

Discuss Problems

Dr. Laub
Doctors Alter Sex

By MARSHALL KILDUFF

Somewhere between male and female lies the transsexual, a deeply troubled "twilight personality" who possesses the body of one sex but the mind of the other. To help this individual, the Stanford Medical Center is considering offering complete sex-change operations, but so little is known about transsexuals that doctors in this controversial field are regarded as saviors by some and quacks by others.

Up to now the Med Center has only treated four persons for minor "adjustment" surgery to complete treatments begun at other hospitals. Dr. Donald Laub, a plastic surgeon and head of the rehabilitative surgery department at the Med Center, says, "We have not decided yet if we are going to embark on this program. That will depend on further study."

Transsexuals have either a male or female physique but feel emotionally like a member of the opposite sex. Psychiatry apparently

does not help the confirmed transsexual.

There seems to be no consensus on how to handle the problem. Dr. Charles Socarides, a New York psychoanalyst, says that the conversion operations are "pathetic and unscientific." But the transsexual organization, C.O.G. (Conversion Our Goal), seeks full freedom to have whatever operations are necessary.

Real Problem

Within these two poles, Laub appears moderate. "Talking to these patients makes you realize that they have a real problem." But many are able to partially adjust, says Laub. "Almost all of these patients are dressed as women and carry out, to the fullest extent, a life of the opposite sex."

Roughly 90 per cent of transsexuals are men, who often want to be women so badly they adopt feminine names.

Laub is proceeding slowly in this field. While he maintains that transsexualism is a "disease," he is

not sure what causes it. One explanation is that transsexualism is present at birth in the person's chromosomal structure. In other words, it is not acquired during the individual's adolescence as homosexuality often is.

As Dr. Laub points out, "Most claim that ever since they can remember they have had feminine tendencies. They don't think that they are male; they think they're females."

A second explanation argues that transsexuals have backgrounds similar to many homosexuals. They have acute family problems or feel a drive to escape paranoid anxieties.

Laub is extremely shy about publicity. Doctors working his field are regarded as quacks by some physicians. In addition publicity attracts many more patients than facilities can handle.

"Whenever there is publicity, we get too many patients knocking at the door. And the patients we

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Transsexual Operations...

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get are the wrong type. They are so desperate they'll do anything to have an operation," says Laub.

Police Counselor

Another authority on transsexuals is Elliott Blackstone, a San Francisco police officer concerned with community relations. His job brings him into daily contact with many of the residents of the city's red-light district, the Tenderloin, and its population of sexual variants. As a counselor, he has helped a number of transsexuals obtain employment and also locate doctors for conversion operations.

He estimates that there are 150 transsexuals in the city and 3000 nationally. He points out that laws in California are becoming more lenient since laws against impersonation (dressing as a member of the opposite sex) were recently declared unconstitutional.

But life for the transsexual is still deeply frustrating. "Some are so horrified by their sex organs that they will go as far as self-emasculation."

Different Level

According to Blackstone, "Many transsexuals were failures as men and want to be females. In this sense the problem is actually a different level of homosexuality."

To Blackstone and Laub, the main difficulty in deciding on whether to operate is deciding if the individual is actually a transsexual. Many are confused transvestites, homosexual or heterosexual impersonators.

Blackstone suggests letting anyone who wants an operation have it, but on the condition that the person try living as a female for two years and undergo psychotherapy before making the final decision.

Psychiatric Tests

Dr. Laub explains that "the whole thing is to choose the ones who will benefit from those that won't." During the treatment extensive psychiatric tests are provided to determine the patient's situation.

But there are sharp criticisms of this advice. Dr. Socarides says, "The argument goes that if you can't change an abnormal psyche

to fit the body, you change the body to conform to anything. After the operation... the psychic problems are the same or worse."

What happens from the operations "results inevitably in their living as a castrated male who hopes to convince himself and others that he is an alluring woman."

In addition to limited conversion operations done at Johns Hopkins, Minnesota University and UCLA, a person may have it done privately in Tangier, Morocco, Tijuana, Mexico, and Chicago. However, the costs are astronomical, ranging from \$4000 to \$7500. The Moroccan doctor insists that the fee be deposited in his Swiss bank before he will examine the patient.

The operation alters the male sex organs to resemble female organs, with some transsexuals even having artificial vaginas. Hormones are also given so that the person may have secondary sexual characteristics as well.

In some cases patients have married, and a few have become mothers through adoption.