



The Inner Circle

T.C. Boyle

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Fresh on the heels of his *New York Times* bestselling and National Book Award- nominated novel, *Drop City*, T.C. Boyle has spun an even more dazzling tale that will delight both his longtime devotees and a legion of new fans. Boyle's tenth novel, *The Inner Circle* has it all: fabulous characters, a rollicking plot, and more sex than pioneering researcher Dr. Alfred Kinsey ever dreamed of documenting . . . well, almost.

A love story, *The Inner Circle* is narrated by John Milk, a virginal young man who in 1940 accepts a job as an assistant to Dr. Alfred Kinsey, an extraordinarily charming professor of zoology at Indiana University who has just discovered his life's true calling: sex. As a member of Kinsey's "inner circle" of researchers, Milk (and his beautiful new wife) is called on to participate in sexual experiments that become increasingly uninhibited—and problematic for his marriage. For in his later years Kinsey (who behind closed doors is a sexual enthusiast of the first order) ever more recklessly pushed the boundaries both personally and professionally.

While Boyle doesn't resist making the most of this delicious material, *The Inner Circle* is at heart a very moving and very loving look at sex, marriage, and jealousy that will have readers everywhere reassessing their own relationships—because, in the end, "love is all there is."

The Inner Circle Details

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Nitya says

This is essentially the story of Professor Kinsey, the famous sex researcher, as told by a young man, who in the late 1930's takes Professor Kinsey's class in college, gets interviewed by him for his now famous sex study, and ends up working alongside Kinsey in his research of human sexuality. The inner circle consists of Prok (Professor Kinsey), his wife, Mac, and the young men who join him in his research, as well as their wives.

I really want to know how much of this book is based on fact. Prok was way ahead of his time, with his beliefs that human sexuality is a natural instinct, and that nothing humans do together, consensually, is immoral or wrong.

Prok was highly sexed, and he practiced what he preached, sharing his wife with the men in his inner circle. He was obsessed with his work, and expected those who worked for him to be equally dedicated. I had never given much thought to Kinsey's work, before. I haven't seen the movie based on his life-yet. After reading this, I realized how backward and repressed our culture was, and of course, to some extent, still is. Kinsey looked at human sexuality like one would look at microbiology. That is to say, as a biological response to stimulation. He played an important part in taking sex out of the stiff Puritanical, for procreation, and better not enjoy it role, instead proclaiming to the masses that sex of all kinds is natural, healthy, and for our pleasure. What a concept!

The book is highly sexed, like Prok, and it raises the questions of non-monogamy, and stimulates the reader to examine her/his own beliefs about sexuality.

Judy says

This is one sexy novel!! Be advised that you may feel aroused while reading it and chronically horny in between the hours spent reading. It is a fictional account of the years leading up to and immediately following the publication of Sexual Behavior in the Human Male by Dr Alfred Kinsey in 1948.

I don't think many people heard the term "open marriage" until the 1970s. In fact, American views on sexuality remained conservative, Puritan and repressive until the "sexual revolution" and "free love" became buzz words as well as an open practice in the 1960s. Alfred Kinsey however, showed that sex before marriage, masturbation, and homosexuality were common practices in the 1930s and 1940s. Such things were never mentioned back then. Churches, mothers, and educators preserved a morality that was proven false by the publication of Kinsey's book, for which he gained wild popularity and of course major moral backlash. His book was a top ten non-fiction bestseller in 1948.

Boyle chose to tell the story through the first person viewpoint of John Milk, a fictional character who serves as Kinsey's first research assistant. Mike is a socially inept nerd, but the set up is brilliant. T C Boyle proves all of Kinsey's research to be truthful by showing us that a socially inept nerd is as horny and open to sexual adventure as any male.

He goes further though in making Milk a besotted, devoted follower of Kinsey, willing to do anything to help the research, even when it involves Kinsey's wife, Milk's wife, and his fellow researchers. Kinsey puts himself and those researchers through a grueling pace over many years as they travel around the United

States taking the sexual histories of hundreds of men. The researchers are required never to exhibit being "sex shy". Kinsey himself is a tireless sexual enthusiast, at least as he is portrayed in *The Inner Circle*, his research lining up exactly with his natural proclivities.

Despite Kinsey's insistence on scientific objectivity and severe statistical methodology, I was left wondering if the "research" was not a tad slanted. But having been raised under the iron hand of the moralist mainstream Christian views on sex, then living the free love life in the 60s, and trying out the open marriage thing in the 70s to equivocal results, I am of the opinion that Alfred Kinsey did us all a favor. I think T C Boyle showed that it takes a slightly wacked guy to break through centuries of repression.

Steve Shilstone says

Mr. Boyle's fictional narrator is a member of actual sex researcher and all around strange fellow Alfred Kinsey's team. The ick factor is strong.

Esther says

I've been a fan of T.C. Boyle for a while – and I'm interested in the subject of psychology in general. So clearly, when I realized that "The inner circle" is something of a biography of Professor Alfred C. Kinsey, my interest was raised.

Professor Kinsey has been one of the first scientists to do intensive research in sex, human sexual activities and relations. While he was originally a zoologist, he believed that there was no logic in humans knowing more about the sex life of gall wasps than the sex life of their own species. His research was a scandal at the time (i.e. in the 1940s in US!) and would probably still be something of a scandal even these days. He provoked this scandal not only for the subject as such and the very personal and intimate way he did his research (he and his team interviewed ten thousands of people, from the sex shy student to the regular wife to the sex addict), but also for his lack of limits (e.g. he interviewed pedophiles granting them anonymity, he interviewed children, he secretly observed prostitutes and their clients, etc).

This book tries to give some sort of account of what happened through the eyes of John Milk, the first assistant in the project and thus the first person of the Inner Circle. In reality, that would have most probably been Clyde Martin.

As the story is narrated in the first person, the reader lives with John Milk through his personal problems, insecurities, the demands of Professor Kinsey but also the generosity he receives, his love life, his marriage and the difficulties to reconcile married life to his job in sex research. It is clear that while Milk was proud to be part of that team and to revolutionize the sexual beliefs and behavior of his generation and the ones to follow, it must have been a tough life, in the shadow of the dominant professor and some of his prominent colleagues, but in the limelight of criticism from the public and his family.

While I agree with some of the basic statements of Kinsey and his team (e.g. "There is no sexual act between consenting parties that is in any way qualitatively different from any other, no matter what the prevailing ethos of a given society may be."), I think judging from this book, that I would not have been able to stand Professor Kinsey, his domination and his demands for more than a day; neither the submissive and quail behavior of John Milk...

Still, I loved this story, found it highly interesting, believe that it is well researched and told in the talented and entertaining style of T.C. Boyle. (less)

Teddy says

Though fictionalized, this is a true account of Alfred Kinsey and his team of researchers who interviewed people from all walks of life about their sexual practices for the, eventual, Kinsey Report. The narrator, a young college student, John Milk, was totally committed to Professor Kinsey, nicknamed Prok, and became indoctrinated into Prok's way of thinking, as was the rest of Prok's inner circle. If you have the option of reading this book on a kindle or tablet that allows you to access definitions as you read, I would recommend it. Though he always enabled the reader to deduce meaning from context, I would've enjoyed having definitions at my fingertips. I literally filled a notebook with the vocabulary T. C. Boyle used in this book. It was such a bonus to be exposed to his rich use of language. What a remarkable talent T. C. Boyle is. Well-written, shocking, and mildly mind-blowing, I found myself thinking of charismatic college professors I've had and how they might've, or could've, influenced me when I was John Milk's age. There is lots of food for thought & discussion for book clubs regarding this aspect alone in addition to the historic era of the 1940's, the relationship of Prok to all the other characters in the book, including his wife, and the underlying love story between John & Iris. Not a page-turner, but a very literary, compelling read.

Sam Quixote says

The work of Alfred Kinsey is explored through a fictitious narrator, John Milk, who is there for the first lecture Kinsey gives on sex and soon after becomes involved in the sex research that will form Kinsey's legacy and change the world. But life in the inner circle is far different from the life presented to the media...

T.C. Boyle's novel is an excellent look into one of the 20th century's most interesting and important thinkers/scientists, someone who brought sex from the shadows and shame and into popular culture. It's no coincidence that the two books "Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male/Female" came out just before the sexual revolution of the 1960s.

Kinsey is a fascinating figure himself, a kind of forward thinker who believes all sex is natural whatever your inclination and practices what he preaches. Where the book becomes interesting is in the tangled web of interconnecting relationships between all of the characters who sexually share themselves and their partners among one another leading to devastated feelings and the limits of the sex research and Kinsey's philosophy of free love which fails to take into account real love, just physical sex.

The inner circle resembles a cult almost with Kinsey as the leader and his "followers" doing his bidding, worshipping his strong personality and mission of bringing sex out into the open. It's ironic because Kinsey is so anti-religion and yet he expects complete fealty to his cause and his beliefs without question from his followers. But his utter single mindedness in his pursuit would lead to an early grave and leave a kind of darkness and hollowness to the people in his life after all he put them through.

The novel is a fantastic read with Boyle taking you right there into the times, personifying Kinsey perfectly and giving the reader a clear and vivid picture of the times and the impact his work had on society at the time. The reader also comes away with an understanding of how Kinsey went about collecting the data via

interviews and later filmed recordings.

Where the novel fails is in its length - I felt that at just over 400 pages it went on a bit too long. The focus on the imaginary narrator became a bit dull especially when the book's main subject is Kinsey and the story should have stayed on him more than meandering away. Also, this is a book where not much happens. That didn't bother me as I didn't expect much to happen (it's not that kind of story, more of a character portrait) though it could bother some people who might be looking for a novel with lots of twists and turns - this isn't that book.

Besides that, this is a brilliant novel of an important and interesting figure of 20th century history who is brought to life with the expert skill of master writer TC Boyle. Fans of Boyle will enjoy this book while those seeking an idea of who Kinsey was but don't wish to trudge through a dry non-fiction book will find "The Inner Circle" suits their needs. An excellent read, Boyle proves once again his exorbitant ability in the written form outshines many of his contemporaries - definitely worth a look.

Alexandra says

Das Thema ist außerordentlich interessant, im puritanischen Amerika werden die Sexgewohnheiten der Bürger in einer großangelegten empirischen möglichst repräsentativen Studie mittels Interviews erhoben. Basierend auf der historischen Geschichte der Entstehung des Kinsey Reports.

Boyle erzählt sowohl von der Entstehung der Studie als auch über das Leben und Wirken der Interviewer und des Universitätsinstituts. Der Institutsleiter regt auch an, dass die Forscher und Ihre Familien gemäß ihrer Mission sexuell frei leben sollten. Dies kann natürlich nie funktionieren und die Chose inkl. aller Beziehungen explodieren dann auch zwangsläufig am Ende des Romans.

Ein großer typisch amerikanischer Roman episch sehr breit ausgeholt. Die Story könnte durchaus kürzer gefasst, die Handlung gestrafft und schneller sein.

Hillary says

I sort of hate to give this only three stars, but the rating hinges to some extent on whether or not you've seen the movie *Kinsey*, which I have and which covers much of the same ground. I'm not opposed to Boyle's leanings toward the historical novel. They've produced great results, as with *Riven Rock*, but that was a book that transcended its subject, becoming just as much about a genre of literature (social realism) as about its more obvious topic. *The Inner Circle* doesn't so much do that--or, if it does, I missed it. Boyle seems to have been so caught up in the subject matter that he neglected to do more. It's almost as well-written page-to-page as most of his stuff, and it's an interesting portrait of personalities, but, again, the movie is shorter and covers the same ground about as well.

Dirk Baranek says

Zweitbester Boyle-Roman. Einfach eine der irrsten Geschichten der Moderne: der Biologe, der sich fragt, warum die Wissenschaft alles über das Paarungsverhalten von Fruchtfliegen weiß, aber nichts über das des Menschen. Und der dann einfach anfängt, die Menschen wertfrei zu befragen, massenhaft. Jede Spielart,

Absurdität und Vergnügen wird dokumentiert. Und da der Professor auch privat recht experimentierfreudig ist, nimmt die Tragödie ihren Lauf: der Aufschlag auf den Boden der prüden Wirklichkeit ist hart.

Colin Mckenna says

I found myself gliding through the pages, to Boyle's credit - and I am not a fast reader. He has a narrative gift that drew me along despite strongly disliking the two central characters, which almost made me give it a three star. I don't know anything about the real characters so I'll assume he was stuck with these flawed people. The narrator, John, is such a doormat that even as I think of him stumbling through every - I mean, every - piece of dialogue, it make me want to change the rating back to a 3. But Boyle's finesse is as persuasive as Dr. Kinsley's and for that he gets a 4. I never got the sense that he was gratuitous in any of his portrayals or scenarios, no matter how graphic or downright repellent the material. I think he managed to stay out of the way and tell the story without editorializing, which I'm not sure I would have been able to do because I admit that I really despised John's lack of backbone and Prok's (Professor K) tyrannical side. But the story is based on the facts and not meant to be pasteurized and pretty. That said, it's not for everyone.

Jeannette says

I love Boyle's books, usually, and was very disappointed in this one. I also love Kinsey's sex response research, such a thorough and devoted worker, but somehow what was learned got buried in the trivia of the narrative. I expected too much of Boyle perhaps, wanting him to show us the total Kinsey and the effects of his pioneering research. Although we get partial views (e.g. Kinsey as a homosexual, a maker of rugs, a man of many interests), Kinsey just didn't come alive, nor did I get a good feel for how the research affected others. Then there is the narrator, a young man of ambiguous character and relationships. He didn't come across as real or fitting for the story, couldn't carry the load, not up to the task so to speak.

Thus the book was a bit of a goyach, the word meaning that I was built up to an expectation of climax, but was let down. The story confused and bored me, going on and on from interview to interview and involvement. I felt the whole thing could have been more engagingly told in half the space or less. Oh well, the author deserves a caress for trying.

Anna says

This is my fourth T.C. Boyle novel and while I was really excited about the subject matter (another piece of historical fiction, this one is a portrait of Alfred Kinsey, the famous 1940's sex researcher) I have to say I found it far less satisfying than his other reads. The writing was rather flat and felt like it was being employed only to spell out the plot - in contrast to "Drop City" and "Tooth and Claw," both of which I thought had wonderful depth of style. But if you're interested in finding out more about the life and work of Dr. Kinsey, this certainly offers a portrait of an incredibly compelling American character. Poses a lot of interesting questions about sex and human nature, monogamy, ethics in social research, etc... (And it's the first novel I've finished since starting grad school! woooh!)

Allrosenthal says

John Milk, a trusted researcher in Kinsey's inner circle, details his sexual awakening, and his struggle to balance his role as a husband and father alongside the prurient, and at times, amoral research environment.

Tim says

What a bore! Kinsey and sex, a bore? In spades! Boyle takes some facts of Kinsey's research and life (how much is impossible to say just from reading this book) and heaps upon it mounds of blather about the growing sexual perversities of Kinsey's research team (the inner circle) and their wives. Perhaps he intended some sort of metaphorical or allegorical story, but if so, it missed me. The only explicit sex occurs in the context of their field work, and it is clinically described, sometimes in detail; but at other times he seems to want to titillate us and has characters begin a sex scene, then turning it into a tease by suddenly breaking off into a different section or chapter. Apparently, Boyle didn't know what to do with all this sex he had chosen to write about nor how to construct a novel around it; it feels both prurient and prudish at the same time.

The boredom comes not so much from the mind-numbing work involved in the research (*that* he conveys fairly well) rather from the tiresome tedium of the main character's life (perhaps 20-25% of the book). For example: the spats and quarrels between him and his wife, from her complaining about being lonely when he is away on research trips to her resistance against being drawn into the open sex life of the inner circle to which she succumbs without convincing motivation, even falling in love (!) with one of his co-workers; or their finding, buying, and refurbishing an old house: or (the worst) almost two full pages detailing his teaching her to drive an automobile (he fails, she gives up). I wish I had given up . . . on reading it instead of slogging through to the end, standing up to Boyle instead of letting him browbeat me the way the narrator lets Kinsey browbeat him.

Shovelmonkey1 says

Dr Kinsey, or Prok as he was known to his overly familiar and very hands-on inner circle was the man who lifted the covers on sex and took a good long hard look, often with the occasional poke or touch also involved. Revered and reviled by post-war American society as both a genius and a deviant he revolutionised the way people think and talk about doing "it". This was especially significant at a time when most people wouldn't admit to doing it, never mind thinking about it or talking about it.

T.C Boyle departs from his own personal fictive style here and instead provides the narrative voice for Prok's story via the conduit of John Milk, the earliest recruit made by Dr Sexy M.D. Milk is a fairly unlikely sexpert but he just about manages to keep his end up with Prok leading the way. This book is described as a both superb and salacious... if mark monday were reviewing it, it might end up on the shelf marked "sexy-time". But the main problem with this book is that ultimately it manages to make sex deeply unsexy... you know how eating loses its appeal when you spend too much time cooking and thinking in infinite detail about the chemical processes that take place when you make the meal? Well the same thing happens here. Prok is an interesting character and undoubtedly ahead of his time but as is often the case, pioneering and domineering are two character traits which like to skip along merrily hand-in-hand. If it weren't for the fact

that Milk is, well, as mild as milk then you can imagine that the whole research process might have quickly unravelled.

Readable but not that rewarding so I'm downgrading this from sexy-time to staying in on your own with a bar of chocolate, a bottle of Lambrini and the box set of *Sex and the City*.

Punk says

Fiction. The memoirs of John Milk, assistant and friend to Dr. Alfred Kinsey as he develops the Institute for Sex Research. This is a fairly dry book, which is amazing considering the sheer amount of sex going on, but that's mostly the fault of Milk, our hedging, awkward narrator. Milk is just no fun, though he's got some crazy hero worship for Kinsey. Kinsey is a god to Milk, and to his other assistants, and it's creepy and fascinating and really makes me want to learn more about Kinsey and see what parts Boyle got right and what he was making up. The subject matter's engaging, even if the writing's a little flat, and I tore through it in two days.

May says

I really like Boyle. I like his writing, but I hate the character of Prok. While I was reading it I would get so mad I would hurl the book away, then promptly pick it up because I wanted to know what happens next. In the book, Kinsey is a strong proponent of open sexuality and consensual sex, yet he manipulates people in to doing it. Iris believes he is blackmailing her into giving her 'history' and having sex with someone other than her husband to get her husband out of the army because he thinks it is for her own good. That is not free choice. Just because Kinsey believes that sex is 'an animal function divorced from emotion' doesn't mean he is allowed to force his opinion on other people or force people to stay married (for the sake of appearance) when they don't want to be. It also makes me mad that Milk is such a push over, and the one time he stands up for himself, he ends up apologising for it. This book made my blood boil. I still love Boyle, only he can make you hate a character so thoroughly yet respect his work.

Lise says

This is NOT the book to read on Melbourne public transport! Believe me you don't want someone peering over your shoulder on the tram or train on this one! This is my first TC Boyle and it's a great read! Boyle combines fact and fiction with the story of Alfred Kinsey's "inner circle" from the point of view of (fictional) John Milk a good looking nerd who gets drawn deeper and deeper in Kinsey's experiments and views on life, marriage, sexuality, to the detriment of his own marriage. The scenes at Kinsey's house where he invites his colleagues and their wives have you on the edge of your seat (or bed maybe) as you wonder what Kinsey has instore for them in the attic. I read this book in less than a week, and really slowed down the last 50 pages because I didn't want it to end.

Jmoscari says

This book made me think about my sexual side in ways I never dreamed of. Boyle understands his protagonist like a true master - when John Milk is anxious about a sexual situation, I am equally nervous. What I found exceptionally impressive about this book is how well Boyle writes the erotic. Despite the blatant opportunity for the events of the story to become gratuitous, the novel is not pornographic in any way. Everything involving sexual subjects - which is pretty much the whole novel - is handled with such supreme finesse. And it's not even that Boyle avoids or waters down the sexual content - the sex is plentiful and explicit. Rather, Boyle does exactly what he should do - just as though it were any other type of novel, the events in the story are significant for specific reasons and propel the story forward. This does two things. First, it makes the novel a page-turner. But, more significantly, it forces the reader to consider the emotional implications, good and bad, of the sexual realm. An awesome read.

Janine Flood says

If you have already seen the film KINSEY, don't bother with this novel, because that's what it is, a novel, told by a fictional narrator who is not worth the imagining of. His name is John Milk and he is a research assistant on the Kinsey project, whose scientific objectivity is constantly at odds with his emotions. This grew tiresome very quickly, as did every character in the book (Kinsey included), with the exception of one character, John's wife, Iris. How I wish Boyle had alternated the narration between her and her husband. I was most able to associate myself with her character, and I would have loved to have read first hand about what she was going through, as a wife in the Kinsey "Inner Circle", forced to put up with their questionable methods in the name of science. She was the only character to actually stand up to that boarish professor, and she made me want to stand up and cheer. Unfortunately, as the book was written, Iris is not enough to have made me enjoy this read.
