

* V. Michelle Parry

Nature v. Nurture?

*"I've been framed.
I've been framed, I tell you!"
- Baby Faced Finster*

*"Don't be such a crybaby;
After all, 99 years isn't forever!"
- Bugs Bunny
1954*

The news reports went something like this:

Today's top story is a double tragedy for one local family. A juvenile runaway accompanied by a vicious dog was involved in an accident that resulted in the death of a bystander. In a shocking turn of events, some residents cheered as the youth fled with an article of clothing belonging to the deceased. The deceased's sister attempted to recover the missing item and in a later confrontation, was also killed.

What would you consider when determining the most appropriate punishment for the delinquent? If the first death was accidental, was the later death self-defense? What about restitution to the family who lost two daughters? Does it matter if the clothing was necessary for survival? Does it matter if the deceased and her sister had been a menace to the community? Does it matter if there are totally inconsistent accounts of the events? What does any of this have to do with conflict resolution?

Simply put, the way a situation is presented can influence the way people view the issues and make decisions. For example, if the incidents described above took place in Kansas/Oz and the runaways were Dorothy and her little dog Toto, the way you think about the questions presented would likely change.

One's sense of right and wrong is usually defined early in life and can be viewed from many different perspectives, including; religious, cultural and legal. However, the philosophical underpinning of how we determine the ethical character of actions is more complicated. These factors come together to frame the way we get along in the world.

People operating under different frames have a tendency to misunderstand and misinterpret the words and actions of each other. It is a natural result of one group not having knowledge of the inner workings and nuances of the other. For example, some people think that certain actions (like lying or stealing) are inherently wrong and others think that actions can be right or wrong depending on the circumstances.

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Therefore, people can make decisions that are entirely consistent with their frame, but that are inconsistent with the frames of others, resulting in serious conflicts. Even if the differing frames cannot be reconciled, it can be helpful to hear the justifications for certain actions taken, and to develop an appreciation for the constraints that may have prevented alternative decisions from being made.

When one frame changes to include some aspects of another; the accompanying thought processes usually become a bit more flexible. However, the key to creating stable interactions is to introduce new ideas into an existing frame in a deliberate and thoughtful way.

For example, an intriguing book published in 1995 by Gregory Maguire short titled: *Wicked*, retells the classic Oz tale from the perspective of a misunderstood girl who was born with green skin, terrible teeth and allergies to water. The orphaned girl has traumatic experiences at boarding school, inflicted largely by her shallow roommate, Glinda. As the tragic figure grows up, she comes to believe that she has no soul, and at one point, decides 'if it's wicked you want, it's wicked you will get.' Hearing the story from this other point of view changes the way we think about it.

If that doesn't give you a new perspective, how about the fact that in both the 1900 book and the 1939 movie, some would say that the only Witch who lies in the story is the Good Witch Glinda. She deceives Dorothy into undertaking a dangerous journey even though she knows the slippers can take her home (a lie of omission). Also, some would say that before Dorothy arrived, nothing died in Oz. But after her arrival, two Witches died; forty wolves died, forty crows died, a swarm of bees died, and a giant tree died; and violently so!

And finally, try this. Scholars say that L. Frank Baum wrote the Wizard of Oz not only as a fairytale for children, but also as a political statement about injustice in 1890's America. Apparently, Oz is the abbreviation for "ounce". The Yellow Brick Road referred to the dangers of the continued use of the gold standard and Dorothy's silver slippers (ruby in the movie) were intended to show support for a popular proposed alternative. The Wizard represented the current administration and the Cowardly Lion represented a particular Presidential hopeful. The Scarecrow represented naïve leaders from agricultural States. The Wicked Witch of the East represented industrialists and financiers, and the Woodsman represented dehumanized industrial workers.

What's next for Mr. Maguire - A sequel? A musical? Cinderella? Snow White? A Christmas Carol? Well, actually, yes. *Confessions of an Ugly Step Sister* was published in 2000, *Lost* in 2002, *Mirror Mirror* in 2004, and *Son of a Witch* will be released on September 27th. *Wicked the Musical* is currently playing at the Gershwin Theater in New York and at the Ford Theater in Chicago.

- That's all folks -