

---

# From the editor

It is 1984, the infamous year of George Orwell's negative utopia.<sup>1</sup> The novel depicts a state of chronic crisis. Many of the material realities depicted are not quite our reality in this year, but the fictional realities provide useful metaphors with which to examine the situation today, stimulating insights that can be useful.

The slogans of Orwell's state, Oceania, illustrate the epitome of doublethink: "War is peace," "ignorance is strength," and "freedom is slavery." The society of Orwell's novel was so thoroughly indoctrinated with doublethink that the slogans were accepted as truths and were not questioned; the illogic was lost to awareness. The people were caught up in perpetual crises that maintained blindness, living out fears engendered by the state as a "normal" way of life. There is much evidence that doublethink is alive and well in the nursing and health care world of 1984. Our own blindness to the illogic of doublethink appears to be just as insidious. Although the covert nature of doublethink symptoms in nursing is distressing at some levels, this is taken to be the normal state of affairs.

Our society takes as a given that *war is peace*. We fail to question the illogic of the predominant political rhetoric that to have peace in the world we must intensify military potential and maintain destructive capacities that threaten, not only "the enemy," but the entire planet. Society's headlong course in this direction seriously cripples health care and human services, with barely a cry of protest coming from nursing. Within the profession, we preach the rhetoric of "collaboration"; political collaboration means "to cooperate with or willingly assist an enemy of one's country and especially an occupying force."<sup>2p217</sup> All too often, we approach our health care colleagues with the sincere intent of an equal intellectual exchange and peaceful cooperation, only to find that if we maintain the edifice of peace, we must submit to an unequal distribution of power, grateful for what is gained in

the cold struggle. Each minor "victory" is perceived as a gain; each loss is another crisis in the continual struggle. Any alternative arrangement is viewed with futility. We believe, just as thoroughly as Orwell's citizens, that there is no alternative; that war is peace.

In Orwell's society, the slogan *ignorance is strength* was maintained by continual obliteration and reconstruction of the past. The state perpetually created superficial propaganda that gave the citizens only partial awareness of reality, nurturing chronic fear of impending disaster. In nursing, the past has been thoroughly erased from our awareness or misrepresented; it is assumed either that nursing has no significant past or that the past is not worthy of serious consideration. We are continually caught up with superficial issues that we believe to be critical for survival. We fight wars on the political front from a position of ignorance of our heritage of oppression, believing that strength will come from "winning" the political battle; one battle follows another, with alternating enemies named at will.

Like Orwell's citizens, we believe that we are emancipated from the restrictions of the past; in essence, we subscribe to the doublethink that *freedom is slavery*. We delude ourselves when we claim that we are not subservient in the health care system; we blame our "image" alone for perpetuating the false remnants of subservience; and metaphorically apply cosmetics and costumes to project an image of autonomy, competence, and ability. We deny the oppression that breeds enslavement and subservience and thus perpetuate the slavery inherent in self-blame for the lack of freedom that exists.

Evidence of doublethink admittedly leads to an overstatement: an angry outcry against the situation. But as long as the evidence of doublethink is denied, we only succeed in increasing our vulnerability. Doublethink does not come from an act of will; it is a subversive flow that psychically captures our awareness

and lays a trap leading to confusion, fear, suspicion, and guilt. An act of the will that insists on seeing creates a fury that calls forth action. Awareness makes it possible to sort out reality from myth, freedom from slavery, strength from ignorance, and peace from war.

In reviewing the material submitted for this issue, it became painfully obvious that nurses, as a group of health care providers, are experiencing a doublethink paralysis. There was a record low of submissions for this issue, suggesting that the concept of crisis is either out of vogue or we are not attending to whatever is implied by this term. The majority of manuscripts submitted addressed the rhetorical question: "What is crisis?" Are we trapped by the doublethink that "crisis is nothing"? The dictionary defines crisis as "the decisive mo-

ment."<sup>2(p267)</sup> If *crisis is nothing* to us in reality, we are blind to the opportunities of critical decisive moments, for ourselves, our clients, our profession, and our country. Once we awake to the reality and the perpetual crises of doublethink, a decisive moment has been recognized. Rather than let that moment slip by, we must act.

## REFERENCES

1. Orwell, G: *Nineteen Eighty-four*. New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1949.
2. *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*. Springfield, Mass, G & C Merriam Co, 1981.

—Peggy L. Chinn, PhD, FAAN  
Editor

## CORRECTION

Three errors inadvertently appeared on page 29 of ANS 6:3. The page should be corrected as follows:

—Doreen C. Harper's affiliation should read:

Chairperson, RN Program  
Assistant Professor  
University of Maryland School of  
Nursing  
Baltimore County Campus  
Catonsville, Maryland

—In the second line of the article, the word "utilization" should read "utilitarian."

—In the credit footnote, the word "interrelated" should be "interrater."