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RAPID-COMMUNICATION

Cultural attitudes and behavioural change: A conceptual examination of the wolf and the publisher

Kathryn Nelson

Abstract

Cultural transformation is required to support positive attitudinal change towards the natural environment. Cultural intermediaries are influential in the dissemination of environmental knowledge since they support and promote cultural activities through their role as gatekeepers and tastemakers of culture. They are, therefore, influential in knowledge transfer, through their work as publishers, arts managers, producers, and curators. Consequently, they play a pivotal role in the creation of an individual's attitudes. This conceptual article, is specifically, concerned with publishers and how they can influence a person's attitudes towards the Eurasian wolf (*Canis lupus lupus*) and its cousins, the North American grey wolf (*Canis lupus*) and red wolf (*Canis rufus*). Furthermore, a change of attitude can impact on an individual's beliefs, feelings, and behaviour. Especially since any attitudes an individual holds are often a result of social learning, rather than direct contact or knowledge of the wolf. Consequently, to achieve behavioural change, it is necessary to challenge existing knowledge and attitudes, here the work of cultural intermediaries can be critical. For example, publishers can help to create cognitive dissonance within individuals which may support positive behavioural change towards the natural environment. Given the significant role intermediaries have within European and North American societies and their ability to change individual behaviour, it is crucial that their impact on environmental knowledge and attitudes be considered.

Keywords: culture, wolf, cultural intermediaries, transdisciplinary, publishers, attitudinal change

Introduction

This conceptual article draws on the methodology of the humanities, where careful reading of text predominates, yet it also explores culture through a social science perspective. For instance, it will explore the relationship between the publisher and that of the wolf. Thus, drawing together two disciplinary strands to create a transdisciplinary focused appreciation of human-wildlife conflict. In the main the word 'wolf' will be used generically; this is because the research is, in the most part, exploring the 'wolf' in fictional portrayals and children's books. Although, when scientific research is being discussed the wolf's subspecies will be acknowledged. Furthermore, the paper will only examine the wolf within Western culture. For this paper, 'Western' will only refer to Europe and North America, and their shared cultural values, customs, beliefs, and political systems. Primarily, the term Western culture, then is being used as shorthand for two cultural spheres, European and North American. It is also, worth noting that this article is a conceptual work, rather than ethnographic research. I will begin the exploration of cultural attitudes and behavioural change of the wolf, with a descriptive analysis of cultural intermediaries, the power brokers of Western culture.

Cultural intermediaries are the gatekeepers and tastemakers of Western societies. Fig. 1 has been developed for this research to elucidate the significant role of cultural intermediaries. These cultural gatekeepers can transform how we view the world since they establish our cultural practices. They may well determine our preferences in literature, painting, and music. Yet their influence frequently extends beyond the arts into the sciences. They are publishers, literary agents, editors, curators, film and television producers, public and private arts funders, art dealers, and arts administrators. Their work can be seen at the intersection of art, ecology, and commerce. Consequently, they are often crucial in how we as a species appreciate the natural world. Notably, they are often linked to the formation of emotional and cognitive knowledge, but they are also highly influential in the marketplace. Hence, intermediaries have an association with cultural power. Yet, their power and influence can lack any social responsibility. Therefore, their pivotal role in society may either hamper or encourage understanding of the cultural trade-offs needed to address human-wildlife conflict.

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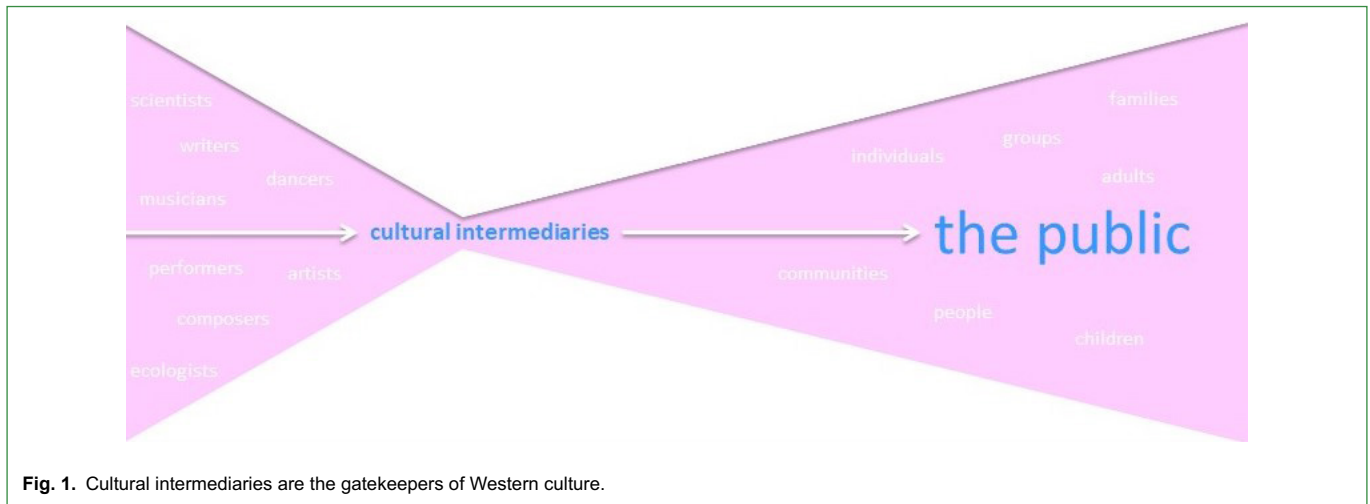


Fig. 1. Cultural intermediaries are the gatekeepers of Western culture.

Culture and attitudinal change

Cultural intermediaries maybe key in attitudinal change, since attitudes are central to how individuals act and behave. Rosenberg *et al.* (1960) asserts that an individual’s attitudes are linked to three components, their beliefs, feelings, and behaviour. This interconnectivity of attitudinal components has been illustrated, for this article, in Fig. 2. Therefore, to achieve a change in behaviour, an individual’s attitudes must first transform. A person’s attitude can range in strength. Moreover, Fazio and Zanna (1981) argue that those based upon constructed and lived experiences are usually held with more conviction, and thus are more likely to be reflected in an individual’s behaviour. Crucially, an individual strives for consistency and harmony in the three domains, a process known as cognitive consonance. Festinger (1957) asserts when a mismatch occurs among an individual’s beliefs, feelings, and behaviour than cognitive dissonance arises, which is psychologically uncomfortable. People in this situation always aim to move from cognitive discord to harmony. Therefore, one method of achieving behavioural transformation is to challenge an individual by creating cognitive dissonance.

The gatekeepers and tastemakers of culture may play a significant role in reducing Human Wildlife conflict, since they intermedate among creative individuals like artists, writers, performers, and the public. Visual art, literature, film, and other creative manifestations can offer the public, a rational appreciation of, and emotional empathy for, wildlife. Subsequently, the work that cultural intermediaries indorse is critical in supporting societies’ re-engagement with the natural world. To fully explore cultural intermediaries’ role in attitudinal change I will now turn to the wolf’s status in Western culture.

The division between nature and culture is a traditional concept within Western society. The book of Genesis has had a substantial impact on this society’s cultural natural ideology. Genesis states,

Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls upon it. (Genesis 1, p. 26)

Given this important religious text, the eradication of the Eurasian wolf (*Canis lupus lupus*) in Europe, and the grey wolf (*Canis lupus*) and red wolf (*Canis rufus*) in the United States of America was not unexpected. This influential verse provides individuals, institutions, organisations, companies, politicians, and societies with a perfect example of Albert Bandura’s moral disengagement mechanism (Bandura, 2016), that of moral justification to ‘subdue’ and ‘have dominion over’ all creatures or more prosaically, ‘rule over’ them. The following quote from Rick McIntyre shows the mechanism of moral justification in action.

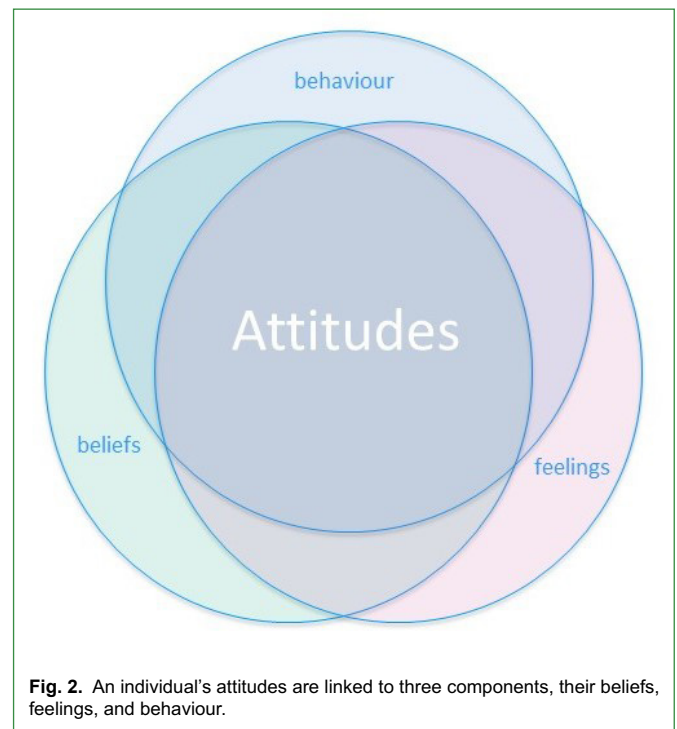


Fig. 2. An individual’s attitudes are linked to three components, their beliefs, feelings, and behaviour.

Beginning in 1630, just ten years after landing in the New World, the European settlers in the Massachusetts Bay Colony passed a series of laws offering a cash reward to any resident who killed a wolf. (McIntyre 1995, p. 29)

This was followed by anti-wolf legislation in other colonies. Wolf killing continued and in 1818 in the virgin forests of northeast, McIntyre (1995, p. 43) argues a ‘war of extermination upon the bears and wolves’ was undertaken.

In 1856, Thoreau ((1906) 1995, p. 23) argued in his journal that the wolf is ‘one of the nobler animals’ and he mourned the extermination of the wolf and other creatures from the forests of Massachusetts. Furthermore, he believed that he was living in an ‘emasculated country.’ To return to the power and influence of cultural intermediaries; I would now like to describe the importance of the publisher Houghton Mifflin to the nature-culture dialogue, and in particular human-wildlife conflict. As Lupfer (2001, p. 178) suggests that at the turn of the century, the company was profoundly influential in *nature writing* and he suggests that no other contemporary literary institution was so influential in

publishing environmental concerned work. In 1863, Houghton Mifflin published a collection of essays by Thoreau. Thoreau wrote,

The story of Romulus and Remus being suckled by a wolf is not meaningless fable. The founders of every state which has risen to eminence have drawn their nourishment and vigour from a similar wild source (Thoreau (1863) 2014, p. 15).

Nine years later in 1872 the first national park, Yellowstone was established by the United States of American Congress.

Yet, societal and individual attitudinal change towards positive environmental behaviour did not flourish. For example, in 1900 the book; *The Wolf Hunter's Guide: Tell How to Catch'em and All about the Science of Wolf Hunting*, was written (Corbin (1900) 1995). The author, Corbin ((1863) 1995, p. 123) argued that God wanted the American continent free of 'wild beasts and savage men.' Corbin ((1863) 1995, p. 126) suggested that fishhooks should be baited, to snag and tear into the wolf pup's throats or stomachs, and in the morning, they could be clubbed to death, skinned, and their bodies left for the buzzards. The book was published, by *The Tribune Company*. This publishing house was owned by Marshall H. Jewell. He was active in politics and was secretary of the 1893 Republican State Committee. It is difficult to gauge why this cultural intermediary selected to publish such a book but given Jewell's political leanings, he wanted to 'civilize' America. According to Belfiore and Bennett (2008, pp. 25–26), civilization at the time was synonymous with European culture. When Corbin's book was published the Eurasian wolf (*Canis lupus lupus*) had already been exterminated in much of Europe.

Furthermore, in 1902, Theodore Roosevelt's book, *Hunting the Grisly and Other Sketches* provides contemporary evidence of the annihilation of the grey wolf (*Canis lupus*) in North America when he wrote:

Formerly wolves were incredibly abundant in certain parts of the country, notably on the great plains, where they were known as buffalo wolves, and were regular attendants on the great herds of the bison. Every traveller and hunter of the old days knew them as among the most common sights of the plains [...] Now, however, there is no district in which they are really abundant. (Roosevelt, 1902, p. 51)

After the elimination of the 'great herds,' the wolves' previous hunting grounds drastically altered, the bison were gone and were replaced by cattle and horses. This environmental transformation, of course, brought the wolves into direct competition with the ranchers. Roosevelt offers an insight into the American cowboys' long-term campaign against the wolf. He explains that in the winter of 1892–1893, the wolves had fed on the cattle and horses and then describes the cowboys' subsequent persecution of the wolves:

The cowboys have been carrying on the usual vindictive campaign against them; a number have been poisoned, and a number of others have fallen victims to their greediness, the cowboys surprising them when gorged to repletion on the carcass of a colt or calf, and, in consequence, unable to run, so that they are easily ridden down, roped, and then dragged to death. (Roosevelt, 1902, p. 52)

Interestingly, Roosevelt's publisher was G.P. Putnam's Sons, and it had already published other books on the American wilderness. The books included *The California and Oregon Trail* (1838) by Francis Parkman and *A Journey Through Texas: Or a Saddle-Trip on the Southwestern Frontier* (1857) by Frederick Law Olmsted. Consequently, it could be argued that G. P. Putnam's Sons were influential in developing the cultural narrative of the American 'wild west.' The publisher, through the work of its' authors, like Roosevelt, was able to depict the attitudes that the ranchers had towards the wolf. This negativity could also be seen in children's storybooks. For example, the 'Big Bad Wolf' was a character to be feared.

Feeney and Moravcik (2005) have argued that children's literary characters are highly influential in how young people understand themselves and the world. Furthermore, according to Bauer and

von Atzigen (2019, p. 148), childhood experience is decisive in our species perceptions of nature and our subsequent relationship to it in adulthood. The wolf in picture books is often the only wolf that some people will ever see. As Ajzen and Fishbein (1977) argue indirect exposure can inform individuals' attitudes without direct contact with, for instance, the 'Big Bad Wolf.' The condemnation of the wolf is clearly seen when rangers shot the last grey wolf (*Canis lupus*) in Yellowstone National Park in 1926. As Redford (2019, p. xvii) stated, 'Few people at the time mourned the loss.'

Significantly, how wolves were portrayed in literature was beginning to change. For instance, the publishers David Nutt and Macmillan began to present the wolf more favourably, describing pack loyalty, the nurturing of the young, its bravery of spirit, its strength of character and intelligence. For example, books such as *Lobo the Wolf: The King of Currumpaw* (1898) by Ernest Thompson Seton, *Call of the Wild* (1903), and *White Fang* (1906) both written by Jack London, and *The Jungle Book* (1894) by Rudyard Kipling began to appear in homes and libraries. Such books play on the empathy of the reader to fully engage with the wolf as the protagonists.

This cultural reappraisal of the wolf continued, and in the 1960s attitudes began to change towards the environment. The publisher Houghton Mifflin again played a part by publishing Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), which is often considered a catalyst for the environmental movement. Houghton Mifflin can be considered vital in promoting Carson's ideology and thoughts. As research has shown literary works have stimulated the development of environmental issues and environmental reform is often dependent on ecological literature proliferation (Grechishkina, 2018). This idea shows the power of the publishers as gatekeepers of knowledge and tastemakers of opinions and attitudes. This change in attitudes towards nature was eventually rewarded in the United States with the 1973 Endangered Species Act (ESA) 1973. The grey wolf (*Canis lupus*) and red wolf (*Canis rufus*) were finally protected.

In 1989, Harper Row published *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs*. The book is written from the point of view of the wolf. It was followed 4 years later by Viking Penguin publishing *The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig* (1993). Chowdhary (2004) has argued that the content of children's storybooks reflects societal change. So, it is not surprising that in January 1995, 14 wolves were reintroduced into Yellowstone Park. Yet, the most remarkable attitudinal transformation was the imprisonment of Chad McKittrick for killing one of Yellowstone's newly released wolves under the 1973 Endangered Species Act. However, this change in opinion towards the grey wolf (*Canis lupus*) had not been universally accepted, since 'a handful of locals [...] cheered the killing, calling it an act of heroism' (Smith and Ferguson, 2008). This opposition to the grey wolf (*Canis lupus*) by some 'locals' is reminiscent of the attitude and behaviour of the ranchers and cowboys as described by Roosevelt. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that the grey wolf's territory has expanded onto their ancient hunting grounds. Moreover, human-wildlife conflict has ensued because the wolf's traditional prey, the bison, has been eliminated from the American landscape and replaced by corralled livestock.

Nevertheless, given this instability in the public's opinion, it was expected that in 2011, the US Congress passed legislation that removed federal grey wolf (*Canis lupus*) protection and returned management of the species back to state wildlife agencies. In 2012, just outside of Yellowstone National Park the shooting of a female wolf caused an international outcry. Her killer was not imprisoned because he was acting legally.

Unfortunately, the fate of the red wolf (*Canis rufus*) has paralleled, in many respects that of the grey wolf (*Canis lupus*). Tobias (2021, online) suggests that there were only 20 red wolves left in the wild in the 1970s, but with careful management, their numbers increased until the programme was considered 'a phenomenal success.' Yet with breeding success, both wolf species were again targeted by their detractors. Moreover, the red wolf (*Canis rufus*) decline has

been recognised by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) as described by Tobias:

In 2015, the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission passed resolutions calling for the FWS to declare red wolves extinct in the wild and end the reintroduction efforts. More significant, it was around this time that opponents of red wolf reintroduction found sympathizers among the FWS leadership, federal officials who were apparently willing to make dramatic changes to the program to appease its critics. These changes would soon send the world's last wild red wolf population into a drastic decline. (Tobias, 2021, online)

It appears without federal protection, the populations of the grey wolf (*Canis lupus*) and the red wolf (*Canis rufus*) are likely to further decline, or in the worst-case scenario become extinct. Given this rather alarming argument, I would like to again refer to Thoreau ((1906) 1995, p. 23) and his ideas on the emasculation of the American wilderness.

Leon Festinger's ideas on cognitive dissonance can provide insight about the detractors of the wolf. For instance, the people living close to Yellowstone Park may still hold to the conviction that such creatures should be subdued. Yet internationally, attitudes towards the wolf had fundamentally changed. This cognitive separation is the key in understanding the different attitudes towards the wolf. Especially, if Fazio and Zanna's (1981) ideas are also considered that lived experiences are usually held with more conviction than intellectual knowledge. Moreover, Sherif and Hovland (1961) assert that a person's latitude of acceptance or rejection is based on their previously held beliefs and feelings. Given this, the belief that nature should be subdued is deeply engrained in the supporters of wolf killing.

Furthermore, Manfredo *et al.* (2016, p. 294) suggest that there is a value shift in the domain of human relationships with respect to wildlife. They argue that it is consistent with a sustainable philosophy, yet the change is slow, so the domination of wildlife is still prevalent. Moreover, Manfredo *et al.* (2020, p. 241) argue that the role of anthropomorphism, or more prosaically the attribution of human traits on to animals, may support the process of attitudinal change. They argue that anthropomorphism is related to value formation and support the supposition outlined by Franklin (1999) that emotional connection to animals is part of modern culture which is reshaping human-animal relationships. Consequently, any emotional connection to wildlife, and particularly the wolf, is likely to be enhanced when cultural intermediaries through their work as gatekeepers and tastemakers portray the wolf favourably.

Nonetheless, the fluctuations of the wolf populations in the United States are particularly worrying since they appear to be caused by two distinct demographic human populations. Manfredo *et al.*

(2020) have suggested that 'mutualism' and 'domination' of the natural environment are at the core of this distinction. Mutualism is concerned with a more harmonious relationship with other species, whereas domination springs from Judeo-Christian traditions. This see-sawing between the two ethical positions is emphasised in Americans' relationship to, and interactions, with their native wolves. This cultural divide perhaps can be better understood through the work of the cultural theorist Raymond Williams. He suggests that culture can be described as 'a whole way of life' (Williams (1958) 1997, p. 6). This re-evaluation of culture offers an insight into the two distinct ethical divisions of mutualism and domination. There appear to be, within the United States two distinct ways of life, with each ethical position attempting to promote 'their' culture and to discard the other. This oscillation within the culture of the United States is highlighted in the 'exploitation' versus the 'protection' of the wolf. Not only can this cultural instability be seen in the changing wolf population numbers, but also in how the wolf is portrayed within literature. Each group's 'way of life' is integral in how they see themselves, how they represent themselves, and moreover how they relate to the natural world.

Yet, there is a fundamental flaw in this form of cultural duality, since it does not provide any notion of a continuum, or breadth, of attitudinal diversity. Perhaps the theoretical pendulum between mutualism and domination might be best understood through the work of Leon Festinger's ideas on cognitive dissonance and how attitudes can change. After all, without an occasional cultural reappraisal Western society would ultimately remain static and unaffected by novel notions and thought.

Conclusion

So how can a deeply engrained cultural conviction be transformed? Perhaps Crossick and Kaszynska (2016) research may provide some insight. They suggest that the arts have emotional, social, and intellectual dimensions. This cultural experience is likely to be influential in attitudinal and behavioural change, to illustrate this point more fully Fig. 3 has been created for this research. Furthermore, they argue that it is necessary to recognise the multifaceted character of cultural experiences, with emotional and cognitive elements alongside broader social reverberations. These social reverberations can be seen through some positive changes in attitude towards the wolf within European and North American culture. Yet it is not simply the writers that influence Western culture, but also the publishers in their role as cultural intermediaries. Yet, this has still not been enough to fully support positive environmental awareness. So, what is the next stage? Given cultural intermediaries significant impact on Western culture, they may still be key in building bridges to mitigate Human-Wildlife

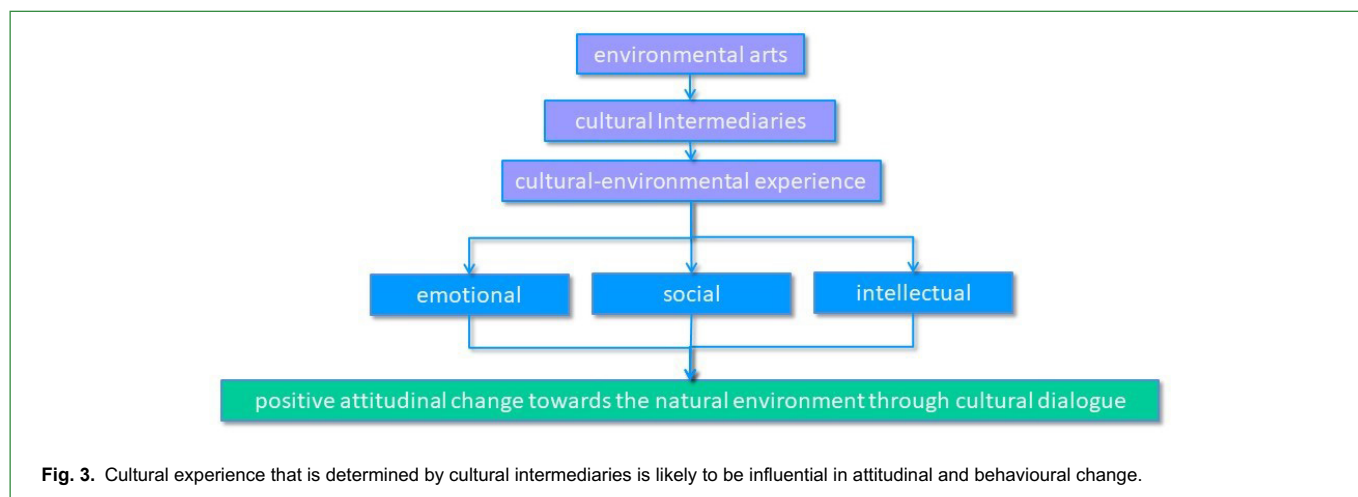


Fig. 3. Cultural experience that is determined by cultural intermediaries is likely to be influential in attitudinal and behavioural change.

conflict. In their guise as arts managers, they could offer funding that sustains socially interactive wildlife art projects. This will achieve behavioural transformation by challenging an individual and the communities unsustainable and destructive, beliefs, feelings, and attitudes, which in turn may support human-wildlife accord.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Ethics statement confirming that all relevant guidelines were followed. All necessary ethical approval has been received for the research. Research involved information available in the public domain.

FUNDING STATEMENT

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