

From the Editor

The Web is more a social creation than a technical one The ultimate goal of the Web is to support and improve our weblike existence in the world. We clump into families, associations, and companies. We develop trust across the miles and distrust around the corner. What we believe, endorse, agree with, and depend on is representable and, increasingly, represented on the Web. We all have to ensure that the society we build with the Web is of the sort we intend.^{1(p123)}

The internet, and subsequently the World Wide Web, has dramatically changed our world. The Web, along with other technological influences such as film and television, has catapulted the social order from a print-based society to a world society that depends on electronic media. Like all such transformations in the world, it is not an easy one, and the issues that we are compelled to grapple with are not of our own choosing. There are 2 such issues that I believe are particularly important for nurses and the others concerned with promoting health.

The first issue concerns the generation gap that has emerged as youngsters began to learn to use computers, the internet, and the World Wide Web from their earliest days. Those in the academic world perceive this gap in dramatic ways, decrying the inability of young students to read, to write, to spell—to engage in all the skills that we in the older generation see as the skills of those who are literate. At the same time, we encounter midlife students (and some colleagues) who still resist using the computer, who resist using e-mail, and who discount any information that might be obtained in the World Wide Web. What we of the older generation are only beginning to realize is that our preconceived, print-based notions of literacy are being transformed, and will be replaced by expectations, standards, and skills that we are only beginning to acquire and appreciate. Spender, who believes that we are probably the last of the purely print-proficient, has observed:

What we have to see is that we are the only generation which will know both mediums, the print and the electronic. We are the ones who will be able to make comparison, who will be able to assess, evaluate and transfer our experience, expertise—and wisdom—form the old forms to the new.^{2(pxxvi)}

The challenge is to acquire sufficient appreciation and proficiency with the new media

in order to have a major influence in this process of transfer.

The second issue that I believe to be important concerns access—access based on economic advantage, social and economic class, gender, political and legal forces, and many other dynamics. Nurses themselves around the world represent all issues of access, as do the populations and individuals whose health concerns us. All too many are excluded from the new world of cyberspace by conditions beyond our control, but even more devastating are the self-imposed and self-controlled factors that limit access and involvement. Spender credits Florence Nightingale as one who declared that without the book, women would be in danger of dying of intellectual starvation.^{2(pxxi)} Likewise I believe that nursing today will be in danger of dying if we do not fully embrace, use, and become proficient in the new internet-based technologies. The fact that many women still eschew technology and the internet-based technologies does not work in our favor, for our own discipline, and for many of those whose health we claim to protect.

Cyberspace is where new communities are being formed and it is where new human values are being forged. Nursing, in order to remain viable and vibrant in influencing health world wide, must be involved, visible, and influential in the world of cyberspace.

As the authors of the articles in this issue of *Advances in Nursing Science* demonstrate, there are nurses who are fully engaged in the world of cyberspace, and have considerable proficiency in creating virtual realities. It is my hope that their work will inspire not only improved scholarship in this area, but will encourage everyone to move to your own next level of cyberspace proficiency!

—Peggy L. Chinn, RN, PhD, FAAN
Editor

REFERENCES

1. Berners-Lee T. *Weaving the Web: The Original Design and the Ultimate Destiny of the World Wide Web*. New York: HarperBusiness; 2000.
2. Spender D. *Nattering on the Net: Women, Power and Cyberspace*. North Melbourne, Australia: Spinifex Press; 1995.