Mark Frankel's Commentary on "All in the Interpretation"

Commentary On
All in the Interpretation

This case deals with several important issues, but one thing readers should note is that a conflict of interest does not exist because you "know" or "desire" something. There must be a context/situation that would trigger a conflict. So, in the example of a judge who recuses himself from a case, the context is some sort of litigation requiring recusal. Sometimes a researcher will find herself in a situation, either created by herself or others (e.g., her mentor's industry funding), where she has to act accordingly. Hence, the context/situation triggers a behavior that will determine (1) whether she has a conflict of interest, and (2) whether it is or is not likely to affect her research. To summarize, the important questions are not whether Kate has "knowledge of" or "desire to" -- neither knowledge nor desire constitute a conflict of interest per se. She has to act on that knowledge or desire in order to trigger a conflict. Even then, having a conflict is not a priori good or bad; what's critical is how one deals with it.