# Reflexivity and positionality in research

## Transcript

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Because some publications conflate the terms reflexivity and positionality somewhat, the relationship between reflexivity and positionality is often poorly understood. It may help to think of reflexivity as a private process, whereas positionality is the public end result of that process.

Reflexivity then is you as researcher making sense of who you are, of what your beliefs are and what you therefore bring to your research – in the positives as well as the negatives. Yes, biases and assumptions play an important role here, but reflexivity is also about recognising your strengths, such as your subject expertise, your professional skills and knowledge, and/or your lived experience. This sense-making happens in your private sphere, and most of us engage in research journaling activities for this reflexivity work.

When you do this private reflexivity work, you will come to a point, where you say to yourself "Right, this is who I am, this is what I have brought to this research, and this is how my being me has shaped my research". And you will make a note of that in a one- or two- paragraph summary. In short, you have achieved some sort of "end point". This end point is where the private reflexivity work turns into public positionality. And the one- or two-paragraph summary becomes your positionality statement.

Now naturally, as human beings we consistently develop, we are impacted by our life experiences, by conversations with have or overhear, by the relationships we build in our personal and professional lives. So, with that regular identity work at a personal and professional level, our assumptions and beliefs will also change. In addition, the ideas and perceptions we bring to one research project may not be exactly the same ones we bring to another research project. Depending on the research questions, for example, we may select participatory and egalitarian approaches to data collection in one research, whereas in another project we use surveys. Our underlying principles and foundational thoughts are therefore different, even though we are still one and the same researcher at that particular point in time. The result of this is that the positionality statement will be different for those two projects. So although positionality is a sort of "end point" to the reflexivity process, that end point is not permanently fixed or set in stone. And many researchers will have written different versions of positionality statements to make them truly relevant for the respective research process on hand.

In effect, it is this malleability of positionality that adds to the confusion around of reflexivity and positionality, and that leads to the conflation of the terms. I always suggest that reflexivity is an ongoing process in private that is very comprehensive and involves the "whole" of who we are as researchers. Whereas positionality is the public-facing part that matters for the research we are currently reporting on.

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