

POSITIONALITY STATEMENTS ARE JUST THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG: MOVING TOWARDS A REFLEXIVE PROCESS

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In July 2020, *Journal of Women and Minorities in Science and Engineering (JWM)* started requiring a positionality statement in each paper published. To the best of our knowledge, requiring a positionality statement at *JWM* is a first for a journal in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education, although some other journals are beginning to encourage authors to include one.

With this editorial, we, the *JWM* editorial staff, want to clarify several aspects about positionality statements. We understand positionality statements to be only one part of a larger process of reflexivity. We also understand that for many *JWM* authors, professional and personal risks are associated with revealing identities in positionality statements. It is our hope that positionality statements—when understood in these more complex ways—will result in higher quality, more socially just research. And that is why *JWM* has committed to them.

The positionality statement that appears in a *JWM* paper is the final *product* of a complex, ongoing *process* of reflexivity throughout the research design, implementation, and reporting activities. We join other scholars in advocating that the investigation of a researcher's positionality is an exercise in deep reflexivity throughout the research process. Investigation of positionality in this way offers opportunities for disrupting privilege and bias (Secules et al., 2021). It is not a “box-checking” exercise for the purpose of publication at the end of the research process. Engaging in the process of reflection offers the opportunity to examine the impact of our research decisions through the lens of our social identities.

Many researchers—including we *JWM* authors—possess complex social identities that are privileged in some ways, marginalized in other ways (and often, simultaneously both) in STEM, in the academy, and in society at large. Our identities create power dynamics between us and our participants, even if only because of our membership in the hierarchical social structure of the academy. Our identities may help us at times build trust and rapport with participants. And at other times, our identities may hinder trust building. When researchers fail to recognize how the privileged and/or marginalized aspects of their identities influence their research decisions, it can inadvertently reify long-standing power dynamics and harm the historically marginalized populations for whom the journal aims to achieve inclusion (Parson, 2019).

We on the *JWM* editorial team believe that the process and product of positionality work is important because it promotes social justice and improves research quality. We recognize that all research with human subjects is political. Research questions, theories, and methods are political because they determine whether and which social systems are critically interrogated, allow or disallow observation of phenomena, reproduce oppressive structures, and determine who is visible and invisible in the data (Martin et al., 2022).

In recognizing the impact of our identities, we researchers think about approaches to (1) minimize bias, (2) build trust, create safe spaces, and center participants' experiences, and (3) consider how diverse perspectives are represented on our research team. Interrogating positionality helps us researchers be intentional about how we recognize power relationships with research participants, rather than delegating these important matters to an afterthought. It promotes transparency in conducting research (Secules et al., 2021).

However, we also recognize that revealing identities and relations to power carries risk. *JWM*'s requirement to include a positionality statement in manuscripts is not intended to force any researcher to publicly reveal identities that puts them at professional or personal risk. The requirement is intended to challenge all of us authors to be reflexive about how our relevant identities have influenced our research decisions. While engaging in positionality often requires us to acknowledge the discomfort of our privilege and bias, our editorial team is committed to honoring authors' decisions about what they believe is safe to reveal about themselves in published manuscripts.

While good resources exist for engaging in the reflexive process that ultimately leads to published positionality statements, none of these resources provide an easy or quick "how-to" list. A positionality statement is more than a checklist of authors' social identities, although it may explore researchers' identities that are relevant to the published research study. Rather, these resources indicate that in writing a positionality statement, we should reflect on how we addressed social identities, privilege, and power dynamics throughout the whole study (e.g., Milner, 2007; Secules et al., 2021). Secules and colleagues (2021) suggest six dimensions for researchers to consider: research topic, epistemology, ontology, methodology, researcher-as-instrument, and communication. Since none of us are perfect and none of our studies are perfect, writing a positionality statement can be a powerful tool for reflection about changes we researchers wish to make in our future work. And, if researchers did not consciously consider all of Secules and colleague's six dimensions upfront, the positionality statement can explore them now. Such a statement could articulate the ways in which the authors now realize how their identity, privilege, and power dynamics affected research decisions, or ways in which they could have made different decisions (e.g., modified the data collection protocol) to enhance the quality of their research.

Our intention is to encourage each other in the field to be even more intentional about acknowledging our position within the research and the impact it has on disrupting privilege and bias to achieve the goal of inclusion. Moving forward, we will ask *JWM* reviewers to provide constructive feedback on positionality statements as an ex-

plicit review criterion (for more on constructive feedback, see Martin, 2020). Similarly, we will encourage reviewers to disclose their positionality in the review comments they write. We look forward to seeing how our authors will respond to this challenge.

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