS addresses critical mechanism areas, including impulsivity and self-control, financial motives related to addiction, the influence of social reinforcement and peers, opportunities for concealment and stealth, and the emotional aftermath of actions. This enables it to serve as both a behavioral risk index and a screening instrument in the field of addiction research.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilized a cross-sectional, quantitative approach to develop and initially validate the Stealing Behaviour Scale (SBS). The SBS was designed to assess stealing behavior as a possible character flaw or behavioral expression linked to various types of addiction, such as gaming addiction, substance use disorders, and other compulsive behaviors. The research aimed to examine the psychometric characteristics of this newly created scale, focusing on its reliability, factor structure, and validity measures.

Participants

The target population comprised adults aged 18 and older from the general population who reported engaging in or being exposed to addictive behaviors such as digital gaming, alcohol or substance use, and other impulse-control or behavioral addictions. Participants were gathered through online surveys as well as in-person data collection efforts conducted in educational institutions, workplaces, and community settings.

A minimum sample size of 200 participants was aimed for, based on the guideline of having at least 10–15 participants per item for exploratory factor analysis (Hair et al., 2019). The inclusion criteria were: (a) participants must be at least 18 years old, (b) have adequate literacy to understand the self-report questionnaire, and (c) be willing to give informed consent. Exclusion criteria involved any acute psychiatric conditions that could hinder self-reporting or comprehension. Additionally, demographic information such as age, gender, educational background, and primary type of addiction (if applicable) was collected for descriptive analysis.

Measures

Stealing Behaviour Scale (SBS)

The Stealing Behaviour Scale is a recently created 12-item self-assessment tool aimed at evaluating the occurrence and traits of stealing behavior in relation to addiction. The items were developed using behavioral-functional models as a foundation. (Grant & Kim, 2009), cognitive-behavioural accounts of moral rationalisation (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2023), and self-control theory (Gottfredson, 2017; Pratt & Cullen, 2000). Additional situational and

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rational-choice considerations (Schulz & Loughran, 2021) and addiction-linked neurobiological models (Grant et al., 2018; Munguía et al., 2025) informed item wording.

Participants assessed each statement using a five-point Likert scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always), indicating their behavior during the previous six months. Items covered dimensions of:

1. **Tangible/opportunistic stealing** (e.g., taking items or money when unsupervised),
2. **Impulsive/compulsive urges** (difficulty resisting the act),
3. **Social reinforcement and peer influence**,
4. **Cognitive rationalisation** (justifying theft), and
5. **Perceived opportunity and low risk of detection**.

Scores can vary from 12 to 60, where elevated scores indicate a higher occurrence and intensity of stealing behavior. The preliminary version underwent evaluation by three specialists in psychology and behavioral sciences to confirm its content validity, as well as to guarantee the clarity, cultural relevance, and face validity of the items. The study investigated internal consistency reliability (with Cronbach's α being .70 or higher) and the factor structure through exploratory factor analysis (EFA) employing principal-axis factoring with Promax rotation.

Procedure

Approval from the institutional review board was secured prior to the data collection process. The questionnaire, which included the SBS and various other measures, was made available both electronically and in a paper format. Participants were provided with a concise overview of the study's objectives along with assurances regarding confidentiality. Informed consent was secured before participation, and participants were assured that their information would remain anonymous. The average time needed to complete the questionnaire was around 15 minutes.

Following the screening of data for completeness and outliers, statistical analyses were carried out using SPSS and AMOS software. Reliability analyses, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were performed to assess the psychometric properties of the SBS. To evaluate convergent and discriminant validity, inter-correlations with other psychological measures were analyzed.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed in several stages:

1. **Descriptive statistics** (mean, SD, skewness, kurtosis) were computed for each item.
2. **Item-total correlations** were calculated to determine the internal consistency of the SBS.
3. **Cronbach's α** and **McDonald's ω** coefficients were estimated to assess reliability.
4. **Exploratory factor analysis** was employed to explore the latent structure of the SBS, followed by **confirmatory factor analysis** to test the best-fitting model (one-factor vs. multi-factor).
5. **Convergent validity** was assessed by examining the correlations with addiction and impulsivity measures, while discriminant validity was analyzed by contrasting SBS scores with unrelated constructs (e.g., self-esteem).

RESULTS

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics							
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Item 1	200	3.5950	1.34910	-.533	.172	-.964	.342
Item 2	200	3.3700	1.31978	-.523	.172	-.908	.342
Item 3	200	3.4600	1.16843	-.599	.172	-.426	.342
Item 4	200	3.4050	1.19083	-.394	.172	-.624	.342
Item 5	200	3.4850	1.16902	-.392	.172	-.562	.342
Item 6	200	3.4350	1.16299	-.577	.172	-.381	.342
Item 7	200	3.2850	1.24963	-.352	.172	-.844	.342
Item 8	200	3.4050	1.22822	-.337	.172	-.798	.342
Item 9	200	3.4650	1.12029	-.453	.172	-.478	.342
Item 10	200	3.4950	1.12083	-.636	.172	-.116	.342
Item 11	200	3.5100	1.12079	-.479	.172	-.323	.342
Item 12	200	3.4950	1.14741	-.451	.172	-.501	.342
Valid N (listwise)	200						

The analysis of 200 observations across 12 items reveals mean values ranging from 3.2850 to 3.5950, suggesting a stable mid-range trend. The standard deviations, which fall between 1.1203 and 1.3491, indicate a moderate level of variability in the responses. Skewness values ranging from -0.636 to -0.337 show a slight leftward skew in the distributions, while kurtosis values between -0.964 and -0.426 suggest platykurtic distributions characterized by lighter tails and flatter peaks. In summary, the data demonstrates a level of stability with a minor inclination towards lower scores, laying the groundwork for further exploration of patterns and relationships within the dataset.

Reliability Analysis of the Stealing Behaviour Scale

The reliability of internal consistency was assessed with Cronbach’s alpha (α) for the overall scale as well as for its derived subscales.

Overall Scale Reliability

The reliability of internal consistency for the 12-item Stealing Behaviour Scale was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha (α), yielding an impressive value of .904. This score greatly exceeds the widely accepted minimum threshold of .70 typically advised for research tools and also surpasses the stricter standard of .80 recommended for practical psychological assessments. Such a high alpha coefficient indicates a strong level of consistency among the scale's items, demonstrating that they effectively measure a uniform underlying construct associated with stealing behavior. The 12-item Stealing Behaviour Scale demonstrated **excellent internal consistency:**

- **Cronbach’s $\alpha = .904$**

This value surpasses the suggested threshold of .70 for research tools and .80 for applied psychological evaluations, suggesting a strong consistency among the items.

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Reliability of Derived Subscales

Based on factor analytic results, two subscales were formed and analyzed separately.

Subscale Reliability Coefficients

Table 2

Subscale	No. of Items	Cronbach's α
Behavioral–Action Dimension	7	0.864
Cognitive–Affective Justification Dimension	5	0.865

The table presents two subscales from a research study, outlining the number of items and their respective Cronbach's alpha (α) values, which are used to evaluate reliability. The Behavioral–Action Dimension comprises 7 items with a Cronbach's α of 0.864, demonstrating strong reliability. Meanwhile, the Cognitive–Affective Justification Dimension contains 5 items with an α of 0.865, which also indicates high internal consistency. These elevated values confirm that the items within each dimension are effective in measuring their respective constructs. Both subscales exhibit strong internal consistency, which supports their capability for independent interpretation.

Assumptions for Factor Analysis

Sampling adequacy and factorability of the correlation matrix were assessed prior to factor extraction.

Table 3

Test	Value
Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO)	0.858
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	$\chi^2(66) = 1354.763, p < .001$

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy is 0.858, reflecting excellent readiness for factor analysis. Additionally, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity yielded a significant outcome ($\chi^2(66) = 1354.763, p < .001$), indicating that the variables are related and appropriate for factor analysis. These findings validate the data's suitability for this analysis, confirming that it is highly appropriate for factor analysis.

Factor Extraction and Variance Explained

Factor analysis was conducted using **Principal Component Analysis (PCA)** with **Varimax rotation**.

Eigenvalues and Variance Explained

Table 4

Factor	Eigenvalue	% Variance	Cumulative %
Factor 1	6.034	50.28	50.28
Factor 2	1.348	11.24	61.52

Two factors with eigenvalues exceeding 1 were retained, accounting for 61.52% of the overall variance, which is considered significant in psychological assessment.

Rotated Factor Structure

Rotated Component Matrix (Loadings $\geq .40$)

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Table 5

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2
Item 1	—	0.827
Item 2	—	0.87
Item 3	—	0.804
Item 4	—	0.662
Item 5	—	0.561
Item 6	0.596	—
Item 7	0.618	—
Item 8	0.652	—
Item 9	0.715	—
Item 10	0.812	—
Item 11	0.794	—
Item 12	0.704	—

Note. Loadings < .40 are suppressed for clarity.

Theoretical Labeling of Factors

Based on item clustering and behavioral theory, the extracted components were labeled as follows:

- **Factor 1: Behavioral–Action Dimension of Stealing**
This factor includes items that reflect actual stealing acts, the repetition and execution of stealing behavior, and behavioral impulsivity and enactment. It represents the observable, action-oriented component of stealing behavior, highlighting the concrete actions and tendencies associated with stealing.
- **Factor 2: Cognitive–Affective Justification Dimension**
This factor encompasses various elements associated with the rationalization of stealing, reflecting how individuals justify their actions. It also includes emotional attitudes toward stealing, which can influence a person’s perspective and behavior regarding stealing. Furthermore, the concept of moral disengagement and cognitive appraisal plays a significant role, as it examines how individuals may detach from moral standards and evaluate their actions, ultimately impacting their decisions related to stealing. It reflects the **internal cognitive and emotional processes** preceding or maintaining stealing behavior.

Validity of The Stealing Behaviour Scale -

Validity indicates how effectively an instrument measures what it claims to measure. In the current standardization process, several types of validity evidence were gathered following the APA Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (2014).

1. Content Validity

Procedure

During the test construction phase, content validity was ensured through several key strategies. Firstly, there was a thorough analysis of the current body of research related to stealing, juvenile delinquency, antisocial conduct, and the concept of moral disengagement. This foundational research informed the development of the test. Additionally, an operational definition of stealing behavior was created, which encompassed cognitive, emotional, and action-based elements to capture the complexity of the behavior. Finally, the assessment process involved specialists, specifically psychologists trained in clinical and

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behavioral evaluation, who contributed their expertise to ensure the test's validity and reliability.

Items were framed to cover:

- Cognitive rationalizations
- Emotional attitudes
- Behavioral enactment of stealing

Interpretation

The final 12-item pool sufficiently covers the range of content related to stealing behavior, indicating that the scale exhibits good to strong content validity.

2. Construct Validity (Factorial Validity)

Construct validity was examined using **Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)**.

Evidence Supporting Construct Validity

Indicator	Result	Interpretation
KMO	0.858	Excellent sampling adequacy
Bartlett's Test	Significant	Factorable correlation matrix
No. of Factors	2	Theoretically coherent
Variance Explained	61.52%	Substantial
Communalities	.49 – .79	Strong item representation
Cross-loadings	Minimal	Clear factor structure

Theoretical Interpretation

The two extracted dimensions correspond to established psychological models:

1. **The Cognitive–Affective Justification Dimension** explores how thoughts and emotions interact to shape our beliefs and decision-making. It indicates that emotional rationalization often influences our justifications, leading individuals to defend choices based on feelings rather than objective reasoning. This highlights the complexity of human psychology in understanding behavior.
2. **The Behavioral–Action Dimension** focuses on the aspects of execution, frequency, and behavioral control failure. It examines how often behaviors are performed, the effectiveness of their execution, and the challenges individuals face in maintaining control over their actions, ultimately affecting overall performance and outcomes in various settings.

This aligns with:

- **Social–cognitive models of deviant behavior**
- **Theory of Planned Behavior**
- **Moral disengagement frameworks (Bandura)**

The Stealing Behaviour Scale exhibits **strong construct validity**.

3. Convergent Validity (Internal Evidence)

Convergent validity was inferred from several key indicators, including high factor loadings, with most items exceeding .60, strong communalities, and high internal consistency demonstrated by an alpha coefficient of .904. These factors collectively suggest that the items intended to measure the same construct converge meaningfully, providing evidence to support adequate convergent validity.

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4. Discriminant Validity (Internal Structure)

Discriminant validity was assessed through several key measures. First, a clear distinction was ensured between items across two factors, which helped to highlight their unique attributes. Additionally, efforts were made to minimize significant cross-loadings, thereby reinforcing the independence of the factors. Lastly, distinct conceptual boundaries were established between the cognitive-affective and behavioral dimensions, further supporting the validity of the constructs being measured.

Moreover, the reliabilities of the subscales were robust but not overly high ($\alpha \approx .86$), indicating that the constructs are related but not redundant. Therefore, the scale shows adequate discriminant validity.

5. Criterion-Related Validity

Current Status

Direct criterion-related validity, whether concurrent or predictive, could not be empirically confirmed due to a couple of significant reasons. Firstly, there was a lack of an external behavioral criterion, such as official records or teacher evaluations, which are essential for establishing validity. Additionally, the study employed a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to draw definitive conclusions about the relationships between variables over time. These factors contributed to the inability to substantiate the validity of the criterion-related assessments.

Methodological Positioning

The current study offers essential construct validation, serving as a recognized initial step in the process of scale standardization.

Conclusion: Criterion validity is **recommended for future research** and does not invalidate current findings.

Face Validity

Although it may not serve as a statistical measure of validity, the scale demonstrates considerable face validity. The items are expressed clearly, making them easily understandable for respondents. Furthermore, the behaviors associated with these items are easily identifiable, allowing for straightforward recognition. As a result, respondents can readily grasp the purpose of the items, which ultimately supports their acceptability in applied settings.

Summary Table: Validity Evidence

Type of Validity	Evidence	Status
Content Validity	Literature + expert review	Established
Construct Validity	EFA, variance, loadings	Strong
Convergent Validity	High loadings, $\alpha = .904$	Adequate
Discriminant Validity	Clear 2-factor structure	Adequate
Criterion Validity	External criterion absent	To be established
Face Validity	Clarity of items	High

The Stealing Behavior Scale shows robust evidence of both content and construct validity, backed by a stable factor structure and high internal consistency. Although criterion-related

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validity has yet to be confirmed, the current results offer a solid psychometric foundation for utilizing the scale in research and applied psychological assessments.

DISCUSSION

Reliability Interpretation

The overall reliability coefficient ($\alpha = .904$) suggests that the Stealing Behaviour Scale is a strong psychometric tool that can be effectively utilized in both research and practical applications. Additionally, with subscale reliabilities exceeding .86, it further confirms that the two dimensions are both internally consistent and clearly separate.

Factorial Validity and Construct Representation

The recognition of a two-factor structure aligns with contemporary theories regarding antisocial and deviant behavior, which suggest that such actions arise from the interaction of two main elements: cognitive-affective processes (such as intent, justification, and moral reasoning) and behavioral execution (which includes action, repetition, and impulsive actions). This alignment bolsters the construct validity of the scale.

Implications for Assessment and Research

The identified dimensions enable a differential assessment of thought–emotion versus action components, facilitating a more nuanced understanding of individual behaviors and responses. This framework allows for targeted intervention planning tailored to specific needs and contexts. Additionally, these dimensions can be effectively utilized in various settings, including clinical, correctional, educational, and forensic environments, enhancing the overall approach to treatment and intervention across diverse populations.

CONCLUSION

The Stealing Behaviour Scale demonstrates high internal consistency, robust factorial validity, and a clear theoretical understanding. As a result, it meets the essential psychometric criteria necessary for standardization and is suitable for use in doctoral-level research.

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Conflict of Interest

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