

Positionality & Equity

OHSU-PSU SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

INTEGRATIVE PROJECT PAPER

5.19.2021

Agenda

What is a positionality & equity statement?

Why include a positionality & equity statement?

Common questions:

- I don't see how this relates to my topic. Can I just say that?
- How do I know what to share?
- What if I don't want to share something specific?
- It doesn't fit my paper. Where do I put it?
- How much do I write?

Example Positionality & Equity Statement

What is a positionality & equity statement?

- Explicit statement about your social identities and how those identities may shape or influence the way you understand and approach your paper topic
- Includes considerations for who is considered “expert” and who is most impacted
- Includes some thoughts on how to center equity in this work

Why include a positionality & equity statement?

1. It is a requirement.
2. It is good practice.
3. It is what we should all be doing.
4. It is useful for identifying gaps.

Common Questions

Q: I don't see how this relates to my topic. Can I just say that?

- No. Equity relates to all public health work. Positionality impacts all work that we do.
- If the act of considering your positionality is new to you and not an open standard practice in your specific field or topic of interest, reflect on why.
 - Is this because of an assumption of objectivity in research or practice?

Q: How do I know what to share?

1. Share what is important to you.
2. Share what has shaped the way you approached your paper topic.
3. Share what is relevant to your paper topic.

Q: What if I don't want to share something specific?

- Ask yourself why you don't want to share something.
 - Is this because you don't want to talk about having privilege?
 - Is this because you feel uncomfortable sharing trauma or oppression? Respect your own boundaries. Share what you feel comfortable sharing.
- Regardless, remember to bring it back to the system.
 - Who is typically considered the expert?
 - What are your thoughts/recommendations for centering equity?

Q: It doesn't fit into my paper. Where do I put it?

- The IP Cover Page (on Sakai) has a place for you to write your positionality and equity statement.
- If you are putting your positionality and equity statement in your paper, I recommend noting that on the IP Cover Page. Example: You can find my positionality and equity statement in my IP paper on page X.

Q: How much do I write?

- As much as you need to. Positionality and equity statements are as long as you need them to be.
- I'd recommend writing at least two paragraphs: one focused on your own positionality in relation your paper topic and one focused on your thoughts/recommendations for centering equity in the field.

Example

It is important to recognize my own positionality in relation to my thesis work. I'm a biracial, working class woman. While I have experienced racism, my proximity to whiteness has insulated me. This is largely due to the fact that I am often coded as white or at most racially ambiguous. Despite my interactions with law enforcement while engaged in activities such as underage drinking or illicit drug use, I have never been arrested. This has meant that I have been protected from the serious consequences of getting entangled by a "justice" system that is punitive and often dehumanizing.

My interest in this topic has been influenced by a number of things. Perhaps the most influential is my awareness of the myth of meritocracy, my interest in resiliency, and my desire for systemic change. Formerly incarcerated women are resilient. They are survivors of a system that has stacked the odds against them. They have a lot to teach us not just about hope and resiliency but also about the consequences of the status quo and the changes we need to make to foster community wellbeing and health.

The women that participated in the interviews for my study were diverse in terms of race, sexual orientation, age, income, comorbid health conditions, and current housing status. The one characteristic that all the women shared is they had all been incarcerated in prison at one point in their lives. I chose to engage in qualitative research to answer the questions that I had because it was the most suited methods for the question but also because I wanted to center the women's voices.

Example Continued

In conducting research that attempts to acknowledge alternative ways of knowing as valid, it is important that researchers carefully choose the language and terms they use to label certain phenomenon. While many studies of stigma refer to the struggles of the stigmatized as “coping” strategies, I deliberately chose the term resistance.

As researchers, we have the ability to situate our subjects as either passive victims or active challengers. Using the term “resistance” rather than “coping” acknowledges not only the power structures which label certain women as deviant and improper but also highlights the work women engage in to construct positive identities in spite of these power structures.

As academics in this space, consideration for power structures is critical. Community based participatory research is one approach that could help to center the voices of those most impacted by the issue of incarceration. Policymakers and academics without lived experience, while often times situated as experts in this field, must make room for those with lived experience. Public health professionals should intentionally make space for and elevate the voices of those who are justice involved and are most impacted by incarceration.