

The shark net



What we, as individuals, perceive to be real; to actually exist, is both objective and subjective. Everyone's perception of realism varies greatly; from friend to friend, neighbour to neighbour and even from parent to child. It is this perception of an individual's reality that ultimately defines who they become. To define a person, it is often said that we should analyse their behaviour, as it is their behaviour that reflects their state of reality. A person's behaviour may depend on their surroundings; the era in which they live, their social interactions or even their physical environment.

The era in which they grew up, for instance, will adversely reflect on an individual by default as society forces their morals and beliefs of what is right - what is reality, onto them. There was once a time where it was the norm for women to take on and settle into their role as a housewife, and for men to go to work and be the sole provider of a family. Now, women have just as many expectations placed onto them career wise as men, and as a result, in general, women come off as more confident and independent as compared to being submissive and unsure, as was the case back in the day.

Their behaviour clearly shows that their sense of reality has changed as society has progressed. In Robert Drewe's memoirs, *The Shark Net*, he retells of his being dragged along to the sermon of evangelical Billy Graham, by his mother. Despite the pressure placed on him by his family, to conform to a life free from religious sin, sex and adultery, he rebels. Quite often is Drewe home late after liaisons with various females. His behaviour reflects a reality quite different to that of his Christian mother, a woman who he has been brought up by since birth.

In this case, it is his rebellious behaviour that defines his perception of reality as a result of his relationship with his mother. But why did Drewe desire so greatly to rebel? The move from Melbourne to Perth was a substantial one for Drewe. He went from the “frosty lawns and trimmed hedges” of an urban, cosmopolitan city to “the most isolated city in the world,” what was essentially, in comparison, a desert. As a result, just as the people of London vary from the people of New York, Drewe encountered a whole new type of people.

To rebel against his mother meant to conform to the people of Perth, as he wished so desperately to fit in, whereas his mother wished to be in control. The controlling nature of his mother contrasts to that of Drewe in his wish to embrace the unknown. The unknown being what was now, in fact, the reality of living in Perth. Drewe’s mother, Dorothy, is unable to accept this new truth, as it nullifies her prior beliefs. However, for Drewe, the reality is clear, succinct and remarkably self-explanatory.

This results in the way unto which the two respective individuals inevitably turn out, as it gives a clear indication of the ways in which they behave. What is interesting to note is that memory and reality are interdependent of one another. A person’s reality can be based upon memories, but these memories can be selective depending on a current sense of reality. Memories also falter, and hence, the selectiveness and reliability of Drewe’s memory comes into question. Was he biased in his representation of himself in his youth in comparison to his mother, for instance? Was his mother really the control freak he made her out to be?

In the same way, in the study of history, when analysing a primary or secondary source, the reliability of the author is always considered, noted and expanded upon, as it may give an inaccurate representation of depicted events - it may not portray the reality of the situation; what really went on. As Chuck Palahniuk writes in *Fight Club*, “.. you're not how much money you've got in the bank. You're not your job. You're not your family, and you're not who you tell yourself.... ” but you are, who you behave to be. So one must ask what is responsible for their behaviour in order to fully understand the definition of their individual reality.