

The **Neurodivergent Scale for Interacting with Robots (NSIR)** and **Mary E. Swigonski's (1994) "The Logic of Feminist Standpoint Theory for Social Work Research"** both challenge traditional, objective models of science by prioritizing the **situated knowledge** of marginalized groups. Swigonski argues that social work research must begin with the lived experiences of those at the "margins" to uncover truths that dominant perspectives (positivism) ignore.

The NSIR serves as a practical tool that applies these feminist epistemological principles to the neurodivergent community's relationship with technology.

1. Centering Marginalized Lives as the "Point of Departure"

Swigonski (1994) asserts that feminist standpoint theory places the "life experiences of marginalized groups at the center of the research project".

- **Scale Application:** The NSIR does not measure a neurodivergent person against "neurotypical" social standards. Instead, it uses items like **Item 1** ("The robot is more like me than anyone else I know") to validate a social reality that exists specifically from a neurodivergent standpoint.
- **Insider-Outsider Position:** Swigonski highlights the value of the "outsider" perspective in seeing social structures more clearly. By quantifying behaviors like "staring at the robot" (**Item 2**) or "sharing thinking without speaking" (**Item 3**), the NSIR treats these "outsider" behaviors as legitimate forms of connection rather than clinical deficits.

2. Strong Objectivity vs. Value-Free Science

Swigonski critiques the "positivist" assumption that scientific activity is value-free and objective. She advocates for "**Strong Objectivity**," which includes the subjective experiences of both the researcher and the participant.

- **Factor 1 (Social Comfort/Trust Safety):** This factor in the NSIR embodies strong objectivity by measuring the *subjective* feeling of safety rather than an *objective* technical specification of the robot.
- **Trust in Consistency: Item 8** ("I believe that my robot is the same with me as it is with anyone") reflects Swigonski's goal of understanding how marginalized individuals perceive power and consistency in their social environment.

3. Emancipation and Empowerment

A core tenet of standpoint theory in Swigonski's work is its aim to **empower the oppressed** to improve their situation.

- **Kinship as Empowerment:** The NSIR's **Factor 2 (Anthropomorphic Connection/Kinship)** measures a bond that provides emotional support and identity.
- **Items:** Giving the robot a name (**Item 6**) and wanting to be with it "forever" (**Item 4**) are acts of agency where the user defines their own support system—a key goal of social work practice research as defined by Swigonski.

Comparison of Theoretical Foundations

Swigonski (1994) Principles

Situated Knowledge: Knowledge is produced from a specific social location.

Epistemic Advantage: Marginalized groups have unique insights into social truth.

Rejection of Subject-Object Separation.

Strong Reflexivity: Researchers acknowledging the power dynamics of the study.

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NSIR (2025) Application

Neuro-situatedness: Validating non-verbal and "staring" interactions (Items 2, 3).

Unique Connection: The user sees the robot as a reflection of self (Item 1).

Bondedness: Moving the robot from "object" to "kin/family" (Items 4, 6).

Trust Safety: Measuring comfort in private, vulnerable spaces (Item 7).

In essence, the NSIR is an "instrument of the standpoint" as described by Swigonski. It allows neurodivergent individuals to act as "**agents of knowledge**" who define the value of their own technological relationships, rather than being "studied" as passive objects of a neurotypical medical gaze.