

REALITY

Ray Glickman

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ABOUT THE BOOK

My story took a year to unfold. A year ago these were ordinary people. Not special in any way. Not suspecting I had something planned for them.

This is the ultimate game of manipulation. Bored with his too-easy successes elsewhere, the unnamed narrator selects six people at random and makes their lives collide.

But the choices they make within the relationships he has constructed are theirs, not his. In the end, who is to blame for their actions: for their deceit, infidelity and crime?

Reality uses our culture's fascination with reality TV and its insatiable exposé of the private lives of the famous, the infamous, and even the plain ordinary, to provoke hard questions about ourselves.

At the heart of this novel are questions of fate and self-determination: to what extent are we responsible for our actions, even when the situation created is beyond our control?

The reader becomes as implicated as the six subjects in this dark, pacy and thought-provoking read.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

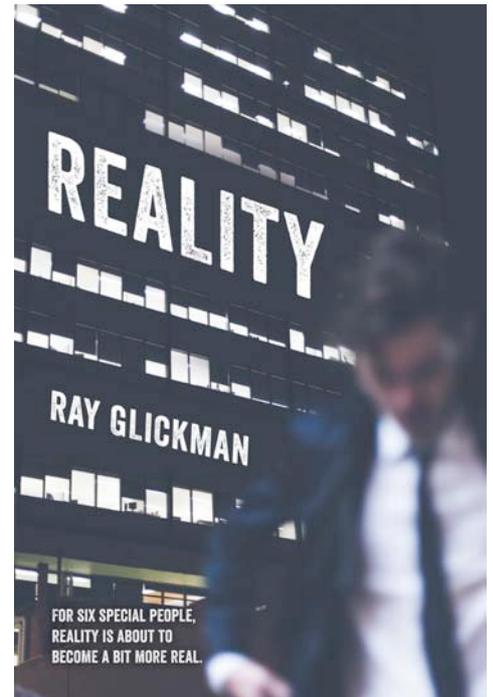
Ray Glickman holds Masters degrees in Business, Applied Social Studies, and Psychology and Philosophy. He was the CEO of the City of Fremantle for nine years and president of the Fremantle Chamber of Commerce for three.

Ray has a background in psychology and social work as well as leadership and management. He has been a lifelong student of what makes people tick as individuals and in groups.

Ray has spoken at numerous conferences around Australia for many years on a variety of subjects. *Reality* is his first novel.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What is the significance of the title? Is 'reality' pertinent to the individual? Can people face a shared reality? Are there multiple layers of reality?
- *But, if you don't make it your business to do things to other people, they sure as hell are going to do it to you.* (pp. 374–375)
What kind of person is the narrator? Do you think the reader is expected to empathise with him?
- Do you identify personally with any aspects of the narrator's attitudes, behaviours and overall world view?
- *Since when is it a crime to select people out of the telephone book and put them in touch with each other? Did I force anyone to do anything against their will?* (p. 368)
Are the narrator's actions immoral, amoral or neither?
- What aspects of morality are raised and explored by the novel?



- Why do you think the author has not given his narrator a name?
- Consider the structure of the novel. Why do you think that the author has set it up in the way he has?
- Do these characters feel to you like real people or are they parodies of types of personalities – or are they somewhere between the two?
- Do you think that your sympathies are expected to lie with the characters that the narrator manipulates? Do some characters invite your sympathy more than others?
- What is it about watching *Big Brother* that inspires the narrator to do what he does?
- The narrator says that his *morals are completely irrelevant* and that he has *merely exercised [his] freedom*. (p. 372)
Do you agree with this statement? Does the author *expect* you to agree with it?
- To what extent are people responsible for their own actions, even if they are not in control of the circumstances they find themselves in?
- Why do you think that each of the subjects' stories begin on a Sunday?
- What is the role of Mark in the story? Would the novel work without him?
- In what way is Hannah Baumgarten different from the other five subjects? Does this give her a different perspective of the narrator's actions?
- Do you think the assessments of the narrator made by the other characters in the transcripts ring true?
- Which of the characters' lives is least affected by the narrator's intervention?
- Which is changed most dramatically?
- Why does the author allow his subjects to speak for themselves in the transcripts?
- Do you think it is possible that an experiment like the one in the novel could actually be conducted in real life?
- In the novel, the narrator secures a film deal for his story at the end. What actor would you choose to play this enigmatic character?

INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

What was your motivation for writing Reality and where did the idea come from?

It was essentially a personal challenge. I thought I could write fiction, I had a clever story in mind and so I challenged myself to put up or shut up.

This particular story springs from my interest in how people tick and how society changes with interventions such as new technology. *Reality* explores the pervasive influence of fate, concepts of 'human significance' and dimensions of personal responsibility.

Reality TV brings these themes nicely into focus. In their quest for 'fifteen minutes of fame', participants entrust themselves to the fate offered by faceless TV networks. This is a great backdrop against which to explore concepts of personal responsibility.

How do you yourself feel about working within bureaucracy?

Although this word has taken on a pejorative meaning, there is nothing inherently bad about bureaucracy. It is just a process for getting complicated things done in large institutions. Max Weber's view was that bureaucracy was the ideal way to organise human activity.

In my various paid and unpaid roles, I have encountered great people with wonderful values and extraordinary capabilities working in the so-called bureaucracy.

Having said this, it is clear that governments and large corporations have become increasingly driven by process rather than outcomes. Politicians, aided and abetted by the public and the media, have progressively driven the bureaucracy to value risk management over everything else.

Hence it is fertile ground for satire. It is delicious (one of my favourite words too!) to observe the bureaucrats tie themselves in knots over political correctness and doggedly follow due process blind to its often perverse consequences.

Are the narrator and the other characters real people you have worked with or encountered in other parts of your life?

The narrator is strongly based on someone I was connected to via my work/board directorships. I was both shocked by, and in awe of, this person's capacity to manipulate.

All of the other characters are either tightly or loosely based on people I know. In a way, they are archetypes representative of people like them. Most of the quirky events that happen to them and the phrases they come up with are real.

Who (if any) is your favourite character in the Master Plan?

I love Mario because he is such a larrikin. He is also very real to me, having been based on someone I was quite close to once. I also greatly admire Hannah. I currently lead an organisation that works with the aged and she is the epitome of the experience and wisdom that reside in so many older people that so often go unrecognised.

Which 'intervention' did you enjoy creating the most and why?

I tried to make sure that all of the chosen interventions were not only credible but also had an element of wicked fun. At some level all of them involve someone getting their comeuppance. However, weaving the web of intrigue between Lisa, Julia and Robert and their families appealed to me most. In the end, how can anyone resist poking fun at the privileged and the worried well?

Do you agree (to paraphrase the narrator) that this story is a product of its time? Could it have been written in an earlier era?

Although reality TV is a modern phenomenon, the central themes of the 'chaos' of fate, the quest for significance, and the abrogation of personal responsibility are timeless.

It is true, however, that the internet is a most useful tool for those in the manipulation business. It is said that information is power. This power can be used for good or evil, and this is a point explored in the book. In the modern world, it is much easier to find things out about people and engage with them.

What do you think lies behind our desire to probe people's private lives?

Human beings are essentially curious animals. That drive to search for new understandings and new opportunities has underpinned mankind's success, if you can call it that.

At the same time, people are highly competitive. As I said before, they strive for significance, which is a relative term. People want to know about other people's lives because it helps them gauge their own success.

In the modern world, mass communications and social media have revolutionised nosiness and encouraged prurience. The mass media have fuelled interest in the lives of the rich and famous and operated with breathtaking double standards by spawning the paparazzi and condemning them all at once.

In the end, most of us do lead little lives so we search for opportunities to make ourselves feel better because the lives of others are even less significant.

Do you yourself watch reality TV?

I love music so I do watch most of the reality music shows. Like many people, I have a morbid fascination with *Big Brother* and the moronic dating shows but I can't bring myself to watch them.



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