

Bioethics Book Club



And Again **A novel by Jessica Chiarella** ***Touchstone, 2016***

Summary¹

In Jessica Chiarella's novel 'And Again' we follow four patients, Hannah, David, Connie and Linda, who have all been cured through 'SUBlife', a pilot program seeking FDA approval. Each of them has been transferred to a replica of their old body, to cure them of the deadly illnesses they suffered. Trying to reenter their previous lives and relationships, they are faced with the same question: How much of your personhood rests in your mind and how much in your heart and body?

The story describes their individual struggles to adjust to their new physical identities as they find their way back into their previous lives.

NOTE: The hard copy version of this book contains a reading group guide, which includes discussion questions along with suggestions for different activities to enhance your book club. This NSHEN book club discussion sheet can be used on its own or in combination with the resources included in the book.

Ethical Issues

Identity

Cloning

Authenticity

Selfhood

Autonomy

Mind and body

Discussion questions:

- Are Hannah, David, Linda and Connie still the same people they were before the transfer?
- "I shrug, though I know he can't see it. It's habit. A habit that was born long before I entered this body; impossible to break." Discuss how habits develop. To what extent may they be tied to experience and/or to genetics?

¹ Partly adapted from publishers' summary.

- Reflect on some of the topical themes throughout the book. Can you draw parallels to current areas of medical practice or research?
- To what extent do you think the four SUBLife patients' experiences of going through the program resemble patient experiences in current medical practice?
- If a program like SUBLife became available, what would be your biggest concerns about participating?
- Hannah's fiancé, Sam, suggests that with the approval of SUBLife, everyone will potentially have the chance to live forever. Discuss how this would affect society in the long term.
- "It's a body so perfect it is difficult to inhabit sometimes, because it is difficult to imagine it's really mine." Discuss how body and mind contribute to shape a person's identity.

Discuss the following passages from the book:

- "It's my own body," I whisper. She nods, looking a little sick. "Of course it is, of course it is. But in the paperwork you signed before the transfer, you specifically consented to allow the SUBLife committee discretion in your medical treatment for the next five years." "My husband" "What?", she asks. "My husband signed that paperwork. Not me."
- "You'd think there would be some sort of litmus test for getting your life saved," Sam says. "Like how many times you've voted to cut Medicaid, that sort of thing."
- "If there is a God, I think SUBLife is tantamount to laughing in his face."
- "I suspect he knows what I do, that Dr. Grath is one generation too old for immortality, that he will grow old and die the way people were always intended to, a death that is the sort the rest of us have always hoped for."
- "I remember how traitorous I felt, knowing that the slick SUBLife brochure was sitting on my dresser at home as I listened to the others describe the agony of chemo, the indignities of colostomy bags, or the triumph of climbing a flight of stairs. I mean, isn't this sort of thing usually reserved for people who aren't going to get a miracle cure?" (Hannah questioning the purpose of the SUBLife support group).
- "You needed me to die. In the hospital, in those eight years. That's what you needed."