

# Feelings Create Reality

by David Shackleton

How do we know what is real? For most of us, our feelings are the primary measure of reality. And our strongest feelings are usually fears. So our reality is primarily constructed out of our fears.

Consider political affiliations, for instance. Those of us of a left wing, liberal bent tend to fear the encroachment of personal liberties by corporations or government. We see individual freedom, diversity and group identity as threatened by the interests the powerful: of big business and the very wealthy. We want a leveling of the playing field in terms of power and income, and we look to government and the legal system to protect individual and group rights, especially “disadvantaged” groups. Our fears have created our story about the world, who are the good guys and who the bad guys.

The conservatives among us, on the other hand, fear the encroachment of government and law into traditional ways of living. We love the idea that anyone can succeed through hard work, and see wealth and power as the just reward for achievement. Income disparities and the power of the business world thus tend to make us feel protected rather than threatened. Trying to “level the playing field” through legal tinkering with the structures that have made us what we are, especially within the family, threatens to undermine all that we have achieved. Our fears are responsible for our story about the world, and we have a different set of good and bad guys.

This is why dialogue between the left and the right rarely changes people's minds. Dialogue usually remains in the realm of the intellect, in concepts and ideas, and they are consequences, not causes. The source of people's politics lies in their feelings about the world, and even when those feelings are articulated (as they rarely are), sharing them in words does not cause another to experience them as we do. Our feelings, so real and intimate to us, remain foreign and abstract to those we hope to convince. And so we tend to stay stuck in our worldview, and fail to really understand (i.e., to *feel*) how others can see things so very differently. It is important to realize that this is human nature. It really is the best that people can do. Only when we wake up, when we begin working consciously on ourselves, do we have the possibility of recognizing and overcoming this pattern.

Interpretations of reality – stories, really – that strike a resonance with the way a lot of people feel, have power to move populations. One that I encounter a lot is the story that the family court system is corrupt and uncaring about children and families, driven by greed and avarice. To the men who come to me in distress, having lost a meaningful role in the lives of their families, this story feels right. How else are they to make sense of their feelings after having their children ripped unfairly from their lives? And yet, it is not “true” in any objective sense – most family law judges and lawyers care passionately about the interests of children, and are trying strenuously for best outcomes for the families they are serving. And so the fathers' rights advocates fail entirely to influence those they most wish to convince – the family law system – since they hold an entirely different (and very derogatory) perception of that system that doesn't resonate at all for the judges and lawyers within the system. Dialogue between these parties usually ends up with each still more convinced of the other's culpability. The fathers' rights advocates have not been able to make any progress in society, to gain many converts, because the feelings that are driving them are foreign to most men (and women) who have not been through

family court. Most men still don't fear losing meaningful access to their children. The story that has been of most interest to me in the last twenty years of my life has been the story about men and women, the gender story. Modern feminism is the story about reality created out of women's fears, out of their feelings about their lives. It is a story about oppression of women by men because many women *felt* oppressed. They felt victimized, unfairly denied power that it looked to them that men had. Men's corresponding but different feelings of powerlessness didn't show up in feminist analysis because they didn't show up in women's experiences. Feminist theory includes *only* powerlessness and victimhood for women, and *only* power and privilege for men because that is how they felt the world to be. When we are unconsciously driven to rationalize our feelings, we are unable to comprehend the objective reality of the world. Rather, we sincerely but mistakenly see a reality which is a projection of our strongest feelings – typically our fears and angers. When the feelings that we are projecting are shared by a lot of people, a movement is born. The feminist movement has held sway in the world, has become the mainstream story about gender, because of two things. First, it resonated with (the feelings of) a lot of women. And second, (and paradoxically, contrary to the feminist story) women *are* powerful in the psyches of men. When women accuse men, as feminism has done, most men experience powerful feelings of shame and guilt, and act to try to reduce those feelings.

I speak to men and women about these things in the hope that they can wake up, become aware that there is more to reality, and in particular to our gender reality, than these stories. We cannot greatly improve the world by operating from within a false or incomplete story about the world's nature, no matter how “true” it *feels*. For a metaphor to what this waking up might look and feel like, think back to when you were a child. Did it seem to you then, as it seems to most children, that the adults, especially your parents, had all of the power and privilege? Were you totally oblivious to the power and privilege that you held as a child? Certainly I was. Now, as an adult, do you have a different perception? Do you apprehend that the power of parents comes also with great obligation to their children, that there is a massive service component associated with it? A whole world of obligation and powerlessness on the part of parents that you were entirely unaware of when you were a child. You have a more balanced, a more whole, a more complete appreciation of the power dynamics between adults and children now, having intimately experienced both sides of that dynamic. That is what waking up feels like. It happens naturally for most people as they move from children to adults.

However, most people *don't* move from women to men, or men to women. To gain a balanced perspective around power and privilege between the genders, therefore, we need to wake up in a different way, in a way that allows us to experience some of the other gender's world through empathy, rather than directly. We need to extend ourselves as a matter of will, of intention, rather than having it happen to us naturally. I invite you to make this intention, to commit yourself to really getting a balanced perspective on gender power and privilege. There is a new magazine that will assist you: where you will find stories that explore all sides of the gender story, that articulate female *and* male victimhood, that describe male *and* female power. As they said in the sixties when the modern gender story began, can you dig it?

*The new magazine David refers to is found at [www.gripmagazine.org](http://www.gripmagazine.org). David has kindly given permission to include this article from the magazine on Everyman.*

