

Positionality Statements

Melissa Curran, Editor of *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships (JSPR)*

Ashley K. Randall, Editor of *Personal Relationships (PR)*

GOAL OF THIS DOCUMENT

- As Editors of JSPR and PR, the two journals of the *International Association for Relationship Research (IARR)*, we encourage authors to include positionality statements when submitting a manuscript. Authors are NOT required to include positionality statements when submitting a manuscript, only encouraged to do so, when possible. In addition, authors would not be mandated to disclose any aspect of their identities unless they themselves consent to doing so.
- The goal of this document is to help scholars understand and conceptualize positionality statements, along with providing examples of positionality statements from empirical studies.

IARR's DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION STATEMENT

- Please click [here](#).

HOW TO THINK ABOUT POSITIONALITY STATEMENTS

- How the identities of the authors relate to the research topic and to the identities of the participants and how these identities are represented in the scientific record / journals (Roberts et al., 2020, page 11).
- Short video description: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GpciVzGYhVs>

WHY TO INCLUDE POSITIONALITY STATEMENTS IN OUR JOURNALS (JSPR and PR)

#1: Commitment to equity and inclusion

As reflected in IARR's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion statement linked above, IARR is committed to equity and inclusion in its broadest sense and strives to value all individuals regardless of age, national origin, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability status, and other identities. (See <https://iarr.org/documents/IARR%20Diversity%20Statement.pdf>).

For decades, our fields have conducted and published empirical science that reveals biases and structural inequalities (for a review see Roberts et al., 2020; <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1745691620927709>).

As editors of *JSPR* and *PR*, we are committed to publishing scholarship that is both socially embedded and representative of the communities in which we serve.

#2: To allow “transparency in how the identities of the authors relate to the research topic and to the identity of the participants and the extent to which those identities are represented in the permanent scientific record” (Roberts et al., 2020, page 11).

Based on Roberts et al. (2020), below are recommendations for authors to work towards reducing racial inequality in social science research:

- *Include positionality statements.*
 - This recommendation makes transparent how the identities of the authors relate to the research topic and to the identity of the participants and the extent to which those identities are represented in the permanent scientific record.
 - Just as authors release statements of author contributions, they can release positionality statements that afford contributors the opportunity to clarify how they are positioned regarding the research and the researched.
 - If, for instance, scholars are drawing conclusions about Asian Americans, yet the author list consists exclusively of White Americans, that could be made clear.
 - For example, it could be made clear in the positionality statement that the research question concerns gender yet the research team consists only of individuals who identify as male, or that the research participants are members of the LGBTQ community yet the research team consists only of individuals who identify as heterosexual and cisgender.
- None of these recommendations need to be limited to the study of race.
- Although race was the focus in this research (by Roberts et al., 2020) intersectionality is also vital to a healthy and representative science (e.g., persons representing a wide range of gender, political, religious, and sexual identities). ***However, authors would not be mandated to disclose any aspect of their identities unless they themselves consent to doing so****

*Bold, italics, and underline were added by the Editors to illustrate this point).

FAQs & Editors (MAC & AKR) Responses

#Q1: My research broadly examines topics associated with relationship development and maintenance. Will I have to disclose personal information about myself like my experiences growing up with caregivers or my relationship status (past or present)?

A: No! Per the Roberts et al (2020) article, “authors should not be mandated to disclose any aspect of their identities unless they themselves consent to doing so.”

#Q2: I am private as a person and do not want to disclose personal information about me to an academic audience and beyond (e.g., race/ethnicity/cultural background, gender identity, sexual orientation, relational status)? Will such disclosures be required in positionality statement?

A: No! Per the Roberts et al (2020) article, “authors should not be mandated to disclose any aspect of their identities unless they themselves consent to doing so. The authors retain the rights to include any identities that they wish to disclose as part of their positionality statements (see examples below). Authors may choose to disclose information related to their positionality statements collectively. For example: “one author self-identified as U.S. Black-White American, and four authors self-identified as U.S. White American” (see Roberts et al., 2020).

#Q3: What information should be included in my positionality statement?

A: Whatever you feel is most relevant for the readers to know about specific to this research study or review. You may identify your *career level* (see Few-Demo et al., 2016), *training with the theory or content* (see Few-Demo et al, 2016), and/or *current geographical location* (see Roberts et al., 2020; Su-Russell & James, in press; Vest Ettekal et al., 2020).

#Q4: I am concerned that not including such a statement may have a differential impact on getting my manuscript published. Is this assumption correct?

A: No. Including a statement will not impact whether your manuscript is published.

Our goal in requesting these positionality statements is in line with the suggestions articulated above by Roberts et al (2020): How to reduce inequalities in the research that we do and how to encourage researchers to engage with diverse scholars in collaborative ways that advance the understanding of our fields.

Additionally, as noted above, across our responses, the goal of the positionality statements is *not* to make individuals disclose information they do not want to disclose. It is acceptable to offer information about *career level, training with the theory or content, and/or current geographical location*.

#Q5: Are positionality statements required to include in my article?

A: No; however, we strongly encourage authors to include positionality statements, when possible.

#Q6: What are the benefits for including positionality statements in my article?

A: This recommendation may encourage researchers to conduct their research collaboratively with diverse scientists and engage in multi-lab collaborations (see Bourke, 2014; Medin & Bang, 2014; Nzinga et al., 2018). (For an example, see the Acknowledgments section of this article by Roberts et al. 2020, which is below):

Page 12: "When the manuscript for this article was drafted, one author self-identified as U.S. Black-White American, and four authors self-identified as U.S. White American."

#Q7: Where should my positionality statement be included in the manuscript?

A: Authors should include their positionality statement in the Method section, denoted with the subheading "Author positionality" prior to presenting standard information (i.e., Participants, Procedure, Measures, and Data Analysis).

POSITIONALITY STATEMENT EXAMPLES (alphabetized by last name)

Empirical Studies

Example #1:

Davis, S. M. (2018) The aftermath of #BlackGirlsRock vs. #WhiteGirlsRock: considering the disrespectability of a Black women's counterpublic. *Women's Studies in Communication* 41, 269–290. doi=10.1080/07491409.2018.1505678

Positionality statement:

Before I present the findings, and in the spirit of self-reflexivity, I acknowledge my standpoint as an educated Black American woman. I am not an avid participant in Black online spaces such as comments sections, but I have observed the interactions of other users, advocated for Black online spaces, and am intrigued by the use of language to mark and protect cultural identities. I acknowledge that my positionality influenced this project to some extent; my member resources proved to be important tools that helped me make meaning of the text.

What was documented in this positionality statement:

- Current geographical location
- Education
- Personal experiences related to the topic
- Race / ethnicity
- Sex

Example #2:

Humble, Á. M. (2013). Moving from ambivalence to certainty: Older same-sex couples marry in Canada. *Canadian Journal on Aging*, 32, 131–144. doi:10.1017/S0714980813000196

Positionality statement:

One of the epistemological assumptions of the social constructionist/interpretivist paradigm is that there is not one reality but many realities “that can be articulated based on the values, standpoints, and positions of the author” (Daly, 2007 , p. 33). Thus, I offer these findings as only one possible interpretation of these individuals' experiences based on my standpoint as a middle-aged, heterosexual, married woman (which I revealed either directly or indirectly to everyone I interviewed) who has conducted research on heterosexual weddings in the past (Humble, 2009 ; Humble, Zvonkovic, & Walker, 2008). I believe marriage is a right that all couples should have regardless of their sexual orientation, but my focus on the transition to marriage does not mean I devalue other types of committed relationships, particularly the common-law, cohabiting relationships of many long-term same-sex couples.

What was documented in this positionality statement:

- Age
- Relational status
- Sexual orientation

Example #3:

Roberts, S. O., Bareket-Shavit, C., Dollins, F. A., Goldie, P. D., & Mortenson, E. (2020). Racial inequality in psychological research: Trends of the past and recommendations for the future. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 15*, 1295–1309.

Positionality statement:

When the manuscript for this article was drafted, one author self-identified as U.S. Black-White American, and four authors self-identified as U.S. White American.

What was documented in this positionality statement:

- Current geographical location
- Race / ethnicity

Example #4:

Scharp, K. M., Hasen, R., Kubler, K. F., & Wang, T. R. (in press). Making meaning of parenting from the perspective of alienated parents. *Personal Relationships*.

Positionality statement:

As Scharp and Thomas (2019) argue, scholars engaged in critical social science research should assess how their own positions and experiences might contribute to their interpretations of people's lived experiences. With this in mind, none of the authors have experienced parental alienation from the perspective of either parent or child. Instead, the first author has been studying family distancing for over a decade and has consequently garnered the stories from parents, children, and immediate family members of distanced parents and children. The first author contends that being immersed in the context of family distancing allowed her to relate to the participants and develop trust even though she was not alienated herself. Furthermore, not identifying as an alienated parent allowed the research team to protect themselves from reliving the emotional trauma expressed by many of the parents in their narratives.

What was documented in this positionality statement:

- Educational background
- Personal experiences related to the topic

Example #5:

Su-Russell, C., & James, A. (in press). Chinese international scholars' work-life balance in the U.S.: Stress and strategies. *Journal of International Students*.

Positionality statement:

There are two authors for the current study. The primary author, led the data collection and analysis processes, is bilingual in English and Mandarin Chinese, which allowed for the study participants to feel comfortable sharing their lived experiences in a way they felt could best express their thoughts and feelings. The second author is an ethnic minority scholar in the U.S. and contributed to refining the theoretical framework. Both study authors contributed to interpreting findings and the implications of the study. It is likely, however, our ethnoracial backgrounds influence our interpretations of the data. To avoid speaking for the data, both authors made efforts to bracket existing biases or assumptions. To avoid bias, notes were taken on all preconceptions that arose about the study population in order to bracket these existing assumptions during data collection and analysis process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

What was documented in this positionality statement:

- Current geographical location
- Languages spoken
- Race / ethnicity

Example #6:

Vest Ettekal, A., Simpkins, S. D., Menjiva, C., & Delgado, M. Y. (2020). The complexities of culturally responsive organized activities: Latino parents' and adolescents' perspectives. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 35, 395-426. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558419864022>

Positionality statement:

As in all research, it is helpful to understand our positionality and, therefore, our lens on the data. The first and second authors are White U.S.-born scholars with expertise in youth's organized after-school activities. The third author is a first-generation immigrant scholar from Central America who identifies as Latina. The fourth author is a U.S.-born scholar of Mexican descent who identifies as Mexican. The third and fourth authors have expertise in Latino immigration and the development of Latino adolescents, respectively; the native language of both is Spanish. All authors worked as a team having regular discussions to ensure the study was guided by their collective cultural knowledge and expertise. This was a collaborative team project that ensured the study was sensitive and appropriate to the context in which it was conducted.

What was documented in this positionality statement:

- Current geographical location
- Geographical place of birth
- Race / ethnicity

Review Articles

Example #1:

Few-Demo, A., Humble, A., Curran, M. A., & Lloyd, S. (2016). Queer theory, intersectionality, and LGBT-parent families: Transformative critical pedagogy in family theory. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 8, 74-94. doi: 10.1111/jftr.12127

Positionality statement:

To begin this conversation, we first briefly describe our own positionality. All four of us are middle- or late-career academics. Our doctoral training is primarily in human development and family studies (HDFS) programs, and both Few-Demo and Humble have some women's studies education. Few-Demo was trained earlier on in graduate school about queer and/or intersectionality theories and scholarship when she obtained a graduate certificate in women's studies and had Black feminist scholars as mentors, while the rest of us sought this knowledge during our academic careers once we were teaching family theory courses (Humble also completed a women's studies minor as part of her doctoral program, and was introduced to queer theory and intersectionality theory, but for many years struggled with how to incorporate this knowledge into her own family studies scholarship and teaching). We have varying levels of experience teaching family theory courses (at undergraduate and graduate levels) and with integrating queer and intersectional scholarship specific to LGBT-parent families. Finally, we all teach or have taught in HDFS departments. Lloyd also taught within a women's, gender and sexuality program.

What was documented in this positionality statement:

- Career status
- Classes that are typically taught
- Content of doctoral training

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- doi.org/10.1177/1745691620927709 (see page 11)