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## Letters to the editor

*Letters received from readers in response to articles and ideas published in ANS are regularly featured, providing an opportunity for constructive critique, discussion, disagreements, and comment intended to stimulate the development of nursing science. Unless otherwise stated, we assume that letters addressed to the editor are intended for publication with your name and*

*affiliation. As many letters as possible are published. When space is limited and we cannot publish all letters received, we select letters reflecting the range of opinions and ideas received. If a letter merits a response from an ANS author, we will obtain a reply and publish both letters.*

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## From the editor

### SCIENCE AND THE POLITICS OF SEXISM

Over the past several years, I have had the opportunity to speak with groups of nurses on topics related to feminism and nursing. The experience has been stimulating, gratifying, disappointing, and frustrating. With every experience I witnessed firsthand that sexism is alive and well within our own community. I have also seen evidence that there are individuals who are beginning to see the reality of this phenomenon, to understand it, and to conceptualize the necessity of initiating change.

The many ways in which sexism invades the scientific enterprise are subtle, but once seen, the dynamics of sexism in science are painfully blatant. Nursing science is in double jeopardy, both in terms of the inherent sexism that invades science per se, and in terms of the long tradition of sexist oppression of the profession itself.<sup>1</sup>

The phenomenon we call "sexism" is an exquisite example of a phenomenon that is so glaringly apparent that we cannot even see it. Since we are not able to perceive it, as empiricists we can cleverly dismiss it as a serious av-

enue for research and knowledge building. Sexism, if indeed it exists, can be relegated to the social critics, the radicals, the political fanatics, and maybe even the philosophers. If we were to open our minds' eyes to see the glaring reality of sexism, we would find it to be a phenomenon that is critical to the health of our profession and our clients, and an essential consideration for the development of nursing science.

Gender identity is central to human experience as we now know it. The single most important thing that all human beings convey to others about themselves is their gender. The specific social and cultural means of conveying gender identity to others vary among cultures, but the structures that necessitate conveying this information are universal. In all cultures there are specific dress codes for males and females, specific body gestures and movements that are typical of males and females, specific language rules that apply to males and females. It is essential to know the other person's gender in any type of social interaction. Nothing is so distracting, or so powerful in bringing social disapproval, as behavior that violates or challenges the codes—a "feminine" male or a "masculine" female elic-