From Accountability to Disclosure: A Citation Analysis of Positionality Statements in HCI

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Positionality statements have grown rapidly in HCI, yet their theoretical grounding remains unclear. We conduct a citation analysis of ACM DL publications making claims about positionality statements, together with the literature they cite. From 36 papers we extract 48 excerpts citing 26 distinct works. Only 9 of those works engage with positionality statements as the concept is used in HCI, and only 3 offer affirmative and robust grounding. Citation practices transform reflexivity's processual accountability into formalized disclosure, and redirect standpoint epistemology from elevating marginalized knowledge towards centring researcher identities. Positionality statements, as currently theorized, therefore risk undermining the goals of accountability and epistemic justice they seek to advance. We suggest resisting formalized disclosure, operationalizing reflexive transparency through process documentation, and re-centring empirical focus on marginalized knowledge. Concerns about the practice have so far been largely conceptual; we provide systematic citational evidence for them.

Positionality statements. Reflexivity. Standpoint epistemology. Citation analysis. Peer review.

1. INTRODUCTION

Positionality statements are commonly presented as providing additional context on researchers, thus offering transparency and accountability (Holmes 2020; Schlesinger et al. 2017). This is premised on a social constructivist understanding of knowledge challenging positivist paradigms where knowledge is objective and independent of the observer, what Haraway (1988) described as a view from "nowhere". The practice has gained popularity across several disciplines, and in some cases has become a requirement (Savolainen et al. 2023; Sweet 2021). Searching the Association for Computing Machinery Digital Library (ACM DL) in April 2024 yielded 186 occurrences, while the same search in May 2026 yielded 1096, nearly a sixfold increase.

Positionality statements are described as encouraging ethical research (Schlesinger et al. 2017), addressing issues of epistemic injustice (Rankin et al. 2021*a*), bias (Bowman et al. 2023) or enabling transparency (Hubbard Cheuoua 2021). These often manifest in links to established scholarly traditions like standpoint epistemology and reflexivity, premised on a similar understanding of knowledge as situated. In parallel, positionality statements have been critiqued as perfunctory (Sriprakash and Mukhopadhyay 2019) and inadequately addressing power dynamics in research (Probst 2015). A recent study of researchers' attitudes towards positionality statements cautioned that "current formulations can reinforce colonial or patriarchal power structures and be oppressive to those with least power in our community" (Singh et al. 2025).

Given the multiple understandings of positionality statements in HCI, we examine its foundations through a citation analysis (Nicolaisen 2007) of publications that ground it on citations to other work. We collected publications in the ACM DL that mentioned the term until April of 2024. These were analysed together with the specific passages grounding positionality statements on cited literature. Our analysis reveals fragilities and tensions in this scholarly scaffolding, as well as a mismatch between many of the claims made and the supporting literature, particularly the two traditions most commonly drawn upon: standpoint epistemology and reflexivity. We suggest recovering HCI's interest in reflexivity and standpoint epistemology by resisting formalized disclosure, embracing foundational ideas of transparency and empirically re-centring on marginalized voices. We join Singh et al. (2025) in examining the rapid institutionalization of the practice and its effects on the peer-review system.

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2. BACKGROUND

Generally speaking, positionality statements range from a written *"description of an authors' identity as it relates to the research topic"* (Savolainen et al. 2023) to a more involved *"explanation of how the researcher developed and how they became the researcher they are then"* (Holmes 2020). While the practice lacks a clear scholarly origin, it is fast-growing across disciplines, with increasing calls for positionality statements to become regular research practice (Holmes 2020; Schlesinger et al. 2017; Secules et al. 2021), and even mandatory (Morton et al. 2022). Some journals, like Cell, require positionality statements (Sweet 2021).

2.1. Social Constructivist Origins

Positionality statements stem from recognizing the meaningful relationship between researcher, participants and knowledge. This resonates with social constructivist understandings of science, where knowledge making was studied as a social practice (Latour and Woolgar 1986) — challenging objectivist accounts premised on a dissociation of the researcher. Haraway argued that erasing the observer from knowledge making was not only a theoretical impossibility, but akin to seeking a divine perspective she called a "god trick" (Haraway 1988). This perspective from "nowhere" appears disinterested, as though having no particular emotional or experiential attachment to the knowledge being produced. Such disinterest, or "modesty" (Haraway 2018, p.32), naturalizes particular perspectives as universal or objective. Historically, "modesty" was the privilege of a *"[g]entlemen's epistemological agency"* (Haraway 2018, p.32) — gentlemen being seen as impartial observers of unfolding phenomena.

In contrast with such dispassionate neutrality lies the knowledge of *"colored, sexed and laboring persons"* who were seen as tainted by *"bias or special interest"* (Haraway 2018, p.32). Standpoint epistemology shared similar concerns advocating for re-centring the perspectives of those who experience the situations being researched — often marginalized groups deemed too close to, or biased towards, the phenomena being studied. Standpoint epistemology makes the commonsensical argument that *"some nonepistemic features related to an agent's social identity make a difference to what an epistemic agent is in a position to know"* (Toole 2019). It frames positionality as "not simply an interested position (interpreted as bias) but interested in the sense of being engaged" (Hartsock 2004).

Another key tradition, reflexivity, recognizing the importance of the observer, suggests self-examination at every stage of the research process (Sultana 2007). It challenges researchers to examine power dynamics between themselves, participants, and the research (Sriprakash and Mukhopadhyay 2019), seeking to provide "accountability for knowledge produced" (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002, p.119). In practice reflexivity entails thorough documentation of choices made (Probst 2015; Clarke and Braun 2021), critically concerned with process rather than disclosure (Probst 2015). Beyond accountability (Green 2019), reflexivity seeks ethical (Tracy 2010), rich (Rose 1997; Folkes 2023), transparent (Liang et al. 2021) and reliable (Parson 2019) research.

2.2. Within HCI

There is an increasing interest in positionality statements within HCI, with a growing number of publications recommending its utility and inclusion as a regular part of research (Schlesinger et al. 2017; Scheuerman et al. 2020). Positionality statements have become regularly associated with reflexivity, namely as practical implementations of transparency (Liang et al. 2021; Hubbard Cheuoua 2021) or as promoting more ethical engagement (Schlesinger et al. 2017). Reflexive practice in HCI has a long history with Rode (2011) arguing for a more explicit positioning of researchers as a way to enrich analysis and render work more accountable. Positionality statements are often understood as providing such benefits (Bardzell and Bardzell 2011). As Liang et al. (2021) put it, "in practice, positionality has led researchers to openly discuss how their own positions based on their race, class, gender, and other social/power categories may influence their work". Positionality statements are suggested to provide important information regarding the context of research and the authors' interpretive work (Scheuerman et al. 2021; Schlesinger et al. 2017).

Recently Singh et al. (2025) found variability in how positionality statements are linked to analytic decisions, at times resembling box-ticking rather than substantively tied to study design. This echoes broader critiques on how the adoption of methods often risks stripping away their methodological sensibilities. Boehner et al. (2007) discussed how 'cultural probes' were adopted as a technique, often losing their interpretivist stance. Similarly, Rode (2011) described reflexivity as inherently incomplete and therefore resisting closure. While the critical examination of positionality statements is nascent in HCI, there are broader critiques worth revisiting.

2.3. General Critiques

Critique of positionality statements has focused on their simplistic (Secules et al. 2021), arbitrary (Savolainen et al. 2023; Ferreira 2024) and

static manifestations, often embodying what Folkes (2023) called 'shopping list' positionality. Many argue that positionality inherently resists formalization (Sriprakash and Mukhopadhyay 2019; Folkes 2023) and that researchers' biases might not be available to them (Gemignani 2011). More practically, disclosure creates anonymity challenges in peer-review (Savolainen et al. 2023; Liang et al. 2021).

Formal disclosure of positionality, while seemingly acknowledging situatedness, can be seen as an attempt to "transcend" it (Haraway 2018, p.37) through introspection. As Pillow suggests *"we do not escape from the consequences of our positions by talking about them endlessly"* (Pillow 2003). Self-disclosure can be a distraction from the research focus (Finlay 2002), by foregrounding the researchers and their epistemic agency, while overlooking more significant power dynamics (Sriprakash and Mukhopadhyay 2019) and inequalities (Finlay 2002).

Furthermore, disclosure can *"be misused to imply that issues of inequity, bias, and misunderstanding have been adequately addressed just because the researcher is aware of them."* (Probst 2015), turning it into a perfunctory act (Sriprakash and Mukhopadhyay 2019). Finlay (2002) suggests that the apparent openness of researchers can turn into claims of authority and credibility through a pre-emptive acknowledgment of generic forms of bias rather than specific ones which might not be immediately available. Pillow (2003) equates this to confession, shielding researchers from the critical scrutiny that reflexivity encourages. While positionality statements are articulated as part of "radical, anti-objectivist programmes" (Lynch 2000), incorporating the position of the researcher as a way to mitigate bias is paradoxically well suited to conventional, "objectivist", research (Lynch 2000). Rather than spurring reflection, positionality statements can serve as a "reassurance of intellectual objectivity" (Gani and Khan 2024).

3. METHODOLOGY: CITATION ANALYSIS

To understand the epistemic foundations of positionality statements we examine citation patterns within their relevant citational context (Nicolaisen 2007; Ding et al. 2014). Citations are a central mechanism through which concepts attain scholarly legitimacy, or "closure" (Latour and Woolgar 1986, p.15). The rapid growth of positionality statements suggests quickly expanding citation networks. Citation analysis, at this early point of expansion, is productive in examining these foundations before they become sedimented, after which "the cost of disputing the claims increases proportionally" (Latour 1987, p.83).

3.1. Data Collection

We curated three mutually constitutive datasets. First, we gathered publications in the ACM DL where claims are made about positionality statements by citing other work, which we call *Primary Literature*. Secondly, we compiled the claims made in the Primary Literature in their citational context as *Selected Excerpts*. Finally, the publications cited in the Selected Excerpts were collected under *Foundational Literature*. Identification and interpretation of excerpts were done separately by both authors. Subsequently, every excerpt identified as relevant was jointly discussed, particularly where interpretations differed. Final decisions arose from consensus.

In the spirit of reflexive transparency (Tracy 2010), we detail the criteria used at each stage and highlight edge cases. A full overview of all Selected Excerpts in their citational context, the Primary Literature they were collected from and the Foundational Literature they refer to, is available online[1]. Figure 1 in the appendix offers a visual overview of the process for clarity.

3.1.1. Primary Literature

On the 6th of April 2024 we collected publications in the ACM DL containing the terms: "positionality statement", "researcher positionality", or "statement of positionality", and 186 instances were manually downloaded. We added an often cited publication that didn't mention "positionality statement" but included an "Author Self-Disclosure" (Schlesinger et al. 2017) in the same spirit.

From the resulting 187 publications, we removed 15 containing the search terms coincidentally. The 172 remaining publications were examined for claims about positionality statements referencing other work. This resulted in 36 publications, which constitute our Primary Literature. The other 136 publications drew on positionality statements without any citations, indicating their quick naturalization.

3.1.2. Selected Excerpts

From the Primary Literature, we gathered all claims made about positionality statements citing other work. Preserving their citational context resulted in a total of 48 excerpts[2]. While identifying these excerpts was mostly straightforward, there were edge cases that required further deliberation. The full list is available online[1].

Direct: Citing support for positionality statements clearly, e.g. *"Positionality statements situate the context from which the research was conducted and*

[1] https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21707683
[2] We mark these with '*' to differentiate them from our bibliography.

the authors have conducted and interpreted it (Attia and Edge 2017)" (Scheuerman et al. 2021)*.

Implied: Referencing adjacent concepts, implying support for positionality statements. E.g. referencing reflexivity: *"Researchers are encouraged to engage in reflexivity to bring honesty and transparency to their work (Tracy 2010)"* (Hubbard Cheuoua 2021)*.

Exclusions: While most exclusions were straightforward (i.e. no supporting citations) there were edge cases. An illustrative case is the referencing of examples of disclosure: *"Explicit author self-disclosures were often embedded in the methodology section* [list of references]*"* (Schlesinger et al. 2017). Initially included by one of the authors as supporting positionality statements through citations, it was ultimately excluded as merely providing examples rather than epistemic support. Including such passages would ultimately weaken any claims made regarding the construction of positionality statements.

3.1.3. Foundational Literature

We collected a total of 26 distinct cited works. Two of these (i.e. (Schlesinger et al. 2017; Liang et al. 2021)) were part of the original 187 publications gathered from the ACM DL. Publications in the Foundational Literature were analysed for:

Relevance: *Are positionality statements discussed explicitly? What understanding of positionality statement is put forth by the publication (if any)? What other concepts and theories discussed might be related to positionality statements?*

Quality: *Are publications peer-reviewed or of otherwise scholarly quality?*

Substantiation: *How are positionality statements grounded within the publication itself? What other work is cited in its support? And recursively, how do these meet the above criteria of "Quality"?*

Furthermore, we refer to sources as *affirmative* if they directly advocate, endorse or support the validity of positionality statements — rather than mentioning them in passing or discussing them critically. Grounding is said to be *robust* where the source is peer-reviewed and substantiates its claims through argument or evidence internal to the work, rather than by onward citation to introductory or non-scholarly material (see Section 4.1).

3.2. Scope and Delimitations

Citation analysis is only one way to unpack a concept, narrowly focused on its epistemologization. Claims are evaluated exclusively in relation to the underlying scholarship cited in its support. This is distinct from content analysis, such as the work by Singh et al. (2025). All inferences are made at the excerpt-in-context level, not at the paper level, to avoid overgeneralizing beyond what is actually cited.

Secondly, analysing the 187 initial publications and the 26 in the Foundational Literature is a significant undertaking for an interpretive approach, often requiring close readings of dense theory (e.g. Harding (1993)) carefully examining it against claims made. The same search in May 2026 yielded a total of 1096 publications, nearly a sixfold increase, rendering our approach impractical. We therefore chose to analyse these first years of the concept's institutionalization.

Thirdly, we likely missed publications that used adjacent terminology, such as "reflexivity statement" or "author positionality", though we included these when encountering them as happened with Schlesinger et al. (2017). Our analysis therefore rests on the use of the terms above. While this means some relevant instances were likely missed, we believe the collection captures the dominant citational patterns.

Finally, remaining within the ACM, and excluding other publishers like the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE), is grounded primarily in the need for citation analysis to engage within somewhat cohesive citation networks. While there is permeability between the ACM and IEEE, including both would have likely resulted in two rather distinct citation networks and therefore, distinct phenomena.

4. ANALYSIS

As mentioned, our Primary Literature primarily grounds positionality statements on two scholarly traditions: reflexivity (e.g. Hubbard Cheuoua 2021; Scheuerman et al. 2020; Liang et al. 2021) and, to a lesser extent, standpoint epistemology (e.g. Rankin et al. 2021*a*; Bala et al. 2023). From reflexivity, ideas of transparency and accountability are often invoked as motivations:

> "Researchers are encouraged to engage in reflexivity to bring honesty and transparency to their work (Tracy 2010). This often takes the form of a positionality statement." (Hubbard Cheuoua 2021)*

In some instances, these traditions are cited not only as an inspiration for writing positionality statements, but as directly prescriptive of the practice:

> "Applying standpoint theory (Harding 2004) as the motivation for our research, we include a positionality statement." (Rankin et al. 2021*b*)*

The relationship between positionality statements and these underlying theories is not always as

clearly stated as in the above excerpts. At times, that connection is implied or drawn out from a particular reading of such theories. This is particularly evident in the ways that reflexivity — as a practice of ongoing reflection between the authors and the research — comes to signify, or suggest, a form of disclosure:

> "Reflexivity in research practice establishes the researcher as a lens through which research is conducted; what Attia and Edge call an 'on-going mutual shaping between researcher and research' (Attia and Edge 2017). In other words, the research is shaped by the positionality — the social and political context — of the researcher. In alignment with the feminist practice of reflexively examining one's relationship to one's research, we want to highlight how the positionality of the authors may have shaped this work." (Scheuerman et al. 2020)*

Positionality statements emerge in the Primary Literature as a commonly accepted and well-established practice. This happens implicitly — for instance by the fact that 136 of all collected publications did not feel the need to cite support for it — and explicitly:

> "There is detailed precedent in other fields for including positionality statements in research. Sociology, anthropology, and increasingly HCI introduce positionality (or reflexivity) into research to ground the choices researchers make when defining research questions, methods, and findings (e.g. (Dombrowski et al. 2016; Rode 2011; Attia and Edge 2017))." (Scheuerman et al. 2020)*

In the Primary Literature, positionality statements as a concept and as a writing practice appear primarily linked to reflexivity and standpoint epistemology, with their scholarly status often presumed to be well established. Our analysis reveals tensions in each of these ideas, which will be the focus of the remainder of this analysis. First and foremost, there are generic fragilities in the way that citations and academic sources are deployed in support of the statements made. Secondly, it is worth questioning the interpretation of reflexivity as a matter of formal disclosure and, thirdly, the suitability of positionality statements as a manifestation of standpoint epistemology and its overall suitability in working with marginalized groups. Finally, our analysis reveals a tension between the social constructivist tenets articulated in the construction of positionality statements within the Primary Literature and some of the underlying positivist undertones.

4.1. Foundational Fragilities

Arguably the most surprising finding from our analysis was the fact that from the 26 publications constituting the Foundational Literature, and therefore the scholarly grounds from which positionality statements emerge, we found that only 9 (cf. Table 1 in the appendix) referred to the concept as it is commonly understood and put forth in the Primary Literature. This goes beyond the fact that the remaining 17 publications did not explicitly mention the term "positionality statement" but that they, from our close reading and interpretation, described and discussed concepts that were largely distinct from it, and that we did not manage to find even implicit references to concepts that could be construed as such. To illustrate this issue, consider how Milner IV (2007)'s work appears as sole citation in explaining the value of positionality statements:

> "In an attempt to account, to the greatest degree possible, for the countless 'seen, unseen, and unforeseen dangers' (Milner IV 2007) associated with educational studies in general, and those concerned with sensitive racial and cultural issues in particular, we aim in this section to engage in critical self-reflection by positioning ourselves in relation to the subject of anti-Black racism in CS education." (Belle et al. 2023)*

> "Preparing a positionality statement encourages scholars to reflect on how their backgrounds influence their research procedures and findings (Milner IV 2007)" (Hubbard Cheuoua 2023)*

While in the first excerpt the relationship is implied rather than direct, we included it in the Selected Excerpts given that it is the only citation in a section justifying a positionality statement. In both these excerpts, however, Milner IV (2007)'s work, which is focused on reflexivity as an inwards-oriented practice, does not mention positionality statements, nor does it seem to suggest any practice of disclosure that could be construed as such.

Our analysis reveals this disconnect to be more endemic than could be initially expected. Examining the 9 publications that do refer to positionality statements, we find issues with their standing as authoritative, and affirmative, scholarship on the matter. For instance, 2 of those are not traditional peer-reviewed publications, Savin-Baden and Major (2023) being an introductory manual for pedagogical purposes and Erete et al. (2018) a short ACM Interactions piece. In both cases, positionality statements do not appear prominently, with the latter publication only briefly mentioning it in reference to Schlesinger et al. (2017), one of the 9 publications already in our Foundational Literature. A second issue emerged in 3 of the remaining publications, which mention positionality statements either very briefly or even in a somewhat critical and reserved manner. For example, Roberts et al. (2020) is centrally concerned with tackling racial diversity, and mentions positionality statements in passing as

one of many possible strategies that might be worth exploring, and Folkes (2023) is mostly critical of the practice. Importantly, we should note that Liang et al. (2021) — the most widely cited work in the Selected Excerpts — does acknowledge the practice while cautioning its use specifically *"under the pretense of epistemic injustice and exploitation"* (Liang et al. 2021). Finally, it is worth examining Holmes (2020) cited 4 different times in the Selected Excerpts. While arguably making the most emphatic case for positionality statements, both as a solid scholarly construct, as well as advocating for its utility in practice, a closer reading reveals concerns in how the author grounds those claims. Without being exhaustive, it is immediately apparent that the work constructs its understanding by citing three different publications: two introductory manuals (Savin-Baden and Major 2023; Sikes 2004), one of which, by Savin-Baden and Major (2023), was already discussed above. The third reference used appears only as an in-text citation and is absent from the publication's bibliography.

Of the 26 works in the Foundational Literature, then, only 9 pertain to the concept, and only 3 (i.e. Schlesinger et al. 2017; Secules et al. 2021; Bardzell and Bardzell 2011) represent affirmative and robust scholarly grounds. Finally, in contrast with the sentiment that positionality statements have robust and well-established traditions beyond HCI, it is worth noting that 2 of these 3 publications are published in CHI. Before moving on to deeper aspects of the analysis we should reiterate that our analytical scope is unable to evaluate any potential utility or value of the practice as suggested, or enacted, by the publications analysed. We are exclusively examining how the concept has gained legitimacy over time, through citation chains, and evaluating the quality of those connections.

4.2. Reflexivity as a Formalized Concern

Reflexivity is the most common influence found in the Primary Literature. Through our analysis we found this relationship established along three mechanisms worth examining in more detail: 1) emphasizing the validity of citations used, 2) a selective understanding of reflexivity as formalized while downplaying its processual nature, and 3) an interpretation of critique into an affirmative case which is otherwise mostly absent.

Reflexivity is generally presumed to be in relation to, or calling for, positionality statements. This is notable in several of the Selected Excerpts, namely those by Scheuerman et al. (2020) and Hubbard Cheuoua (2021) previously expanded in the analysis. In the first case, the authors cite three publications (i.e. Dombrowski et al. 2016; Rode 2011; Attia and Edge 2017) that prominently refer to reflexivity, while not directly dealing with positionality statements. This is also the case in the second excerpt's citing of Tracy (2010). There is a clear ambiguity as to whether the citations are being used in direct support of positionality statements or simply referencing reflexivity. While a case could be made for the latter, we find that their citational context — paragraphs explaining the utility and value of positionality statements — serves as legitimation.

A second and related link to reflexivity, presumed in much of the corpus analysed, lies in a particular interpretation of its processual aspects, like "transparency" (e.g. Hubbard Cheuoua 2021; Liang et al. 2021) or a shared commitment to interpretive research (Scheuerman et al. 2020). Broader understandings of reflexivity, including those put forth by publications within the Foundational Literature such as Tracy (2010) and Attia and Edge (2017), for example, tend to associate these ideas with ongoing and largely introspective efforts at all stages of research. Common elements of reflexive approaches typically involve recurrent meetings within the research team, renegotiation of the research engagement, as well as constant documentation throughout (Finlay 2002; Probst 2015). These commonly understood aspects of reflexivity appear reinterpreted as calls for a more formal mechanism of self-disclosure. For instance, in Hubbard Cheuoua (2021) the authors suggest that *"while reflexivity should influence all phases of research, the outcomes are normally reduced to brief paragraphs in papers [...] likely to allow more space for greater description of other study aspects like findings"*. While we agree with this observation in isolation, what is interesting here is how it is offered not as indicative of a critical — perhaps intractable — tension between positionality statements and reflexive practice, but rather as a way to further legitimate the need for even more extensive forms of positionality statements.

Overall, and as a final point, there is a notable and significant absence of a clear, explicit, and affirmative case for positionality statements within the Foundational Literature. From a citation analysis perspective, it is worth noting how this case is built instead by drawing from more critical perspectives. Consider how positionality statements are affirmed in the following excerpt:

> "We suggest, echoing Liang et al. (Liang et al. 2021), that positionality statements need not always include identity characteristics" (Sannon and Forte 2022)*.

The cited publication by Liang et al. (2021) provides a nuanced discussion of positionality statements and their distinct status from broader understandings

of reflexivity. In particular, its authors reflect on the inevitable partiality of disclosure as well as the limited utility and potential risks of including identity characteristics. In the excerpt above, this critical discussion of positionality statements and their overall value in scholarly work is reinterpreted as a practical matter to be resolved. The affirmative case for positionality statements is constructed through a partial acknowledgment of limitations that somewhat imply its overall validity. Liang et al. (2021) is important here since, despite outlining several of the issues surrounding positionality statements, it is the most commonly cited work in the Foundational Literature, where at times it is presented as unequivocally prescribing the practice:

> "Positionality statement: It is necessary to share the context of our positionality in relation to our participants, due to the sensitive nature of our research focus (i.e., social VR harassment targeting women) and how our identities and cultural backgrounds may influence our analysis and interpretation of the data (Liang et al. 2021)" Schulenberg et al. (2023)*

Our analysis reveals how literature constructs an understanding of positionality statements as proximal, even a consequence of reflexivity, by citing publications that predominantly refer exclusively to reflexivity, while implying or explicitly drawing out a clear connection between the two concepts. This results in the absence of a clear affirmative case for positionality statements from the citations and references used, one that is built through several mechanisms of reinterpretation, such as the incorporation of critique as a practical matter to be resolved or even as a direct form of scholarly support. The result is an emerging conflation between reflexive traditions — centred on process, documentation, and introspection — with a formalized concern around self-disclosure.

4.3. Standpoint Epistemology Turned Inwards

Affirmative cases for positionality statements tend to emerge in work that is concerned with matters of marginalization and epistemic justice, grounding its value in traditions like standpoint theory as well as reflexivity. However, our analysis shows some issues in that grounding, namely 1) it tends to transform standpoint theory's focus on elevating marginalized voices into an inward turn, and 2) it seems to re-purpose concerns within reflexivity literature around the value of positionality statements in these matters, into support.

Standpoint epistemology appears as the second most prominent academic tradition cited in the Primary Literature, with an edited volume by Harding (2004) being cited in 9 of the Selected Excerpts. Standpoint epistemology resists a singular formal methodology as the cited volume amply demonstrates by incorporating a wide variety of often contradictory perspectives — none of which relate directly to positionality statements per our close reading. Despite these rich and deep theoretical tensions, standpoint epistemology is cited as prescriptive of positionality statements:

> "Applying standpoint theory (Harding 2004) as the motivation for our research, we include a positionality statement." (Rankin et al. 2021*b*)*

Such a prescriptive understanding is found across the Primary Literature (e.g. Rankin et al. 2021*a*; Venn-Wycherley et al. 2024; Xu et al. 2023). While standpoint epistemology resists a reductive understanding, there are some core aspects which are worth contrasting here. Toole (2019) attempts a distilling of its more widely accepted characteristics, which revolve around an understanding that people's experiences affect their knowledge of a particular situation and that marginalized groups have traditionally been excluded from formal knowledge-making practices (Toole 2019) in favour of those from *"dominant standpoints"* (Toole 2019). The "dominant standpoints" Toole (2019) refers to are partly those of researchers who historically privileged their own perspectives rather than those of marginalized voices. Highlighting these "epistemic injustices" (Toole 2019) has helped raise awareness over important matters such as adequate participant representation and spurred reflections over what constitutes a just research engagement with vulnerable groups. Put simply, standpoint epistemology's core commitment is to address epistemic injustices by looking outwards, elevating the voices of those affected by an issue who have traditionally been overlooked, ignored and/or deemed unreliable. In contrast, the understanding of positionality statements that emerges from our analysis leverages standpoint epistemology to, paradoxically, suggest the importance of further highlighting the perspectives of those in traditionally dominant positions — researchers, their situations and perspectives.

The interpretation of reflexivity in the Primary Literature plays a formative role here as well. Consider Green (2019), a publication in the Foundational Literature that offers reflexivity as a suggestion to treat *"one's own scientific inquiry as a subject of analysis"* (Green 2019). In the text, the author is critical of research operating through simplistic formalisms and statements of intentions. For instance, the author argues that research explicitly framed as engaged in "social good" will often lack a deeper reflexive engagement and questioning of its own premises and therefore, rather than achieve those intended goals, is *"likely*

to reproduce the exact forms of social oppression [they] seek to dismantle" (Green 2019). Green's call for reflexivity as an ongoing and complex process, and a resistance to formal statements of intentions, is cited as implying support for the practice of writing positionality statements:

> "Positionality statements are one way to situate ourselves and contextualize our research, problems, data, and solutions. They are tools which allow us the opportunity to reflect on what we see (and what we might miss); assumptions we may be making; and potential gaps in our knowledge. Research lacking in reflexivity is "likely to reproduce the exact forms of social oppression" we are trying to prevent (Green 2019)." (Devinney et al. 2022)*

While the notion that positionality statements are a valuable tool when engaging with marginalized groups is rarely explicitly stated as in the above excerpt, it is clear from our analysis that this implicit assumption is prevalent. Another example where this connection is explicitly made is found in:

> "Positionality statements are an important aspect of community-engaged research, especially when working with marginalized populations (Liang et al. 2021)" (O'Leary et al. 2022)*

A close reading of Liang et al. (2021) is illuminating here once again, as the authors reflect specifically on this matter but offer a somewhat different consideration than the one presented above. In their text, the authors caution that the practice of reflexivity, when interpreted as "self-disclosure" (Liang et al. 2021), should be *"especially important to contest under the pretense of epistemic injustice and exploitation"*. This critical reflection on the limits of positionality statements (similarly to the concerns by Green (2019) above) is almost entirely overlooked. This is the case not only in the excerpt above, but throughout the Primary Literature that relies on Liang et al. (2021) as its most common citation.

Our analysis reveals that standpoint epistemology and reflexivity are often inaccurately leveraged to justify the practice and perceived value of positionality statements. The former by suggesting a concern with the perspective of researchers rather than marginalized voices, and the latter, by drawing on critiques over its utility in these specific matters as a justification. It is important to note that our analysis is not meant as an indictment of the work analysed and is uniquely focused on their scholarly understanding of positionality statements, an arguably minor, even marginal aspect of the overall research. Furthermore, we share the overall intentions and goals of addressing matters of epistemic justice and working sensibly with marginalized groups. Rather, we hope to contribute by calling attention to the way positionality statements emerge as a productive mechanism even as the underlying scholarship on which this understanding is built seems to suggest otherwise.

4.4. Describing Positionality

A final, more subtle point that stems from our analysis is a tension between paradigms when describing positionality statements. By and large, authors in the Primary Literature share an understanding of knowledge that could be described as interpretive, situated, socially constructed, partial, and a series of other terms that indicate the indissociable relationship between the observer, researcher, or knowledge producer, and the knowledge produced. Positionality statements seemingly emerge from a concern to address, mitigate, or at least make visible, the effects and potential biases that researchers bring to their research practice. This is shared across the corpus and is implicit in many of the excerpts produced in the analysis so far. Describing researcher positionality adds value as suggested by Venn-Wycherley et al. (2024):

> "The positionality of the researcher cannot always be mitigated, nor should it be, as it provides rich insight into the design and interpretation of research (Cope 2014)" (Venn-Wycherley et al. 2024)*

Many of the publications seem to understand positionality statements as a departure from previous traditions that relied on paradigms undervaluing the situated nature of observation. While this is for the most part implicit and our interpretation of the Selected Excerpts, Bowman et al. (2023) expresses this sentiment in a way which we find would be widely shared by other authors:

> "Disciplines that historically value positivist 'ways of knowing' (including HCI) may struggle with explicit declarations of researcher characteristics and demographics, and may disagree or misunderstand these statements as introducing bias rather than attempting to account for the researcher as an active part of the process (Clarke and Braun 2021)". (Bowman et al. 2023)*

Alongside the apparent paradigm shift lies a parallel understanding of positionality statements as a formal mechanism that, through additional descriptive work, is able to mitigate biases and produce more accurate representations of knowledge. While this analysis of the Selected Excerpts relies on a somewhat more interpretive reading of the corpus, it is reinforced by the recurrent use of terminology around "accounting" (Bowman et al. 2023; Belle et al. 2023), "reporting" (Corbett et al. 2023; Venn-Wycherley et al. 2024), or even "disclosure" (Liang et al. 2021; Freeman and Acena 2022; Li et al. 2023).

There is a sense in which reflexivity, understood as disclosure, bypasses its traditional focus on the limits of self-knowledge and assumes that *"positionalities are knowable"* (Sultana 2007). Describing researcher positionality as a means to mitigate, or minimize, the impact of their situatedness is in direct tension with underlying reflexive and critical traditions where that relationship is understood as inherent and productive. Tracy (2010) argues this derives from *"realist paradigms that aimed to rid research of subjective bias"* (Tracy 2010), while Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991) describes researcher bias, within an interpretive context, not as something to be mitigated but rather leveraged, an inherent feature and a resource that researchers "bring to the study" (Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991). More critically, as Pillow (2003) notes, self-disclosure raises immediate concerns around the ability of authors to provide accurate, meaningful, and accountable representations.

5. DISCUSSION

Our analysis reveals significant issues in the grounding of positionality statements within HCI, whose legitimacy is partly derived from standpoint epistemology and reflexivity through a reinterpretation and selective reading of cited sources. Reflexivity is drawn upon to justify formalistic understandings of positionality statements — despite its processual nature — while standpoint epistemology suggests its suitability in matters of epistemic justice. Citation analysis can show how concepts are legitimated and where that legitimation is fragile. It cannot establish what positionality statements do for authors, reviewers or marginalized scholars in practice. While our analysis is empirical and primarily concerned with citational grounding and potential conceptual risks, rather than measured effects, given the issues identified we offer a few points for reflection.

5.1. Resisting Formalized Disclosure

Positionality statements echo familiar patterns in how HCI tends to address ethical concerns through formal and standardized reporting requirements (Punchoojit and Hongwarittorrn 2015; Brown et al. 2016), with Singh et al. (2025) warning against positionality statements turning into an exercise in box-ticking devoid of meaningful reflections on actual impact. Guidelines and aspects of formalization can serve important functions, such as protecting the privacy of participants or helping researchers balance potential harms and benefits of research (Niksirat 2023). However, for these concepts to institutionalize and integrate submission requirements, or peer-review guidelines, they should be predicated on robust scholarly grounding, something positionality statements currently fail to demonstrate. This risks transforming thoughtful methodological concerns into superficial requirements that, rather than illuminate relevant power dynamics, may further obscure them.

For instance, transparency, within reflexive traditions, is largely understood as an aspirational, ongoing process based on extensive documentation. Rather than disclosure the goal is to provide rich and often indeterminate analysis, so "the reader can personally critique the credibility of the study and substantiate the interpretations" (Cope 2014). In contrast, transparency in the context of positionality statements, places the onus on the researcher to select a narrow and arbitrary set of characteristics to highlight to the reader, running counter to both natural "blind spots to self-scrutiny" (Probst 2015) and inherent conflicts of interest. It is in this spirit that they have been critiqued for signalling good intentions, while pre-emptively shielding researchers from scrutiny (e.g. Sriprakash and Mukhopadhyay 2019; Finlay 2002; Pillow 2003).

Similar tensions have been raised around Responsible AI, where impact statements, model cards and fairness checklists have been proposed as accountability mechanisms (Olteanu et al. 2023). Madaio et al. (2020) show that checklists function well as prompts for organizational deliberation and poorly as compliance artifacts, a distinction that mirrors reflexivity's processual character (see also Constantinides et al. 2024, on grounding such guidelines in regulation). Positionality statements risk resolving in the compliance direction.

5.2. Transparency and Contestability

Publications present the reader with a narrow and meticulously crafted window into a research project, the complexities of which would be impossible to fully map out and articulate. Adding a statement of self-disclosure is unlikely to provide insight beyond those intended by the author. To quote decolonial thinker Françoise Vergès: *"Biography does not explain everything, and often, it does not explain very much at all"* (Vergès 2019). The offloading of a set of characteristics onto the reader could, in fact, be construed as an abdication of the author's analytical responsibility, upon which reflexivity is predicated. Such disclosure builds on a distinct — even contradictory — understanding of reflexivity's concept of transparency, which calls for a more careful, extensive, and detailed approach to documenting and presenting research. Reflexivity does not call for a separate form of disclosure, but rather making methodological or analytical decisions available to external scrutiny (Finlay 2002; Probst 2015). As others have pointed out, positionality

statements instead offer superficial and formalized relief from the intractable discomforts inherent in research (Pillow 2003; Parson 2019; Gani and Khan 2024). Reflexive transparency seeks to make research more contestable. It is in this spirit that our approach is intentionally reflexive: carefully detailing the criteria and rationale behind every step of our data collection, illustrating edge cases and including the full extent of our Selected Excerpts online[1]. Doing so opens our analysis to scrutiny, rendering it contestable, in the expectation that this would strengthen rather than undermine it.

5.3. Re-centring Marginalized Knowledge

Given that positionality statements are grounded in a tradition committed to elevating marginalized knowledge yet constructed, as our analysis shows, around the researchers' own account of themselves, they risk further endowing researchers with epistemic authority. Paradoxically, rather than addressing existing power differentials, self-disclosure can function as what Tuck and Yang (2021) call *"moves to innocence"* that primarily protect the researcher from discomforts encountered. Standpoint epistemology fundamentally argues for elevating knowledge from marginalized positions, recognizing that those who experience specific contexts and sets of circumstances — such as different forms of oppression — have unique insights into their operation (Toole 2019). The core empirical interest when working in sensitive settings should remain elevating the voices of those who experience them.

5.4. Implications for Peer-Review

Given some of the tensions revealed in our analysis, we echo concerns around the institutionalization of positionality statements as a practice (Singh et al. 2025). This includes their adoption in reviewing guidelines (Kumar 2020) or submission guidelines (e.g. AfriCHI). For transparency, we have been asked on multiple occasions to provide positionality statements during peer review. This is arguably a common experience, and one which we have consistently challenged. To normalize this as institutional practice places an unreasonable burden on authors, particularly junior and marginalized scholars, who may feel compelled to comply with a practice which lacks academic robustness or empirical validity. Liang et al. (2021), the most cited publication in the Foundational Literature, expresses this best: *"Individuals should be able to decide whether or not they want to disclose their own identities, but it is hard to disentangle whether they are doing it for themselves, to please a reviewer, or because they have seen similar statements elsewhere. In HCI, there is little work that explores the nuance of reflexivity and positionality or documents the real-world consequences that many researchers who experience marginalization face when they disclose their identities"* (Liang et al. 2021). Similar and important concerns around anonymity in peer-review have been raised in other fields (e.g. Barusch et al. 2011; Savolainen et al. 2023; McGill et al. 2023; Liang et al. 2021) and recently in HCI as well (Singh et al. 2025).

Rather than requiring positionality statements, reviewing guidance could make explicit that their absence is not a deficiency. Where reviewers seek reflexive accountability, prompts might instead address the research process — how researchers' perspectives shaped design choices, which alternatives were considered, how interpretations were arrived at — rather than who the authors are. Such prompts ask nothing of author identity and thereby avoid the anonymity concerns raised above. This is not an argument against self-disclosure as such: where voluntary, situated, and integrated with the analysis, it may well have value. Our concern is with its institutionalization, where compliance rather than reflection becomes the operative incentive. Whether the practice delivers on its stated aims remains an open empirical question. Our institutional practices, such as the peer-review and publication processes — imperfect as they may be — require care and protection from the creep of demands lacking robust foundations.

6. CONCLUSION

Our work contributes a systematic and critical citation analysis of positionality statements as emerging from the ACM DL. The analysis reveals tensions with the scholarly foundations that are cited in its support, namely the alignment, or lack of, with the principles of reflexivity and standpoint epistemology — transparency, accountability, and the elevation of marginalized voices — upon which they are built. We join recent calls for deeper examination of the practice under rapid institutionalization (Singh et al. 2025).

As Singh et al. (2025) note, there may be utility in self-disclosure, something researchers brought up in interviews. The concrete evaluation of benefits is beyond the scope of our analysis, which focuses exclusively on how the concept is constructed through citations. Therefore, our contribution is also a methodological one, as other widely used concepts may well struggle under similar scrutiny. We hope to encourage others to examine the rapid proliferation of concepts in fast-moving disciplines, where we could benefit from additional efforts in disciplinary synthesis and examination beyond the appeal of novelty.

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Table 1: *Foundational Literature and total citations in the Selected Excerpts. Divided between Foundational Literature that engages with positionality statements (PS) or not.*

Foundational Literature	Total cited papers	Citing Primary Literature
	Engaging with PS	
Liang et al. (2021)	10	(O'Leary et al. 2022; Schulenberg et al. 2023; Sannon and Forte 2022; Salac, Oleson, Armstrong, Le Meur and Ko 2023; Salac, Landesman, Druga and Ko 2023; McGill et al. 2023; Miller and Cooper 2022; Freeman and Acena 2022; Freeman et al. 2022; Li et al. 2023)
Schlesinger et al. (2017)	7	(O'Leary et al. 2022; Schulenberg et al. 2023; Freeman and Acena 2022; Freeman et al. 2022; Li et al. 2023; Liang et al. 2021; Dym et al. 2019)
Holmes (2020)	4	(Salac, Oleson, Armstrong, Le Meur and Ko 2023; Salac, Landesman, Druga and Ko 2023; Liang et al. 2021; Ortloff et al. 2023)
Bardzell and Bardzell (2011)	4	(Schulenberg et al. 2023; Freeman and Acena 2022; Freeman et al. 2022; Li et al. 2023)
Roberts et al. (2020)	2	(Salac, Oleson, Armstrong, Le Meur and Ko 2023; Salac, Landesman, Druga and Ko 2023)
Savin-Baden and Major (2023)	2	(McGill et al. 2023; Taylor et al. 2018)
Secules et al. (2021)	1	(Grande et al. 2022)
Erete et al. (2018)	1	(Liang et al. 2021)
Folkes (2023)	1	(Bowman et al. 2023)
	Not engaging with PS	
Harding (2004)	9	(Rankin et al. 2021*a*,*b*,*c*; Erete, Thomas, Nacu, Dickinson, Thompson and Pinkard 2021; Erete, Rankin and Thomas 2021; Erete et al. 2022, 2023; Xu et al. 2023; Bala et al. 2023)
Dombrowski et al. (2016)	3	(O'Leary et al. 2022; Scheuerman et al. 2020; Sackitey et al. 2023)
Milner IV (2007)	3	(Hubbard Cheuoua 2021, 2023; Belle et al. 2023)
Rose (1997)	2	(Scheuerman et al. 2020, 2021)
Attia and Edge (2017)	2	(Scheuerman et al. 2020, 2021)
England (1994)	1	(Scheuerman et al. 2020)
Clarke and Braun (2021)	1	(Bowman et al. 2023)
Furniss et al. (2011)	1	(Bowman et al. 2023)
Green (2019)	1	(Devinney et al. 2022)
Rode (2011)	1	(Scheuerman et al. 2020)
Bourke (2014)	1	(Corbett et al. 2023)
Tracy (2010)	1	(Hubbard Cheuoua 2021)
Hammer and Berland (2014)	1	(Brown et al. 2024)
Cope (2014)	1	(Venn-Wycherley et al. 2024)
Probst (2015)	1	(Venn-Wycherley et al. 2024)
Finlay (2002)	1	(Venn-Wycherley et al. 2024)
Pillow (2003)	1	(Venn-Wycherley et al. 2024)

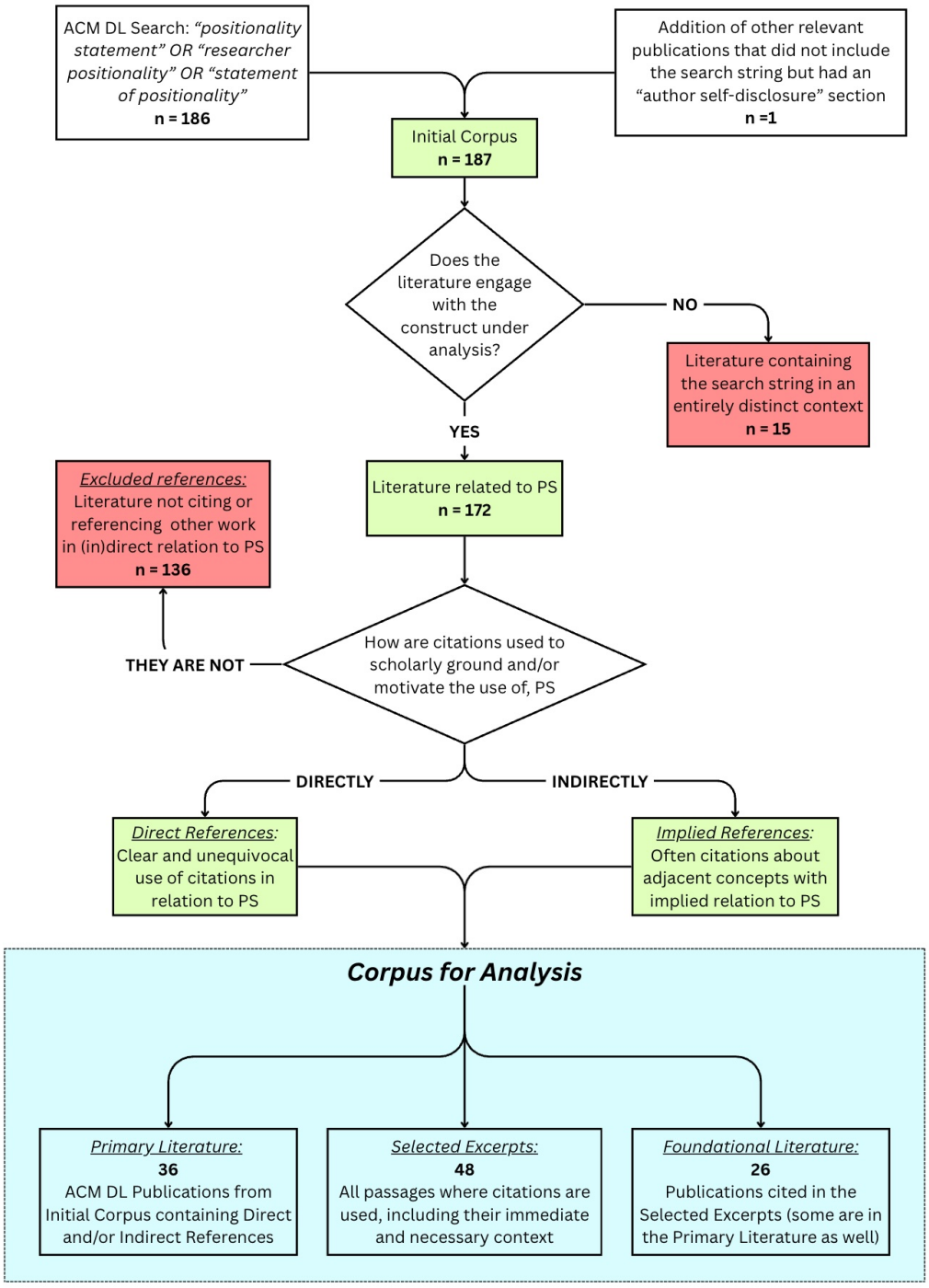


Figure 1: *Illustration of the Data Collection pipeline: April 6, 2024 ACM DL search for 'positionality statement', 'researcher positionality', 'statement of positionality' returned 186 items; one widely cited 'author self-disclosure' paper was added (n=187); 15 off-topic removed → 172; among these, 36 papers made claims about positionality statements supported by citations (Primary Literature); 48 excerpt-in-context units were extracted; these cited 26 distinct works (Foundational Literature)*