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## THE OUTSIDERS CLUB

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by

Victor Ellis

In the early part of 1979 Tuppy Owens met a boy, permanently in a wheel chair, who complained that he had no personal life at all and, at the age of 32, had never seen a naked woman. She got to know him over the next few months, introduced him to friends and tried to help him to develop some kind of love life; this was to some degree successful and her exposure to the particular problems experienced by handi-capped people decided her, with the help of the young man, to set up a club to help others like him. A friend of hers, Nigel Verbeek, who had recently lost his sight, offered to help to run the club and Patricia Gillan, the psychologist and sex therapist offered her support.

Information about the club spread through newspaper and magazine articles and now the club has something like a thousand members not only from all over Great Britain, but from all over the world. The club operates as an opportunity for pen-friends, a network of people with shared problems, a dating agency, and offers "members an opportunity to meet each other for romantic, intimate or other friendly pursuits".

They've found that it is not the disability itself which makes it difficult for a person to establish relationships; it is rather a by-product of having led a disabled life - with over protective parents or guardians, lack of opportunity to make assertive relationships, and a continual fear of rejection resulting from nasty early experiences. Some members need a lot of help, they need pushing and encouragement both by the organisers, consultant therapists, and other members.

There is a pool of ideas and practical suggestions - published as a booklet which is a collection of all the problems members have come up against and the different ways they have tried to solve them, both the successes and the failures. Members are encouraged to continue to send in reports and information on the ways in which they try to combat their frustrations so that they may help other members and also increase the general understanding of the outside public about their particular problems. When a new member joins, they are sent an introductory welcoming letter, a copy of the booklist - they have a library of over 200 books with

subjects ranging from disability, sexuality, relationships, shyness and personal effectiveness - and they receive a list of all other members in the club so that they may establish contact with other people who may be near them.

All correspondence is written by hand, and no copies are kept of letters to insure confidentiality. Counselling is offered by the Sexual Minorities Advisory Service and members are put in touch with other kinds of services, such as speech and confidence classes, gestalt therapy sessions, re-evaluation co-counselling, local Forum groups and similar activities.

Only about half of the members have a real physical handicap. The others, the so-called able bodied, find the club useful for a wide variety of reasons. Some of them suffer from isolation either from bereavement or because of their geographical situation. They may suffer from hidden handicaps such as phobias, shyness or depression. Some are simply bored and are looking for something different to do. Others genuinely want to help. Whatever their motivations or reasons for joining, all members are treated the same.

To join the club, write to Box 4ZB or telephone (01) 741 3332 at any time day or night.

**All readers of Self & Society are invited to:  
a LECTURE/DISCUSSION/SOCIAL EVENING with AHP  
on Thursday 12th December 1985 from 7.30 for 8.pm  
at Regents College, Regents Park, London NW1  
led by Tony Merry, on the subject of:  
HUMANISTIC CHALLENGES TO EDUCATION**

Educational organisations form perhaps our most important social institutions. Their impact pervades almost every aspect of our social and personal lives, yet in the main they serve only to impart a sense of failure in the majority of children and young adults. Their emphasis on cognitive development in a competitive environment at the expense of the affective and spiritual serves to increase social tension. This lecture will take a critical look at both education and the role played by Humanistic Psychology. From a Person Centred perspective it will seek to suggest some ways in which Humanistic Psychology can promote real and lasting changes.

**TONY MERRY** is a Humanistic Psychologist at the School for Independent Studies, North East London Polytechnic. He has completed a three year training programme in Client Centred Psychotherapy and applications of the Person-Centred Approach under Carl Rogers, Chuck Devonshire and Alberto Zucconi. Recently he was a staff member on an International Cross Cultural Communications Workshop in Dublin, and will be repeating this workshop in 1986 in Budapest, Hungary. He has worked for many years with groups of teachers, lecturers and students and is keen to find new ways to promote the ideas of Holistic Education within a person centred framework.

**Cost: £3 (concs £2, £1) - NO BOOKING - All are welcome.**