

Sex and the iWorld

Study Guide


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And you may ask yourself,
How do I work this?

Talking Heads, “Once in a Lifetime”

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Study Questions

Preface/Introduction

Sex and the iWorld proposes that limiting sexual relations to a marriage between a man and a woman is good news for everyone. This is a proposition that until recently has been relatively unchallenged. Yet, we live during a time when not only is the proposition being challenged, it is being toppled. This substantial change in social and relational values raises many questions.

1. What is the author's purpose in writing the book?
2. What are the two main questions facing Western culture?
3. Why is the ethic of the sexual revolution succeeding?
4. Why is this occurring among Christians?
5. Why have so many churches and Christians been silent on these issues?
6. How have your attitudes toward sex and marriage shifted in the past decade?
7. How has the cultural shift in attitudes toward marriage and sexual behavior affected you personally?

Chapter 1

One of the most important “facts” with which we must wrestle is that for millennia Western society believed that human fulfillment was found not by doing what we like or indulging our desires but by embracing the relational matrix. Before we can critique the tWorld, we must sympathetically understand it. The purpose of this chapter is to define and examine the tWorld and its conditions as the realm out of which our current society emerged, or, in other words, the world from which we came.

1. How is freedom defined in the tWorld?
2. What is the role of family in the tWorld?
3. What is the role of friendship in the tWorld?
4. Is creating time for personal contemplation and the development of relationships really superior to sexual relationships in the pursuit of the best life?
5. Do you agree with Cephalus’s assertion that old age brings freedom from the frenzied and savage mastery of sexual desire?
6. Does the tWorld’s relational matrix inspire contentment or stifle individualism?

Chapter 2

To recognize the iWorld for what it is today is to make sense of the last six hundred years of intellectual history in the West leading up to it. By tracing social progressions through these years, it becomes clear how elevating science to the dominant epistemology served to transition us, knowingly or not, to the iWorld. Science undermined belief in the classical philosophy and theology that formed the moral foundation of the tWorld but offered nothing in its place. It expanded our knowledge of what “is” but undermined our belief in what “ought” to be.

1. Why was science allowed to displace religion as the authority on truth and morality?
2. What are the ideas that brought down the tWorld?
3. Do you agree with Nietzsche’s assertion that moral claims are ultimately rooted in emotion or appetite and not reason?
4. What is Postmodernism?
5. How do humans discover their individual identity?
6. What are the social implications of having identities that are fluid and self-defined?

Chapter 3

Exploring the nature of the iWorld is elusive because the iWorld is more of a way of living than a coherent approach to life. The iWorld is based on religious-like faith in individualism. It is a “faith” because it is based on assumptions that cannot be proved. Christians won’t know if their faith is true until the end of history. Proponents of the iWorld won’t know if their faith is adequate until we see if it works. The most important points to take into account are the three freedoms (p. 64) and the three taboos (p. 71).

1. What is freedom in the iWorld? Does the iWorld love freedom or idolize it?
2. What are the core commitments of the iWorld?
3. What is the iWorld’s view of self?
4. What are the three taboos? Do you agree with the assertion that violating any one of the three will lead to a swift and strong expression of societal disapproval?
5. Is there a meaningful difference between men and women, or are they the “same difference”?

Chapter 4

When a society begins to embrace the individualism of the iWorld, the changes in relationships are clearly reflected in public policy. The two most cherished freedoms of the iWorld will be sexual and relational freedom, and, as a result, public policy will develop in seven different directions concerning sex, marriage, and family. Government will accommodate the broadest range of choice in these areas and in doing so, eventually facilitate sexual and genetic manipulation and cease to recognize fading gender boundaries. As a result, marriage will convert to a strictly legal contract and the creation of families and children will be radically redefined.

1. What are the highest values in the iWorld?
2. Can the iWorld ever give its citizens the security that comes from knowing oneself? If not, is it important?
3. What are the by-products of individualism?
4. What factors have led to the breakdown of the three-generational-family (3GF)?
5. Has the author exaggerated the potential social costs to the children of the iWorld? If so, how?
6. What are the changes to politics in the iWorld?
7. What effect does the iWorld have on public policy? Which of the seven policy directions of the iWorld do you welcome? Which raise concern?

Chapter 5

This crucial chapter addresses the concern that there is no viable alternative to the iWorld, a concern stemming from the difficulty of responding to Nietzsche's assertions that God and morality are "dead." Nietzsche discredits morality because it has no discernible objective foundation. Dale Kuehne argues, however, that there is a response and that it can be found by rediscovering the spiritual possibilities of human experience, long overshadowed by the Enlightenment focus on the material world.

1. What is Nietzsche's challenge to the concept of moral truth?
2. Why is Christianity having difficulty responding to Nietzsche's challenge?
3. What is "natural law"?
4. Do you find Kuehne's response to Nietzsche persuasive? Why or why not?

Chapter 6

Here, we begin to unpack the meaning of the rWorld. To comprehend the rWorld is to recognize Christianity as a relational religion at its core and humans as relational by nature. Gender matters, and it matters all the more because relationships matter. To distort one is to mangle the other. When considering marriage and family, while they are both important, family is more important than marriage. Marriage is valuable in itself, but all the more so for fostering the greatest relational fulfillment of family.

1. How does the relational nature of God impact the rWorld?
2. What does gender have to do with relationship?
3. Why does family take priority over marriage in the rWorld?
4. What is the role of the 3GF in the rWorld?

Chapter 7

The subtitle for this chapter might be “The Love Song from the End of Time,” because it explicates the story of the centrality and complexity of divine and human love. It is the story of the human race, of living in the relational innocence of the Garden, opting out of the Garden for an unsustainable individualism, and a divine invitation to find our way home.

1. How is intimacy depicted in the first two chapters of Genesis?
2. Why did Adam and Eve’s disobedience in Genesis 3 disrupt their intimacy with God and each other?
3. Why do we need to be connected with God to be able to properly love others?
4. How does God invite us back into relationship?
5. What is identity in the iWorld? In the rWorld?

Chapter 8

The biblical teaching on sexuality is good news for everyone because it is a signal to all of us that the fulfillment for which we yearn is found not in sex, but in the quality of intimacy we enjoy relationally. Hence, denying non-married people sex does not deprive them of anything they need to live the most fulfilling lives because what makes marriages good is not the sex but the quality of intimacy the couple enjoys. The iWorld values sex as freedom. The rWorld values the development of divine love and human intimacy that enables true human fulfillment.

1. What are the arguments for and against allowing monogamous homosexual relations?
2. What is the argument for marriage as an essential ingredient to a fulfilling life?
3. How can a sexual relationship inhibit our ability to cultivate love and intimacy?
4. What do the iWorld and the rWorld teach about the nature of relationships and their role in human fulfillment?
5. How does the rWorld define intimacy and love?

Chapter 9

Just as the iWorld's insistence on individualism extended influence throughout society, the rWorld's standards will inevitably be reflected in relationships and the public policies that help to shape them. To envision the rWorld, consider the shape of relations between man and wife, families, neighbors, and the world as a community. Further, consider the role of gender in an rWorld society where relationships are vital.

1. What is the difference between *standard of living* and *quality of life*?
2. What steps are necessary in creating the rWorld?
3. What makes up the relational matrix in the rWorld?
4. What is the role of government in the establishment of the rWorld?
5. How do roles and boundaries enhance the relational structure of the rWorld?
6. What is the difference in the understanding of relational freedom between the iWorld and the rWorld?
7. What public policies can promote better relationships?

Chapter 10

The book concludes with a chapter that seeks to clarify the choice with which we are faced. In large part, our choice will be made based on the question of how we determine who we are. Is our identity primarily rooted in our individual characteristics, or is it primarily rooted in our common human nature? This chapter helps us understand the various dimensions involved in answering this question.

1. What makes the iWorld and the rWorld mutually exclusive?
2. *Who are we and how do we know?* How does the iWorld answer this question? How does the rWorld answer this question?
3. What are the major questions you have concerning the iWorld and the rWorld?

Suggestions for Study Leaders

Preface/Introduction

Leading a civil discussion of such controversial issues is only rarely done in this world. The first session will set the tone for all subsequent sessions. Sharing some guidelines and expectations for these conversations will shape a forum conducive to a group discussion. Take the time during the first session to have people lay out all their issues and questions related to the subject. Keep a running list of these topics and pledge a discussion of them at the right moment in the subsequent meetings. Once that list is made, focus on the questions appropriate to the readings assigned for the session. It might be advantageous to construct a list of rules for discussion. For example, ask that people avoid giving long speeches. Advise group members to think carefully before disclosing personal information; rather, have them focus on the ideas and avoid personalizing. Help members disagree without being disagreeable. Ask them to pay attention to tone, speak in the first person, and avoid confrontational phrasing like “you” statements and generalizations like “those people.” The following questions can assist the group in developing a healthy approach to discussion before launching into the substance of the book.

1. Why is it so difficult for all of us to discuss these issues in a civil manner?
2. What is it that we fear in this discussion?
3. In light of these frustrations and anxieties, what can this group do to create a safe, open, and receptive discussion of these issues?

Chapter 1

Concentrate with laser-like focus on exploring all that was good about the tWorld. A critique of the tWorld will only be fruitful when this line of thought has been fully examined and acknowledged. Consider asking the group this question: could we return to the tWorld if we wanted to?

Chapter 2

Get the group to live with the persuasive power of Nietzsche's question, "Why?" This will be uncomfortable but essential in understanding how we got to where we are. You can tell the group to stay tuned for the author's response to Nietzsche in chapter five.

Chapter 3

This group needs to explore together what a world of unbridled individualism that respects only the three taboos looks like. Help the class invoke their imagination in this enterprise. Encourage people to withhold judgment and to imagine and develop a contour of the iWorld.

Chapter 4

It will be constructive for the group to debate whether or not sexual and relational freedom will be cherished as highly as the author suggests and to consider what this means for public policy. Again, encourage people to use their imagination and withhold judgment.

Chapter 5

The author doesn't claim to prove the existence of spirit and soul but merely seeks to point out that the West believed the soul was self evident for millennia. Further, contrary to popular wisdom, science has not ruled it out. As before, help the group to understand the argument and consider the likelihood of the existence of a nonmaterial realm of spirituality. Consider what this might look like.

Chapter 6

The teaching of this chapter runs counter to the individualism of the culture and the church. There is much to discuss and explore. Try to help the group to understand the author's argument before you allow the group to critique it. As we will see, the rWorld is not a cafeteria where we can pick and choose what we please; rather, it is a coherent whole. Hence, helping the group grasp and discuss the big picture is truly important.

Chapter 7

Many who come to this chapter will be challenged as they consider the degree to which this world as it is presently constituted is not a safe place to trust with their hopes and dreams. While hell is not mentioned by name many will struggle with that aspect of the Christian story. The most challenging concept to believe in this chapter concerns heaven. Can it really be this good? Explore with the group the plausibility of God being good enough to create Eden, good enough to allow free will, and good enough to love it back into submission.

Chapter 8

This chapter directly takes on the challenge of the sexual revolution. After the group discusses the chapter's central arguments long enough to understand them, guide the group into an exploration of the validity of the biblical teaching on sexuality as good news for EVERYONE.

Chapter 9

One of the most difficult conceptual challenges in understanding the rWorld is to understand why the iWorld and the rWorld are mutually exclusive. Many who read this book will assume that the iWorld gives people permission to live rWorld lives. The reality is, however, that the iWorld only gives people permission to live individually as they wish. The iWorld places the individual above relationships. Hence, for the rWorld to be realized, it will have to break away and form itself in a very different manner. Help the group to grapple with this basic point of logic before they debate the ideological differences between the iWorld and the rWorld.

Chapter 10

It will be important for everyone to be able to consider how he or she can come to know who they are and then select the world that is best for them. Encourage honest and open dialogue, giving space for individuals to disagree with each other.