

# Transsexual operations on increase

By JANICE C. SIMPSON  
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PALO ALTO, Calif. — About 20 times a week, Marti Norberg answers the phone on her desk to hear what has become, for her, a familiar but still pathetic plea. "I am a woman," the caller will say. "I have the body of a man but I am a woman. Can you you help me?"

The caller is a transsexual, one of an estimated 10,000 people in the U.S. who, though born with the physical anatomy of one sex, identifies psychologically and emotionally with the other.

Mrs. Norberg is the coordinator of the gender dysphoria clinic at Stanford University, one of 40 medical centers and teams in the U.S. that try to help transsexuals with hormone therapy and surgery that changes their physical appearance to conform with the image they have of themselves.

The number of such operations in the U.S. is growing dramatically, giving medical scientists new insight into the problems of sexual adaptation and also, because of widespread publicity about sex-change surgery, focusing public attention on the broader problems of those suffering from sexual abnormalities.

In 1975 alone, at least 300 operations were done in this country, says Dr. Roberto Granato, a New York urologist. That's twice the number performed five years ago, he adds. Dr. Granato has performed 250 such operations himself in the last eight years, including one on Dr. Renee Richards, the ophthalmologist turned tennis player.

Transsexualism isn't simply another form of homosexuality (attraction to a member of one's own sex) or transvestism (an attraction to the dress and behavior of the opposite sex).

Rather, it is a more deeply rooted identity conflict in which a person with a male body views himself as a woman or a person with a female body views herself as a man.

Experts don't agree on the cause of transsexualism. Some suggest that it may result from prenatal hormonal imbalances in the mother. Others contend that it is a matter of conditioning during the early stages of childhood. Most, however, say there is no cure short of surgery.

Follow-up studies indicate that most people who have had the operations are able to lead normal lives as a result.

The first sex assignment clinics in the U.S. opened in 1966 at Johns Hopkins Hospital and the University of Minnesota. (European doctors began performing the operations in 1930. Their work was brought to the American public's attention in 1952, after the highly publicized—and sensationalized—conversion of George Jorgensen into Christine Jorgensen.)

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Over the last decade, the 40 American centers involved in this work (only 20 actually perform the operations) have designed comprehensive programs aimed at smoothing their patients' adjustment to their new sexual identities.

The clinic at Stanford is typical of these programs. Since it began in 1968, it has performed 160 operations, 74 per cent of them male-to-female. In the last year, however, the number of applications from women has increased dramatically, so that now the ratio of operations performed is about equal.

Stanford's patients have ranged in age from a 16-year-old boy (who, although he is on hormone therapy, won't be allowed to receive the operation until he is older) to a 65-year-old woman. They come from all racial and ethnic groups and all social and economic levels.

One patient, a General Motors Corp. Executive, waited until his children were grown, divorced his wife, took an early retirement and then moved to a small Midwestern town to live the rest of his life as a woman.

Experts say it is more difficult for post-operative women to adjust to their new lives than it is for postoperative men. Many of them wear too much makeup and go through a promiscuous stage in an attempt to prove that they are now truly women.

Stanford tries to make the transition easier by bringing in experts to give makeup and poise lessons, to discuss the changing image of women and to teach voice inflection and phrasing.

There are other problems, too. Nine states won't allow name or gender changes on their birth certificates, a severe handicap for someone who is trying to start a new life.