# Exploring Positionality in HCI: Perspectives, Trends, and Challenges

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## Abstract

Positionality is a concept that acknowledges subjectivities, values and experiences of researchers as influencing approaches to and outcomes and implications of research; it underlines the importance of reflexivity and self-awareness. To understand how positionality is used in HCI, we conducted two studies: (i) a scoping review of positionality and reflexivity statements in the CHI papers in the last 11 years and (ii) a survey of HCI researchers (n=75). Our findings show that positionality statements are often a box-ticking exercise and their influence on the research is rarely discussed. While positionality statements are often used and requested in papers, they are often restricted to more sensitive areas of research and impact marginalised identities. We argue that positionality statements can be valuable but not as markers of methodological rigour. Our contributions include a current snapshot of positionality in HCI and reflections on the role of positionality statements in HCI.

## CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing** → **Empirical studies in HCI**; **HCI theory, concepts and models**.

## Keywords

Positionality

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## 1 Introduction

Recently, in HCI and other disciplines, there have been increased calls for the explicit description of researcher positionality in papers [60, 67, 81]. Positionality is a concept rooted in the social sciences and critical theory, and centres on the idea that our personal, social, cultural, and contextual backgrounds influence our perceptions, actions, and interactions [10, 29, 83]. Ultimately, knowledge is not value-free [17] and is coloured by the attitudes, values, identities and contexts of researchers, such as their political leanings, social class, ethnicity, religious faith, sexuality, gender, race, geography and so on [24]. Thus, positionality can be used as a lens through which researchers and designers recognise and communicate subjective interpretation of and influences on the research, design, use, and evaluation of interactive systems.

While positionality is not a novel concept, recent work in HCI has seen it gain more prominence (e.g., [60]), and it can be one way to critically examine and question tacit assumptions and practices about how research is conducted in diverse communities [24, 90]. However, what is unclear is how positionality is being actively used and what it 'signals' about researchers and, ultimately, their research. While presentation of positionality is largely viewed positively, some criticise its application as a form of virtue-signalling, or requiring completion as a tick box exercise [34, 88]. In this paper, we explore the role of positionality in HCI, querying how researchers, designers, and reviewers situate themselves within HCI research, writing and peer review processes.

In an effort to understand patterns in the growing inclusion of positionality statements in the HCI literature, we conducted two studies. We ran a scoping review of the academic literature at the CHI conference from 2013-2024, and conducted a survey of HCI scholars who had published at CHI or an equivalent venue in the

past decade with the aim of understanding the practice of positionality within the HCI community. Our scoping review demonstrates how, in recent years, the number of positionality statements included in HCI research papers has increased exponentially. Whilst we find that most published positionality statements focus on researchers' identities, nuanced characteristics - such as religion, location and disabilities status - are also, though less commonly, included. Through our survey of HCI researchers who published at HCI venues, we aimed to elucidate a collective understanding of what the HCI community perceive the 'purpose' of positionality statements to be and how they use them in practice; furthermore we explored perceived advantages and disadvantages of including positionality statements and what makes them meaningful to the work. Finally, we examine their place in the review process.

Our review contributes to an understanding of how positionality statements are 'used' in CHI, and, specifically, how researchers report the relationship between their positionality and the design and conduct of their research. Through this review of over a decade of positionality statements at CHI, we present a rich account of how positionality is reported at CHI and the key contexts in which it is used. Our survey builds on the review and demonstrates the varied nature of what positionality means to HCI researchers, with some seeing it as burdensome while others viewing it as an opportunity for disclosure. Through this work, we argue that positionality statements, in their current form, do not always achieve their purported reflexive goals. In fact, these statements may be responsible for inadvertently perpetuating inequalities and power dynamics between more privileged researchers and contexts and more marginalised counterparts. We also argue that mandating positionality statements through the peer review process also reinforces inequalities and can harm minoritised or marginalised researchers. Finally, we highlight opportunities for the CHI community to critically reflect on its approach to and practice of positionality.

In doing this work, we are not rejecting reflexivity or aligning with positivist perspectives that are critical of positionality. Rather, we highlight the rise of performative positionality and the potential for subsequent inequity and power dynamics that disadvantage certain groups. We are, however, proposing that expression of positionality is not in and of itself sufficient to legitimise research methods or act as a measure of rigour without accompanying reflexivity situating it and defining its influence on the research. We believe that reflexivity can lead to learning, reflecting and sharing of best practice and help the discipline to grow. We do not aim to target these practices in this work, we support them.

## 2 Background

### 2.1 Reflexivity and positionality as multidisciplinary concerns

Reflexivity and positionality are interrelated concepts, drawn from qualitative research and the social sciences, [24, 63, 73, 90], including anthropology, sociology, geography, education, development and feminist studies. These concepts are grounded in an understanding that the researcher is never a neutral party in the research process. Our personal subjectivity, backgrounds, values and beliefs are inextricably embedded within our professional practice, and these are not aspects which can just be 'laid aside' when engaging in research. As qualitative researchers, we are often interested in exploring experience and meaning without assuming that there are fixed or universal truths simply 'out there', waiting to be discovered. Our research questions, methods and even our participants' responses are interactively and culturally shaped and constructed, informed by multiple, shifting factors, such as gender, class, race and age. 'Bias' - or perhaps more neutrally - *subjectivity*, is therefore simply unavoidable and, rather than necessitating avoidance or mitigation, should be explicitly acknowledged and actively operationalised within the research process by way of reflection and transparent description [24]. There are many rich examples of how this may be achieved across multidisciplinary academic literature. For example, through the process of reflecting on their positionality and what it means to be in the field, Bilgen et al. [8] demonstrate how unequal power relations at all levels complicate the interactions and exchanges between researchers and participants, while Schnazel & Porter [89] discuss the role of gender in the context of research interactions, the need to navigate personal safety and its potential impact on the research.

Indeed, the concepts of reflexivity and positionality are based on two fundamental premises: (i) that the researcher *is the data collection tool* and that, as such (ii) the researcher is the vehicle by which data is generated, interpreted, analysed and thus *co-created* with participants. Savin-Baden and Major [87] suggest that exposition of positionality can offer insight into the position that the researcher has (ideally) intentionally adopted within their work and situates the researcher in relation to three key aspects [63, 87]: (i) the topic of investigation, (ii) the study participants, and (iii) the research design and process.

Positionality and reflexivity, though related, are conceptually distinct. Positionality is a way for researchers to position themselves, consciously or unconsciously, in relation to the research context, influenced by spatial, temporal, and sociopolitical factors. It encompasses personal characteristics such as gender or racial identity, age, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, language, institutional affiliation, lived experiences, biases, theoretical, political and ideological perspectives, and, crucially, *emotional reactions* to participants [3, 13, 33, 43], which influence the research process. Positionality is dynamic and context-dependent and varies with social norms, political climates, and historical contexts.

Reflexivity, on the other hand, involves critically examining one's own role, assumptions, and influence throughout the research process. Kirby and McKenna [56] invite us to view reflexivity as a process of acknowledging and unpacking our "conceptual baggage", of engaging in a process of continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation in order to interrogate the assumptions, idiosyncratic concepts, and informal theoretical frameworks we live by. Reflexivity invites us to think about how we conduct ourselves in the research process [108] through engaging with our identity and positionality. It involves being aware of how one's positionality affects aspects such as interacting with participants, framing the questions, and interpreting the data [108]. Reflexivity can be a tool for situating and adapting positionality within each research scenario by helping researchers to acknowledge (and explain) how their positionality impacts the research context.

Positionality is also considered in part as a way to challenge and subvert the didactic and dispassionate perspective often referred

to as the "god trick" (a term popularised by Donna Haraway)[44]. The "god trick" describes a claim to knowledge that appears universal, neutral, and detached from any specific context or perspective. By openly acknowledging subjectivity (emphasising that all knowledge is created from the researcher's standpoint), situating knowledge (by highlighting how research findings are influenced by a researcher's positionality and context) and embracing plurality (recognising that no single viewpoint can encompass the full complexity of human experience), clear expression of positionality works hard to challenge this notion of objective 'truth'.

Reflexivity and positionality are meant to invite us to "approach our work with epistemological unease" [96] and embrace the reality that working with participants in a research context cannot be 'unbiased' because we simply cannot be objective, empty vessels. Furthermore, regardless of our own self-perception, we cannot determine how others choose to see us or what information they choose to share with us [88]. This is arguably true for all forms of scientific investigation. Indeed, extending this epistemological unease beyond social science can be extremely uneasy indeed for those who assume that bias, subjectivity or skewedness in research is fundamentally undesirable [24]. However, while some view this as a reliability problem, others argue that these different ways of seeing simply provide a richer understanding of complex phenomena [5, 60, 73, 90]. Futhermore, we argue that the explicit acknowledgement of our own position in this process contributes to methodological transparency, rigour, and *quality*. As Malterud [63] reminds us: "Preconceptions are not the same as bias, unless the researcher fails to mention them" (p. 484).

The relationship between positionality and methodological rigour is an important one and the persistent dominance of quantitative approaches in academic critical appraisal has resulted in qualitative methodologies typically being banished to the base of the evidence hierarchy, languishing somewhere in the gap between 'expert opinion' and 'reports' (e.g., [107]). The diversity of qualitative methodologies and underpinning epistemologies contributes to the difficulty of demonstrating the value and intellectual integrity of qualitative work. Quality frameworks and reporting checklists for qualitative methodologies do exist [98, 113] and share an expectation of explicit description of authorial reflexivity and positionality. It is suggested that by including reflection about who we are - and why this might matter - the reader can monitor the interaction between the researcher and the participants as a way of critically evaluating the rigour of the work [50].

In parallel to the question of methodological rigour is the matter of trust. A researcher's approach to revealing and reflecting on their positionality should demonstrate where and how they feel their influence has shaped the research, enabling the reader to make an informed judgment about the impact of the researcher on the research process [24]. While positionality may be one way to establish methodological rigour, several researchers have argued that it is not enough. Savolainen et al. [88] highlight three issues with positionality statements: "(i) they are subjective and constrained by the very positionality they seek to address, (ii) they are unnecessary as bias reduction in research should not hinge on the biographical details of individual scholars but on the integrity and rigour of the process, and (iii) they undermine the impartiality of research" [88].

Reflexivity and positionality can and should be employed to legitimize, validate, and critically examine research practices and representations (rather than the researchers themselves). However, putting reflexivity and positionality into practice and demonstrating this within academic reporting presents unique challenges.

While explicit understanding of authorial positionality can be a critical component of rigorous, transparent and trustworthy qualitative research practice, at which point of the research should it be done? And how? As will be discussed, positionality is often illustrated by little more than a brief statement, typically detailing a variety of personal characteristics intended to show how the researcher is a 'good match' for conducting this particular kind of research [34] . Emirbayer and Desmond [28] somewhat pointedly call out this cataloguing of traits as a form of "heroic...self-disclosure", an academic tick-box exercise which shows limited appreciation for the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of knowledge production. Reflexivity and positionality can and should be used to understand, contextualise, and critically examine research practices and representations (rather than the individuals who conduct them), and yet operationalising reflexivity and positionality and demonstrating that we have done so within our academic reporting is uniquely challenging [33, 73, 77]. There is evidence that asking for positionality related disclosures can also lead to harms, especially for marginalised researchers [71]. Others have argued that it "inverts the racism" and power structures of previous generations and has become one way of demonstrating privilege [32, 36, 71]. Arguably, researchers engaged in so-called 'lone-ranger' methodologies such as ethnography, are accustomed to actively integrating reflexive practices into the research process itself. But, researchers conducting other forms of research, especially those working in teams, continue to highlight their challenges in integrating and reporting reflexivity and positionality meaningfully [47].

## 2.2 The turn towards positionality in HCI

The ongoing debate around the role and purpose of reflexivity and positionality is a part of a bigger discussion around ontological, epistemological and axiological aspects of the self, interpersonal subjectivities and the praxis of knowledge creation [7, 40] and nowhere is this more the case than in contemporary academic reporting of HCI research. HCI research is no stranger to the conceptual complexities of positionality, since the introduction of the term to the discipline over 10 years ago, [6] along with subsequent calls for embracing positionality in HCI [6, 31, 59, 91]. HCI research has since continued to build on the ideas of feminist standpoint theory, grappling with the idea that all knowledge is situated or positioned socially, not neutral or disinterested. Bardzell and Bardzell [6] argued that engaging with the principles of feminist HCI methodology requires researchers and practitioners to openly communicate their personal standpoint in the world, disclosing their objectives, values and beliefs related to the research and that this should be an ongoing process of self-inquiry, maintained throughout the research process. Thus, researchers should consistently question whether their work aligns with feminist principles (that science is not value-free, accessing pluralistic experiences equitably, valuing underprivileged voices), contributes to enhancing human well-being, and actively

opposes oppressive social systems. Others have added to this, calling for self-reflection [30] and self-disclosure [92], arguing that disclosing aspects of identity and related impacts to the process of research can support transparency. However, Schlesinger [92] cautions that the value of self-disclosure should be carefully weighed by authors, especially those with marginalised identities, as such disclosures may not always be viewed positively and could even be harmful.

One way of normalising the practice of reflexive disclosure is to recommend that people who do not identify with a marginalised identity or work with marginalised or specific populations also include some form of reflective disclosure [60]. However, this practice can still propagate harm. Indeed, there are alternatives to identity-based disclosures, which can act in different ways to enhance rigour, replicability or trustworthiness of the work, such as providing information that reflects efforts made to design and conduct research ethically, or including information about the authors' cultural context or privilege within it and its perceived influence on the research being undertaken [24].

Despite this alignment of views on the inherent value of including positionality, the methodological challenges of doing so remain troublesome. Bowman et al [11] in their recent paper on the use and application of thematic analysis in HCI healthcare contexts reflect on the practice of including positionality statements in healthcare-related HCI papers. The authors describe the tendency towards simplistic description of geographical location and professional background and, more seriously, highlight a significant parallel problem of methodological weakness also observed in the social sciences in which accounts of reflexive thematic analysis contain no evidence of researcher reflexivity at all. Furthermore, Bowman et al. [11] highlight the specific complexities of balancing reflexivity and positionality with journal or conference anonymisation policies: *"Make sure that no description that can easily reveal authors' names and/or affiliations is included in the submission (e.g., too detailed descriptions of where user studies were conducted)."* [18]

Positionality in contemporary HCI is both "overdetermined and underdefined" [54] and has reached an important tipping point in which positionality statements are frequently expected yet are frequently not employed in a meaningful or appropriate way. This tendency towards performative positionality undermines the very powerful ways in which meaningful demonstration of positionality can tackle structures of hierarchy, patriarchy and colonisation, and enhance methodological rigour [36]. We argue that rather than being satisfied with the enforced inclusion of a positionality statement in our writing, the field of HCI should expect more. Pillow [73] (speaking from a social sciences perspective over a decade ago), reminds us that demonstrating positionality is challenging, clumsy even: "researchers are handling their subjectivity in myriad ways – some accept that they can know who they are and thus state it up-front; others blur the line between themselves and the research subject(s), other texts collapse under the weight of the confessional tale – but all are attempting to account for how they themselves interact and impact the research process". Nonetheless, the discipline of HCI does include rich examples of thoughtfully conducted reflexive work. Some HCI scholars have engaged with the practise of sharing personal narrative accounts, similarly to that in Social Sciences research [27] as a way to highlight reflexive practice, both in carrying out the research and retrospectively. Since Dourish [26] wrote about moving away from reductionist approaches, there has been much discussion in HCI around reflexivity in qualitative methods, ethnographic practices and design [55]. First person methods such as autoethnography have long been used to reflect on and acknowledge researchers' influence on research and studying their own experiences [16, 61]. Some researchers have written rich, retrospective accounts foregrounding the voice and experience of the researcher-self [53]. Balaam et al. [4] have critiqued how much of the "emotion work" in HCI and design research goes unreported and with it opportunities for training and learning. Other reflexive methods such as duo-ethnography by Garcia and Cifor [37] and trio-autoethnography by Howell et al. [51], show how two or more researchers can dialogically unpack, reflect on and learn from previous work and their own feelings, experiences, or perspectives which form an essential part of the research process. Not only does such work reflect on successes but also on what went wrong to encourage learning and development of better practice.

Crucially, positionality is not simply about the privileged researcher attempting to come to terms with their differently-privileged research subject in order to present the 'subject' in a less ethnocentric manner. The HCI literature does include examples of how researchers have articulated their position in such contexts. For example, Gaver et al. [38, 39] in their work on cultural probes, examine how technology "can be appropriately designed to [...] address the distinctive needs of users in developing regions" [49]. Similarly, Wyche [110] uses the design process detailed by Gaver et al. [39], to contribute a novel case study stance of the decisions made when designing and deploying a selection of probes in Bungoma, Kenya. The participants' conversations and reflections on this newer, more deeply subjective approach to probing cultural idiosyncracies provide glimpses into specific regional values within counties, allowing researchers to foreground the role of locality in value-centric cultural research. [110]. Boehner et al. [9] agree that providing such a "rich explanation", or anchoring the method in its relevant methodology is an important, yet frequently overlooked, aspect of using cultural probes in HCI. We argue that this is a rich example of how positionality can be approached in HCI. Similarly work by Medarametla et al. [66] is an example of how personal connections and cultural relations help with engaging in a specific cultural community, with thick descriptions of the role of the 'researcher as insider'.

Rather than grappling with the nuanced academic arguments around the conceptualisations of positionality and reflexivity we have sought to take an overtly pragmatic, inclusive approach to positionality. Our objective is to contribute to the growing discussion of positionality within HCI by developing a collective understanding of its use and perceived purpose through interrogation of the literature and examination of scholars' lived professional experiences. We aim to explore ways in which the CHI community can develop a shared methodological understanding of positionality statements: are they required - when and by whom? For what purpose? Do they fulfil that purpose? What will the field of HCI gain or lose through the focus on positionality statements?

## 3 Research Aims

This research aims to explore the following research questions:

- **RQ 1** How is positionality reported in HCI? • i.e., in which contexts do we see the inclusion of a positionality statement, what aspects of researchers positionality are reported?
- **RQ 2** How do authors discuss the influence of their positionality on the research conducted? • i.e., how is positionality related to the research undertaken and the researcher or participants?
- **RQ 3** What are the considerations for applying positionality in HCI research?

### 3.1 A Reflection on Our Motives and Methods

Our motivation for conducting this research stemmed from our own experiences, as well as anecdotal evidence around practices of reflecting on, writing about, and being requested to account for our positionality. We are a group of interdisciplinary qualitative and mixed-methods researchers who have conducted work in a wide variety of populations and contexts, some that are considered marginalised. We work in the domains of health and wellbeing, aging, disability, sexuality and gender and we have a mix of backgrounds including Psychology, Computer Science, Health Services Research, Public Health, Games Research, Design, Artificial Intelligence and Physiotherapy. All of us have worked in Human-Computer Interaction for between 5-10 years. On the whole, we have attempted to be reflexive in undertaking our work on a personal and team level. However, we have increasingly found ourselves receiving requests for information regarding different aspects of our own positionality when publishing our research: some of these have been useful aids for professional and personal self-reflection, but in other cases have caused concern due to expectations around the specificity of detail in our personal disclosure. We have actively pushed back against external requests for disclosure of personal information from more junior members of our teams as we deemed these disclosures harmful. While these subjectivities are good to discuss as part of reflexive research practice, disclosing personal characteristics that may be harmful in the long run seemed wrong. We acknowledge that such requests are not commonplace across all research domains. In corridor conversations, at conferences and in our own workplaces, we further learned that some colleagues doing work in HCI, qualitative and quantitative, had never been asked and never come across positionality. Thus, we were led by curiosity to explore specific practices within the field of HCI. We acknowledge the importance of reflexivity in research and our aim is not to disparage reflexive practice. Rather, we argue that mandating disclosure based on identity and research topic may not always be appropriate or necessary and can be harmful: disclosure requested from potentially marginalised scholars, particularly as part of review processes or supervisory discussion, leads to important concerns around power dynamics. We intend for this work to provoke discussion and reflection in the practice of reporting and asking for positionality in the field. We want to reflect on what this means for equity, reflexivity and the multidisciplinary fabric of HCI.

## 4 Methods

To address our research aims, we conducted two studies: (i) a scoping review which aimed to explore how positionality is operationalised in the HCI academic literature, and (ii) an online survey built on the scoping review findings in order to understand HCI researchers' attitudes towards and experiences of positionality, in the context of producing their own work and as actors in the peer review process.

### 4.1 Study 1 - Scoping Review

*4.1.1 Study design and development.* Scoping reviews are "an approach to knowledge synthesis that identify trends within an existing knowledge base, to inform research, policy or practice" [57, 99]. Our scoping review aimed to explore how, when, why and by whom positionality is operationalised and reported in the academic HCI literature. To this end, we searched the ACM Digital Library, using systematic principles drawn from established scoping review methodology [2] and guidance around team-based review methods [105]. Extraction procedures were developed iteratively through piloting and discussion until there was sufficient agreement among us to proceed to the extraction of a full set of papers.

*4.1.2 Search.* Based on preliminary reading of the extant literature and our anecdotal data, search results were anticipated to include a range of study designs and populations to reflect the acknowledgement that the inclusion of a positionality statement has increasingly crossed methodological boundaries in HCI. Thus, the search of the ACM Digital Library was kept intentionally broad, but with a pragmatic focus on balancing specificity and sensitivity. Our aim was to explore patterns and trends in the inclusion and content of positionality statements in the CHI corpus. We therefore searched the proceedings of the ACM Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI) for papers that included the terms positionality or reflexivity. The initial search included literature from April 2013 - April 2023 and was conducted in April 2023. We later expanded it to include CHI papers up to April 2024, conducted in July 2024.

*Eligibility:* Papers were included if they satisfied the following inclusion criteria:

- Were published at CHI between April 2013 and April 2024 (inclusive).
- Explicitly included a description of the researcher/designer/user positionality and/or reflexivity.
- Full-length research paper.

Studies were excluded if they described alternative conceptions of positionality, such as papers which discussed positional data in a virtual environment or data linked to the position of the user within a tracked area. Next we removed papers, which did not contain a positionality statement from the sample.

The ACM database was searched for items that include "positionality" or "reflexivity" in the title, abstract or full paper, using the keywords, "position*," and "refle*". The asterisk (*) used specifies the inclusion of unknown characters; thus, 'position*' will match terms including 'positional' and 'positionality' in addition to 'position'.

We acknowledge that we could have broadened terms to include terms such as "stance". Our aim with this work was to examine the trend of positionality statements and how it was operationalised

in HCI. Future work should look at a more broad subset of the literature for how HCI operationalises concepts of reflexivity and disclosure and researcher participation by including other terms.

*4.1.3 Data screening and extraction.* The references for the search results were exported and two authors (1, 2 for anonymity) conducted the initial screening of 570 search results by reviewing titles and abstracts and skimming full papers for mentions of positionality or reflexivity and variations of the term. Duplicates were removed. Following discussion and iteration of the extraction form, full-text articles were retrieved for further assessment against the inclusion and exclusion criteria. In total, we evaluated 412 articles that matched the initial screening requirements of length and venue, and which explicitly mentioned in the content of the article information about the importance of positionality in the context of the described work. However, 140 of them did not contain full positionality statements although they specifically state how positionality can shape key aspects of a study such as the relationship between different stakeholders, or lead to the creation of algorithmic biases due to the lack of diversity within design teams. We then extracted data from these papers which would support us in addressing our research questions, namely: how is positionality reported and how do authors relate positionality to their research process. As recommended by McDonald et al. [64], we sought to avoid inference and conjecture by only extracting data which was explicitly available in the paper. We used spreadsheets to chart the extracted data, which was then split between all authors. Key information extracted from each study included the author(s), publication year, positionality statement, type of study, population and key findings related to the concept. The systematic extraction process was supported by discussion of interesting or challenging examples. All authors completed the extraction, taking care to review only papers that they had not previously screened. Any discrepancies between the reviewers were resolved through discussion and consultation. Following this pragmatic, iterative process, a total of 272 papers were included in the subsequent data synthesis.

*4.1.4 Quality appraisal.* In accordance with established scoping review methodology, a formal quality appraisal of individual studies was not conducted. The focus, in this case, was on mapping the breadth of literature on positionality and summarising key concepts and themes

*4.1.5 Data synthesis and analysis.* The findings from the included studies were synthesised through a combination of a content analysis and codebook thematic analysis. We identify and describe common themes, variations in conceptualisations of positionality, and emerging trends. At least two team members reviewed the positionality statements, the abstract, and the title of each included paper. Data were processed using a custom-written python script using pandas. The results are presented in narrative form and supported by relevant quotations from the included studies and counts of characteristics or practices of interest.

## 4.2 Study 2 - Survey

*4.2.1 Aims.* Systematic scoping review frameworks recommend the inclusion of expert review as an important final step in the process of gathering, synthesising and reporting evidence on an emerging or scattered topic [2]. We achieved this by conducting a survey of the HCI academic community. This survey built directly on study 1 with the aim of understanding the positionality-related perspectives of HCI researchers and to identify the differing motivations for writing positionality statements across different studies. The survey was framed to capture a researcher's own perspective and understanding of the term 'positionality' across different contexts. The approach we took to conducting the survey and the participants involved is described below.

*4.2.2 Materials.* An online survey was designed and distributed through a survey tool (Qualtrics) and distributed via weblink, using convenience and snowball sampling with direct and indirect contacts of the authors. The survey method was used because it provided rich qualitative data [14] and a mix of both experiential accounts of positionality within HCI research, researchers' diverse opinions and reflect on these.

The survey included information about the aims of the study such as how the qualitative information would be used. Data was fully anonymised and any identifiable information, if shared, was removed from participants' responses prior to analysis.

## 4.3 Inclusion criteria and Survey Structure

To participate in the survey, participants had to confirm the following information:

(1) That they were conducting research primarily in the field of HCI.
(2) That they have submitted or published at least one paper in HCI at an ACM venue such as CHI, CSCW, TOCHI.

In the survey we first collected information about the participants, including their countries of affiliation and country of research focus, number of years publishing in HCI, year of most recent paper submission, preferred venue for submission and employment status. In addition to asking whether participants had published at a recognised HCI venue, (such as CHI, CSCW, TOCHI), we also asked if they had experience reviewing papers. Next, we inquired what was understood from the term "positionality", whether they had added it to any of their papers, and the context of doing so; the advantages or disadvantages of including positionality in a paper; the types of information that positionality statements should include and when it should or should not be included. The last section proposed scenarios that probed the appropriateness of positionality within different research contexts. We also included an open-ended question where participants could share anything on the topic of positionality. This study was approved by the UCL Interaction Centre's Ethics Committee.

*4.3.1 Analysis.* After cleaning the data, we performed descriptive statistics for the quantitative data in the survey. Qualitative data from both studies was analysed using thematic analysis [14]. After initial familiarisation with the data, open codes were identified by the first author and they were iterated upon as our understanding of the data developed through discussion among all authors. The codes were then grouped into central organising concepts and then into broader themes.

*4.3.2 Participants.* Participants were recruited via social media (including Twitter, LinkedIn, Reddit), and using convenience and

**Table 1: Information about Publication Experience and Positionality (* indicates questions with options for multiple answers)**

| Variable | Categories | n | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| **How long have participants been publishing in HCI** | Less than one year | 5 | 6.7 |
| | 1-5 years | 20 | 26.7 |
| | 5-10 years | 28 | 37.3 |
| | More than 10 years | 20 | 26.7 |
| **Have you published a positionality statement** | Yes | 38 | 50.7 |
| | No | 37 | 49.3 |
| **What prompted you to add a positionality statement*** | Due to context | 23 | |
| | Due to the population studied | 22 | |
| | I was asked by the AC/ reviewer | 8 | |
| | I did not include one | 19 | |
| | Other | 6 | |
| **Main Advantages*** | Acknowledging biases | 24 | |
| | Transparency | 23 | |
| | Information about how to do similar research | 6 | |
| | Other | 14 | |
| **Main Disadvantages*** | Biasing reviewers | 16 | |
| | Sharing private demographic information about authors | 29 | |
| | Others | 19 | |

snowball sampling methods [68]. We received 156 responses. We excluded pilot and incomplete responses and those not meeting the inclusion criteria. 75 survey responses were finally analysed.

Most of our participants originated from the global north, including from the United Kingdom (N=27), United States (N=15), and Germany (N=7), making up the majority of the sample. Other respondents were from Netherlands, Australia, Japan, Spain, Finland, Denmark, Austria, India, France and Canada. As described by our participants, women made up 45% of the sample, whilst 44% identified as men. Women, non-binary made up 2.7% as did non-binary participants. 5.3%, n=4, preferred not to disclose their gender identity.

We captured a broad range of experience from people working in the context of HCI, recruiting students (N=17), as well as Research Fellows (N=11), Tenured Faculty (N=39) and Researchers from industry (N=7). Years of publishing experience ranged from less than 1 year (n=5), 1-5 years (n=20), 5-10 years (n=28) and more than 10 years (n=20). Table 2 and Table 1 summarises the characteristics of the sample.

**Table 2: Demographic characterisitcs of the sample**

| Variable | Categories | n | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | Woman | 34 | 45.3 |
| | Men | 33 | 44 |
| | Woman, Non-Binary | 2 | 2.7 |
| | Non-Binary | 2 | 2.7 |
| | Prefer not to disclose | 4 | 5.3 |
| **Country of Publication** | United Kingdom | 27 | 36 |
| | United States of America | 15 | 20 |
| | Germany | 7 | 9.3 |
| | Netherlands | 6 | 8 |
| | Australia | 5 | 6.7 |
| | Japan | 3 | 4 |
| | Spain | 2 | 2.7 |
| | Finland | 2 | 2.7 |
| | Denmark | 2 | 2.7 |
| | Austria | 2 | 2.7 |
| | Spain | 1 | 1.3 |
| | India | 1 | 1.3 |
| | France | 1 | 1.3 |
| | Canada | 1 | 1.3 |
| **Employment** | Undergraduate | 2 | 2.7 |
| | PhD Student | 15 | 20 |
| | Researcher in industry | 7 | 9.3 |
| | Research Associate/Fellow | 11 | 14.7 |
| | Tenured faculty or equivalent | 39 | 52 |
| | Prefer not to say | 1 | 1.3 |

## 5 Results

Next we report the results of the scoping review followed by the qualitative results of the survey and the scoping review.

### 5.1 Results Of Scoping Review

The initial search identified 570 articles, after the removal of duplicates and the exclusion of papers which did not contain any mention of positionality, we conducted an initial review of 412 papers which specifically spoke about positionality in the context of the work. In this corpus we identified 272 articles (66%) which included complete positionality statements either in dedicated sections or integrated within different parts of the manuscript.

*5.1.1 When were positionality statements included?* Immediately noticeable is how the temporal distribution of the articles published in the last decade that matched our inclusion criteria is heavily skewed towards more recent years. The greatest number of papers featuring a positionality statement was found in 2024 (N=111), followed by the two years before (2023 (N=77), 2022(N=46). The graph indicates an exponential growth in papers containing full positionality statements, with only 5.14% (N=14) being published before 2021. Figure 1 summarises the distribution of publications of our corpus satisfying all inclusion criteria.

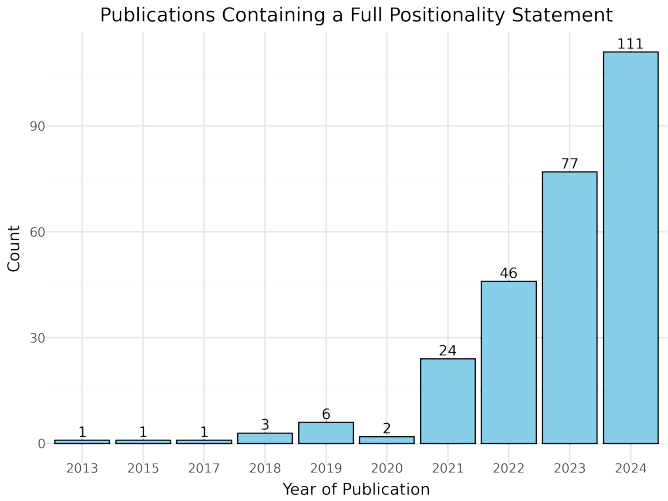


**Figure 1: Papers satisfying all inclusion criteria distributed over the publication year**

*5.1.2 How do positionality statements align with the content of the paper?* Our analysis revealed that the majority of positionality statements relate to the studied population (N=181), revealing information is contextualised in the research questions of the paper (N=185) and the overall research space of the publication (N=207). Most of the analysed positionality statements describe the positionality (N=230) in a reflexive manner. We utilised the term "performative positionality" to describe statements which state authors privilege, without describing how it affects the research or acknowledge their own privilege in the context of the research. Figure 2 summarises these results. . Reflexive statements often included rich details of


**Figure 2: Results of the four aspects analyzed by the content analysis of positionality statements**

how the personal and professional lived experiences of the authors helped to frame questions, shape actions, and guide the analysis within the specific research topic described in the manuscript. As an example, Tseng et al. [100] provides a detailed contextualisation of how the authors experience as volunteers in a clinic for people who experience partner violence shaped their commitment to social justice, but also supported switching between objective and subjective reflections, which are articulated in great detail throughout the manuscript. On the other hand, the positionality statement in the manuscript by Hui et al. [52] was labelled as performative due to the fact that it described the position of the authors as enrolled in a PhD course at an elite university solely as a potential limitation which creates a power differential that might have limited the willingness of participants to disclose certain details during the research. This is of course true and the authors are correct in identifying such a risk. However, the authors also mentioned sharing background similarities with participants which are likely to have helped them contextualise the findings and shape the process of analysis, but this is not stated in the positionality section.

*5.1.3 Which countries were mentioned in the positionality statements?* Building on our content analysis of the papers included in our scoping review, we examined which countries of residence of the authors were revealed in the analysed publication. Table 3 shows that the majority of authors mention the United States (N=105), India (N=32) and the United Kingdom (N=20). 120 positionality statements did not include any mention of a country.

| Country | Number of Mentions |
|---|---|
| United States | 105 |
| India | 32 |
| United Kingdom | 20 |
| Canada | 11 |
| China | 10 |
| Japan | 5 |
| Germany | 5 |
| Bangladesh | 5 |
| Pakistan | 5 |
| Mexico | 3 |

**Table 3: Top 10 Mentioned Countries in Positionality Statements. Please note: Some positionality statements mentioned multiple countries which affected the overall number of countries.**

## 5.2 Themes of positionality papers

We conducted a content analysis: two researchers independently read the positionality statements and identified themes within the statements. These were then swapped and sense-checked. Key themes related to academic background (N=83), gender (N=77), and lived experience (N=48). Most statements contained several instances of descriptions of multiple characteristics of the authors. Academic background and expertise could encompass the authors position as faculty, student or researcher [48] as well as disciplines of interest which were relevant to the scope of the study [114]. Such information does not generally include sensitive personal information and is largely leveraged to illustrate contextual knowledge the authors might have drawn on though the research. On

the other hand, information about gender, ethnicity, nationality and race could have significantly more nuanced undertones and at times included details of extremely personal nature. As a example, Simpson and Semaan [93] discloses the gender, race, nationality and sexuality of each author, one of whom is originally from a country where LGBTQ+ individuals can face legal discrimination and prosecution. This degree of detail is not routine and there are several instances where only specific authors' demographic details are shared to clarify how they could more easily communicate in the preferred language of participants or be familiar with specific cultural phenomena [112, 115].

We also observed differences when we examined the trends in the descriptions of details concerning personal and lived experiences. Whilst several papers articulated the positionality of authors, providing generally less sensitive details which connected the researchers to the population studied or the topic researched, these could also be related to disability status [85] or experience as migrants [62]. At the same time a smaller set of papers featured detailed personal accounts of potentially sensitive personal information such as mental health conditions [76], experiences with breastfeeding [111], or experiences of discrimination [46]. Figure 3 summarises the largest themes identified.

## 5.3 Qualitative results

This section presents the combined results of the qualitative analysis from the scoping review and survey. We use P# to denote survey participants.

Four themes were identified: (i) to declare or not to declare positionality, (ii) uncertainty around the praxis of positionality, (iii) the balance of power and gatekeeping, and (iv) who carries the burden of positionality. These themes are discussed next.

*5.3.1 To Declare or Not To Declare?* Six survey participants shared that they had never heard of the concept or term *Positionality* before the survey. Sixty-three participants shared their opinions of the advantages and 46 participants shared disadvantages of sharing a positionality statement in their work, Table 1 summarises these perspectives. Participants could choose multiple options.

Overall, survey participants described various motivations for adding positionality statements. The first was around communicating their own stance and reasons for their participation in the study or research. Participants felt that positionality can allow researchers to be transparent about their personal and social contexts which may have an impact on how they approach research, collect data and interpret findings. Participants noted how they used the statements to emphasise transparency (n=23), awareness of bias (n=27), and the contextualisation of research within the broader sociocultural landscape. Participants felt that positionality could help authors and researchers, both in constructing and reading the work, to connect personal experiences to the production of knowledge and communicate their intentions.. As an example, Vandenberghe et al. [103] mention how being guests in a school for disabled children allowed them to contribute, but also separate from the students and their faith, maintaining a position of privilege that allowed them to detach themselves from the everyday realities. *"As a reader yes, I like to see the authors' positionality as it helps me better reflect on their research objectives/questions and more objectively interpret their methods and the findings they result in. As an author, I have only so far have found it important as a means to enable me to be sure that the intention or envisioned use of proposed technology is not misunderstood (e.g. by potential participant groups, or by researchers who have in mind alternative uses that do not align with our own views)." (P50).* This extends to the research, writing and analysis. A thoughtful example of reflections we identified from the literature review include the statement by Tuli et al [101] highlighting how *"data interpretation is likely to be biased by our strong desire to dismantle the social construction of the menstruating body as deficient and in need of 'control."*, which flags to the reader how the interpretative lens of the authors will have shaped the analysis and presentation of the findings.

Some survey respondents alluded to how being explicit about positionality can encourage researchers to consider their intersectional positions and acknowledge how factors such as their place of domicile, culture, gender, race, sociodemographic factors, politics, sexual orientation and other self-identifications may impact their research choices, data interpretation, and implications, in line with the Feminist Perspective. The analysis of positionality statements from the scoping review also shows examples of how positionality statements can be used to contextualise the reasons for undertaking a particular study, whether this is based on the affiliation to a particular group or organisation [21], specific events in the researchers' life [20, 111], personal values or moral convictions [80, 97, 101], as well as previous or concurrent research projects [22].

While some survey respondents emphasised the potential benefits of positionality, others questioned its relevance or importance in the papers or in the review process. When examining positionality from the literature review we found some examples in which, although the authors reported some aspects of their identities, they did not reflect on how it impacted their research, resulting in what appears as personal disclosure of information, without a specific interpretive context [15, 19, 65, 86]. It should be noted that by pointing out these discrepancies we are not questioning the validity of the studies, but wondering to what extent the inclusion of these positionality statements add value to the presented research.

Some survey respondents shared concerns of sharing positionality in papers due to fear of how personal information may be misinterpreted or used against authors, or coerce authors to declare personal information about themselves they may not be comfortable in sharing. *"People use it against you - or think you are making a point." (P66).* Another survey respondent shared how adding a positionality statement was critical for their paper to be published, *"The shepherd made it conditional for acceptance." (P22)*

Sharing characteristics of research teams that may have enabled specific access to populations or knowledge could lead others to construct bias in interpretations, whereas sharing such information is intended to mitigate this and increase validity in work. There was concern that readers would reduce their trust in the findings.*"I think it can sometimes look like you hold a bias. I think it can be misunderstood and sometimes the inclusion is seen as a disclosure of weakness when it comes to data analysis. I think there is still a feeling that data for HCI papers should be validated, and including a positionality statement undermines this." (P45)* Others like P11 had the opposite view, that papers may be viewed more positively due to the author's positionality. Further, sharing information about

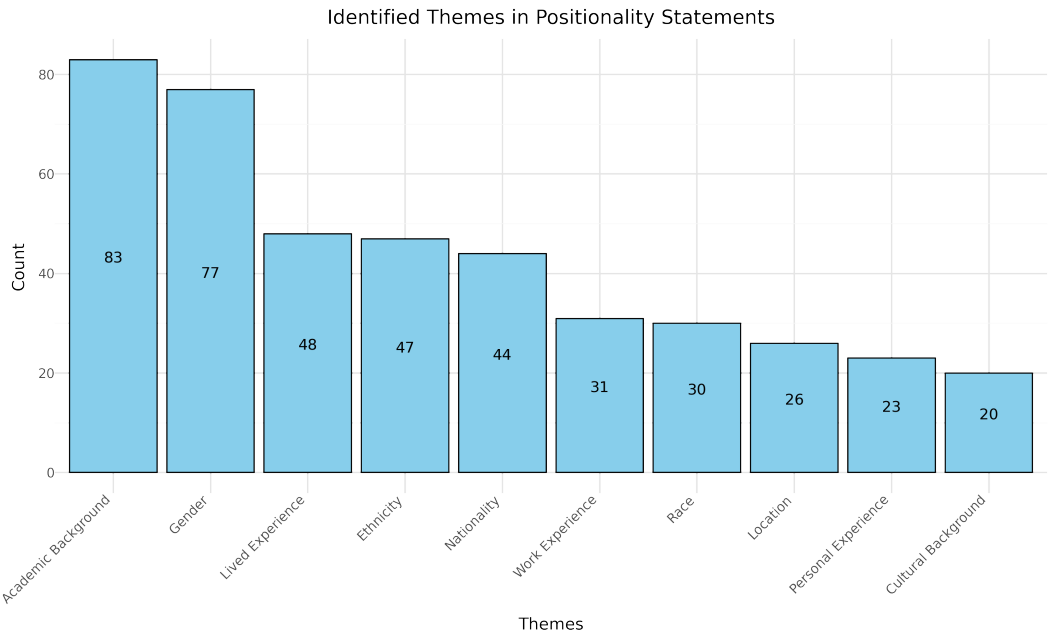


**Figure 3: Themes and their distribution in the analysed sample**

the authors raised concerns that it may risk de-anonymisation in the review process. While others stated the nature of self-selection of information in positionality statements, "Many people say what the reviewers want to hear, that's the truth. We all make them up. (P41)"

Some authors believe positionality statements are necessary whenever the author's positionality could affect the research, especially when working with vulnerable or marginalised groups. *"Always (in tandem with some kind of research philosophy being made explicit) but particularly in anything that involves marginalised groups, community groups, power differentials between researcher and participant, etc. A positionality statement is also just good methodological practice: how do I know what influences it may have on your sampling, research design, etc.? This influences quality and validity of research. [...] This is an epistemological problem as well as an equity problem."* This was also echoed in some of the articles featuring in the literature review such as [35, 45, 100] who all argued that disclosing positionality when working in disadvantaged communities is not solely a matter or rigour, but an ethical concern, to acknowledge the influence of power in the exchange. Others argued that they are needed only when the author's positionality has a clear influence on the research design, data analysis, or interpretation. Some suggest they should be included by default to provide context for the research in a socio-cultural-political context, while others believe they are rarely or never needed.

Survey participants emphasised that information in positionality statements should be relevant to the research context, such as professional experience, academic discipline, epistemological stance or reflecting on biases related to the research topic. This is also somehow reflected in the content analysis from positionality statement discussed in Figure 2 which shows that academic background, and experience (intended as research or professionally relevant experience rather than lived experience) were the most commonly included information in a positionality statement [20, 74, 82, 97, 104]. These were followed by others such as gender [35, 69, 92], nationality [78, 80, 95], race [25, 69], and cultural background [79, 101]. The level of detail in positionality statements should vary depending on the research and the comfort of the authors.

Positionality statements can highlight belongingness as well as otherness, in-group or out-group identities. By themselves being in either of these groups while participating in research may not make for better scholarship but can influence how the research is shaped based on the researchers' knowledge and access to the population. But that is not always clear to authors, *"My issue with positionality statements relates to hidden aspects of people's identity. One could argue that as long as the author(s) are happy to provide this information, then it could help to better evaluate how they collected, interpreted and analysed data; especially qualitative data. Yet, i often feel the assumption is that to engage with a community or data from a community, one must have a link to the community; whereas there is value in both having a link (close affiliation) with a community, and having distance from the community. (P28)"*

*5.3.2 Uncertainty around the Praxis of Positionality.* Familiarity and experience with positionality statements was not uniform in our survey. For some participants, it was something that they did not feel was necessary in their research because of the populations they were working with or the research methods that they had employed being "regular" and "straightforward". The practise of writing them was hampered by a lack of norms or precedent as well as the fact that it seems to be prevalent more recently, *"I am a new*

*researcher, just published my first paper. But there wasn't really a precedent for writing a positionality statement for me." (P48) It didn't exist as a norm with [my] last first author papers I did and with most recent ones, I wasn't the first author and the research was very quantitative and 'objective' so it didn't feel relevant or like I could tell more sciency (machine learning) colleagues what to do." (P7)*

Framing positionality statements with teams also seemed to be "tricky" (P13). Questions were raised in the survey around the best practise for such statements for a team of authors and who should decide what to include. Some participants mentioned how they might be uncomfortable with having conversations around colleagues identities to frame a positionality statement, *"This can lead to awkward conversations with co-authors about how they identify themselves, which many will find inappropriate. So may not want to which means statements may not be totally complete. It may also compromise anonymity." (P36)* Indeed, in cases of power differentials in the authoring team, the junior authors may not be in position to choose what to disclose. Complexities around how to agree what to include in a positionality statement also emerged in the survey. *"If positionality was asked for, how would this be handled in practice? A single author may be able to make the decision, but should a lead author of a multi-author paper have to request this type of information from other authors? What if they do not feel they want to share, but other co-authors do? How would someone maintain a hidden aspect of their identity without being deceptive or protect the one researcher who has a marginalised identity but is an insider and does not want to disclose?" (P28).* The quote below highlights the tension between writing a positionality statement for a single researcher vs. a team, *"I saw that the first author had referred to my sexual orientation in a positionality statement - I was not comfortable with putting this in a paper even if it is obvious and even if it shows that we are part of the community. But discussing this is difficult." (P48)* The above statement also highlights the tension in teams of researchers, especially when there are disciplinary differences between colleagues; whose positionality should be highlighted? This tension was also somehow observed in the positionality statements analysed as part of the literature review where some papers shared equal amount of information about all authors [69, 84], whereas others would be primarily focused on one or two members of the research team [15, 41, 42, 94, 97].

*5.3.3 The Balance of Power and Gatekeeping .* Some participants argued against forcing disclosure, as it could compromise anonymity and deter authors from pursuing research, especially in sensitive or stigmatised areas. Participants felt that in some types of research, positionality statements could be prompted but the authors choice should be respected. Most survey participants who shared they included positionality in their papers because they were asked to, saw it as a condition of publication, rather than as critical consideration in their work, as mentioned earlier. Often these were identity-based disclosures on work focusing on the minorities (e.g., P23 - *"I was asked to clarify if I was a person with disabilities or not in a paper focused on the design of a novel assistive device to assess if my approach was shaped by an ableist bias; ""For a paper exploring gender diversity, we were asked to provide identity details, similarly for a paper about menstruation. In another paper about menstruation, we referred to abortion laws and were asked to provide identity information. These are just a few examples. I have been an AC when reviewers have asked for this information and have pushed back, informing authors that revealing identity information is not necessary for publication. I will die on that sword. I have also heard from junior scholars that they have been pressured into writing revealing positionality statements because reviewers have asked and their supervisors have forced them to disclose. I think this is unethical." (P71)*) Thus, concerns were raised about the potential risks, and the need to consider the consequences of demanding positionality disclosure in various global contexts.

Declaring positionality has implications in the review process, as reviewers could also have opinions on the research based on their own positionality. This can lead to a perceived power imbalance. Some participants believed that revealing positionality can enhance transparency in the review process, helping authors understand the background and context of the reviewers, particularly regarding their methodological and epistemological stances. 21 of our survey respondents believed that reviewers should share their positionality if asking for positionality, while 22 did not. Others were undecided. P31, argued, *"If I had to explain my positionality, it would be helpful to know about theirs. I'd like to know the audience"*. Some participants felt that understanding reviewers' positionality may offer valuable insights and context to the reviewers' comments and also make the participants more comfortable in sharing their own positionality. These points of view resonate with the ones observed in positionality statements from the literature review which state that researchers sharing their own positionalities with participants can help to build trust and facilitate sharing in return [42, 69, 97].

Many participants were completely against the idea of asking reviewers to declare their positionality. *"Nobody should feel that they have to disclose any aspect of their identity. A reviewer may feel very comfortable and open about an aspect of their identity, whilst the author(s) they are requesting disclosure from, may not. If one reviewer asks, perhaps other reviewers feel uncomfortable disclosing (assuming all reviewers would have to disclose)." (P28)* Others felt that there was a consideration of how reviewers asked and also the power dynamics at work. P38 said, *"...there are power dynamics at play here and there is also a different valence to asks. If someone wrote in a review 'This is not a criteria on which I will accept or reject the paper, but I would have appreciated seeing a positionality statement.' I don't know that I require that reviewer to provide their own positionality. However, were someone to make it a demand, rather than a suggestion, I would want to know the reviewer's positionality. It is a different kind of ask if it is from empowered reviewer -> marginalised author than if it is marginalised reviewer -> empowered author, and I think the ask feels different depending on the author's positionality"*

Participants in our survey expressed concern that revealing biographical information in the review process could introduce bias or limit the representation of the research context. This was also highlighted in the included review by Cooper et al 2022 [23] which points out that extreme versions of position operationalisation might result in forcing authors to "out" themselves as members of a marginalised community in order to be legitimised, whether they feel comfortable to do so or not. Others reported witnessing such bias as part of the reviewing process. P31 argued, *"I've not included one before, and I'd be concerned if I was asked to do so. I've witnessed positionality statements raise reviewer concerns over a*

*paper that would have received slightly better results if this content was excluded."* However, others argued that revealing positionality could also be valuable in understanding potential biases in reviews. Both reviewers and authors could benefit from the practise of providing reflexive feedback and improved contextual understanding, ultimately enhancing the quality of reviews. Some participants also viewed positionality of assessing methodological rigour : *"As a reviewer, if I did not see a note about positionality, I would expect more rigorous reporting of co-design method, or some kind of PPI." (P53).* This in itself can also be problematic as a strategy as positionality cannot be considered a measure of rigour in research in the same way, unless rigorously reported as methods for co-design would be for example, as authors can choose to frame positionality statements in more favourable ways.

Some participants were also concerned about the complexity of negotiations surrounding positionality between reviewers and authors, and the potential for it to become a competition. *This shouldn't be a pissing contest "I'm more authentic than you". (P16)* Participants argued that it might not be relevant in all cases and could even corrupt the review process.

*5.3.4 The Burden of Positionality.* Often the burden of positionality seems to fall on research that is already focusing on work with more "vulnerable" or "marginalised" groups or contexts such as the Global South. Many participants felt that the additional work of adding positionality could affect researchers in engaging with such contexts. *"To me, there is a longer-term risk to research, especially research with stigmatised communities. If someone knows they will be required to disclose an aspect of their identity in order to publish, will they pursue that research? How would this impact research on vulnerable and stigmatised groups?" (P28)*

Others were concerned with the increasing emphasis on disclosing identity, especially in research with minorities or marginalised populations. *"There are some areas of the world where holding a certain identity characteristic is illegal (e.g., being gay is still illegal in many parts of the world). Do we suggest that authors put their lives on the line, to get published?" (P28)* While others emphasised that acknowledging their identities, even as outsiders, especially in research with marginalised populations was important. *"It is useful to some marginalised populations e.g. minority ethnic communities and mental health communities to acknowledge you are not a member of this community and that whilst you do not share their voice, you are choosing to represent theirs." (P4).* This could be useful to others to understand the perspectives that the research is approached with, how it was conducted, based on who is doing the work. *"I think all research is located in an author's positionality, so ideally would see it in all research. However, it does place authors in a vulnerable position, at times, so I would prioritise positionality in studies that focus on marginalisation. If you are studying a vulnerable population, I want to know if you do so with in-group sensitivities or as an outsider." (P38)*

There is also the aspect of defining vulnerable or marginalised. With the HCI research community being global in nature, it is not always possible to assess relative privilege. A perspective centred in the Global North for example, can assume privilege where the community being studied may not view itself as such. Thus there is value in considering the definition of the context that the research is located in. *"The papers touch on the experiences of particular target groups that are often not represented in research and that could be seen as vulnerable population –although the concept of vulnerability is problematic because communities in the Global South do have agency and assets and might not consider themselves as vulnerable but i dont agree with other terms like marginalised as well due to similar reasons. Better to call them as they are in a particular context." (P55)*

But again there is the issue of placing the burden of positionality on work focused on certain communities, arguably disadvantaging that research. As one survey participant said, *"There is also less risk in revealing a majority identity" (P38).*

When discussing what positionality statements should contain, participants often spoke about demographics but most were aware of the harms too. *"The academic background of the authors and the demographics they represent as a group. However, I believe that this should remain generic, to prevent risks to individuals, especially those in minority groups."* Others were more mindful of the biases that may affect the target population of the study. As this participant noted, *"Suppose we are researching vulnerable or minority groups. In that case, I will find it helpful if the authors include a positionality statement, to better spot 'about them not with them research,' maybe? e.g. if an HCI paper is talking about the needs of disabled women of color, and all the authors are white males I in the reviewer position would look at their methods with more scrutiny to potentially harmful unconcious biases potentially stemming from the author's positionality."* Others felt that it may help to understand the motivations of the research itself, *"I think it should include the whys of the research. Why this research / these questions / this context. Not just the formulaic lit review version but the ,'this is important to me because .'"*

Many participants believed that the statement should be requested nonetheless, to ensure reflexive practise, as positionality at the moment seems to be one of the main ways that people assess reflexivity in qualitative research, *"Personally, I think it should be always requested. There are many papers from the US or the Global North were researchers do not engage in reflexive practices and in particular us, authors from ethnic minorities are the ones that either we do it as part of our reflexive practices or being asked to do it. But this should be for everyone to emphasise the importance of reflexivity and positionality. However, this could be very tricky sometimes and put the researcher in disadvantage especially if we are part of the population under investigation, and probably in some occasions it does not need full disclosure as long as it follows some ethics it could be ok."*

## 6 Discussion

The aim of our study was to examine patterns in practice for including positionality statements in HCI papers (Study 1) and then explore how the HCI community approaches the practice, their key considerations, and experiences of positionality and peer review (Study 2). Our results show a complex picture where the number of positionality statements is increasing with many types of disclosures and reflexive practices. Many researchers agree with the practice of including such statements but believe it should not be forced and that it should be included in all types of research, qualitative and quantitative. Researcher positionality is arguably

as relevant to the quantitative researcher: considerations around study motivation, research questions, study design and data selection, analysis and reporting are not the sole provision of qualitative research. However, the burden of declaring positionality falls largely on qualitative researchers from certain parts of the world, with marginalised identities or those doing work with marginalised groups. If reflexive practice and methodological rigour (in addition to safeguarding communities) is the goal, then it should be more prevalent in other areas as well, a sentiment echoed by our survey participants.

In this section, we broaden the discussion based on our studies and the literature to discuss some of the trends and challenges in declaring positionality and the implications for us as HCI researchers and ultimately as people in the research process. We approach this question from an open and curious place, not from a political perspective or to shore up an epistemological argument and offer some considerations to the community.

## 6.1 The need for addressing the balance and type of positionality

Our studies showed that even though positionality reflections are increasingly being seen in HCI literature, more than a third (34%) of papers published for this venue which discuss the relevancy of the concept do not include positionality statements. Even among our survey participants, not all respondents added positionality statements to their papers even though they saw value in the practice, while some were unfamiliar with the concept altogether. Conversely, while calls for positionality and disclosures exist [12, 60, 91] in the HCI community, this leads to an unreasonable and inconsistent reality, compelling some people and some areas of research to focus on providing positionality statements while 'allowing' others not to engage with it at all. Our scoping review shows that in a majority of papers, authors explicitly focused on a marginalised, vulnerable or minority community with many of these researchers choosing or having to disclose their identities as such. Such personal disclosures appear an unreasonable expectation for a subset of the CHI community, and are likely avoidable, as there are other ways to provide positionality information. It all comes down to why positionality is being reported or asked for - if it is for methodological rigour, this should not be dependent on the presence (or not) of a positionality statement [88].

One approach could be to to look at shared experiences of the research team, such as experience working with a specific community, rather than a single researcher's alignment with that community. Another approach could be for authorship teams to apply specific 'lenses' to positionality statements, thereby giving them a means to reflect on which aspect of engagement with a community they will give information on, e.g. socio-economic status, race, gender etc. These approaches could help to vary the ways of achieving methodological rigour across positionality statements.

Generally qualitative papers were the ones that included positionality statements in our corpus. However, the literature and survey responses both indicate that some form of positionality, that indicates researchers' stance and approach to research design, would be welcome even in quantitative studies. Implications are broader reaching than these types of studies however, and we suggest that positionality statements should be aligned with the specific HCI contribution the author(s) are making. For example, [109]'s identification of seven contribution types in HCI can also be used to orient researchers in creating positionality statements. Whilst this work has discussed empirical quantitative and qualitative positionality statements in detail, researchers could also consider providing their positionality for other types of contributions. For example:

The majority of positionality statements reviewed, were largely from **Empirical** contributions from a single study. Empirical (lab, field, ethnographic) positionality statements could reflect on how the researchers will use their own experience to empathise with the people they plan to work with, how they personally relate to a group or community or how they foresee their work adding value to the people being researched. **Artifact and design** positionalities could evidence designers' or engineers' technical proficiencies and personal limitations, describing similar inventions they have created previously, or how a new artifact aligns with previous design and technical guidelines. They could reflect on their own technical competencies and align these with existing design principles, such as [1], where designers reflect on their own biases and conventions when designing new tools. **Methodological and theoretical** contributions could deal with researchers' epistemological viewpoints for the work where we can take inspiration from work such as [39]. Researchers could evaluate their own epistemological influences relevant to the work they are describing and reflect on how this could colour the research portrait they are presenting through their work. In particular, for methodological contributions, researchers could reflect on how they have interpreted other HCI methods and how this aligns with co-authors' understandings too. **Survey and benchmark** positionalities could reflect on the process of seeking, obtaining or creating primary and secondary data sources. This could be a collaborative reflection with the wider research team (if appropriate), examining, for example, the researchers' ethical approaches to sourcing datasets and creating them.

## 6.2 What to include and why

It is not always clear to researchers what they should be including in positionality statements. Our survey results show that there are varying attitudes and motivations for including positionality statements and thus the content in them varies. While some people believe that all papers should have a positionality statement, others are opposed to it for fear of introducing more biases. Liang et al. in their recent paper articulated four tensions in HCI, [60]: in the present work, we echo and extend their findings especially in terms of the tensions of disclosure and membership. They argue that while identity-based disclosure can sometimes help, especially in research with marginalised groups, it may often lead to assumptions about the authors' identities, emphasising that normative assumptions can be harmful depending on context. Liang et al. [60] also provide a useful set of questions that can be used by reviewers and authors to reflect on why they may want to add or ask for a positionality statement. We believe that positionality statements should not be mandatory and definitely not enforced. We firmly oppose the use of the review process as a means to enforce positionality statements, especially on more marginalised scholars or early career researchers, as the pressures of being published at venues such as

CHI is immense. Bowman et al. [12] in their recent review of CHI papers using thematic analysis in healthcare, describe challenges of using reflexive practices and positionality in CHI papers. While practices of identity disclosure remain the most commonplace, the anonymisation requirements at conferences such as CHI can be a bottleneck in disclosing positionality, unless it is redacted for review. Besides, we have already touched on the benefits and harms for researchers with more marginalised identitites but equally, if the positionalities of reviewers do not reflect on the actual impact on research and become an exercise in ticking boxes, the advantages of the impact on the participants and target communities is not always obvious even if a self-aware practice.

Identifying with a group does not mean a good actor in practice and vice versa [75]. There can be instances of assumptions and harms from those perceived as insiders. Besides, in terms of intersectional and often complex identities, identity disclosures can often lead to superficial impressions of insider status. The assumption that positionality is always fixed and certain is also not true. Porisky et al [75] reflect on the notion of a fluid "credible visitor" who weaves in and out of the more static constructs of insider-outsider dichotomy, which allows us to be more reflexive. Vanwingerden [102] suggests resisting being comfortable in static versions of positionality and embracing uncertainty in positionality claims, in a way that allows researchers to be open, vulnerable and fluid - for example, by stating what is not controlled by the researcher or not tacit. Embracing such uncertainty does not mean that researchers can be careless or ignorant of issues that may be sensitive but foreground interactions and discovery through research, while being mindful of ethical issues and open with their participants and collaborators. In documenting curiosity and discovery, research processes and outcomes can be made more accessible to the community. Lian et al. [58] reflect on the fluidity of researcher identity as they navigate the research process, in effect many selves depending on the stage of the project, the stakeholders and the research itself. Thus, we need to reflect on not just in how we see ourselves as researchers but how others see us and that has an influence on the way information is shared with us. In the survey, besides biographical details, participants spoke about the influence of professional backgrounds, skills and previous knowledge, roles of different members of the teams and interactions with those outside the team like ethics bodies and advisory groups on situatedness towards their research.

## 6.3 The need for charting a course for HCI research

As HCI research becomes more inclusive and global, calls for improving our praxis of reflexivity and positionality will only increase. Reflexivity is essential not only during data analysis but also throughout research design and data collection, especially in studies closely working with users. While our corpus focuses on papers that report positionality, few studies reported on how their positionality and relationship to the research context affected the shape of the research at all stages [72], but the absence of these artefacts does not mean that the work was not done. Making use of more evaluative frameworks as summarised by [72] is one way. For example, through asking questions not just while writing but while conducting the research, "Have the "role of researcher & relationship with participants" been reported?; Is there clear "identification of assumptions and biases of researcher"? [72]. Bowman et al. [12] also suggest the use of reflexive diaries. We agree that positionality statements as themselves are self-selective and should not be the sole signal of methodological rigour [36, 88]; instead of asking for positionality, reviewers could ask for aspects that would shore up methodological rigour or indeed just frame what they need the statement for and allow authors to address this in their own way. We also think the practise of demanding biographical details in the review process must stop as we do not know what harms we may be inflicting in doing so, especially in blind review processes, and such harms have been reported [36]. Indeed, authors should have mechanisms to refute such demands and where declaring marginalised identities should reflect on the consequences of this to themselves as well [60]

There is also the matter of reporting positionalities of multiple authors: while most papers had multiple authors, positionality statements varied from an amalgamation of authors identities to disclosure about a single author. Further, the information reported varied between papers, some reported what role each author played like when submitting to a journal, which can also add to the transparency.

The arguments opposing the practice of adding positionality statements also has merits. Savolainen et al. [88] put forth three arguments (i) the difficulty of constructing credible positionality statements as they are constrained by researchers' positionality. Second, reducing bias in scientific literatures "should not depend on the biographical details of individual scholars but on the integrity of the collective process of truth-seeking" [88]. Third, through encouraging disclosure, positionality statements can undermine the norms and practices of research impartiality. The authors argue that the academic community should insist on other methods of ensuring methodological transparency and rigour, rather than relying on positionality statements to do that work.

While we agree that positionality can be a useful tool that may be beneficial to the practise of research, we argue that current formulations can re-inforce colonial or patriarchal power structures and be oppressive to those with least power in our community [36]. We echo Folkes' call [34] to go beyond 'shopping list' positionality and to instead embrace the inherent diverse nature of research positionality [106] and be reflexive about what aspects affected the research beyond demographics. A lot of positionality statements in our literature review focused on characteristics of the researcher and their privilege but there was less focus on how this affected their research. There is an opportunity to actively consider other aspects that are more fluid and contextual, e.g., how a rapport was created with participants based on where the researchers met (e.g in a student bar -for example, O'Kane et al. [70]). Folkes discusses using 'kitchen table reflexivity' and in/visible tools [34] we encourage developing reflexive research in HCI, which includes reflecting on and articulating motivations for pursuing the research topic, focusing on the researcher(s) voice and mechanisms of (and challenges in) building rapport with participants. Thus, we advocate meaningful engagement with positionality throughout the life and including different stages of research, avoiding static and hollow positionality statements.

We end here with some reflections. Is there a danger that a narrow focus on positionality could inadvertently limit our ability to innovate and address the complex challenges of HCI? By forcing certain types of practices on a global complex community, will we miss out on gaining a deeper understanding of what emerging communities have to offer. And does such an exclusive emphasis on individual positionality overlook collective experiences and socio-cultural dynamics that shape HCI interactions? The interactions that ultimately shape the research are often far beyond the individual positionality statement suggests. Do we want to stop 'shopping list' positionality statements with identifying disclosures and instead focus on the methodological approaches and rationale?

In making positionality explicitly about identity in certain cases we are starting a dangerous trend - one in which people who do not identify with certain groups will get locked out of research. This can be stifling for a field such as HCI, especially when the burden is on the few. Even with truly practicing inclusion of target communities within research, authors can feel othered because they do not themselves belong to a community or do not declare positionality for fear of criticism.

## 7 Limitations

This research has certain limitations: CHI is not HCI; positionality is not the only concept that supports disclosure of authors' information, contexts and research approaches: some authors refer to other ways to approach this, such as through including a section on author disclosure. Our search included only papers published at CHI that explicitly use the term "positionality" or similar derivatives. Our survey participants were concentrated mainly in the global North despite various attempts to engage a broader range of participants. Future work should also focus on obtaining a more comprehensive sample of participants from the HCI community.

## 8 Conclusion

Opinions on positionality statements are diverse, ranging from advocating for their inclusion in most research to viewing them as unnecessary or potentially detrimental. The content of these statements should be context-dependent and aligned with the specific research objectives. There are ways of ensuring methodological rigour besides positionality statements and we must avoid conflating reporting of positionality with methodological and analytical quality. Crucially, we must work harder as a discipline to avoid placing undue burden around positionality and reflexivity on a minority of researchers. As HCI researchers, we need to rethink how positionality can benefit us and how it contributes to furthering the field. Ultimately, we propose that inclusion of a positionality statement must be methodologically consistent and left to the discretion of the authors.

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