

# Sex Surgery At Hopkins

Transsexuals are undergoing change-of-sex surgery at the Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, the first medical center in the United States to give its official support to the operation.

So far five persons of each sex have had the operation. More than 100 applicants have been screened in the past year at Hopkins' "gender identity clinic" where a special committee of psychiatrists, surgeons and other medical experts evaluate the cases.

Transsexuals are men or women with physical characteristics of one sex who intensely long to belong to the other. They feel trapped in the wrong body and many psychiatrists have found that psychotherapy is not adequate treatment for these people. Transsexuals often dress in keeping with what they feel to be their true sex and many function in society accordingly, but they live in constant fear of exposure. Transsexuals are not transvestites or homosexuals.

The causes of this transsexualism are unknown, though psychological, genetic and endocrinological sources have been postulated. Regarding genetic origins, Dr. Harry Benjamin points out what a young science genetics is.

Dr. Benjamin, author of "The Transsexual Phenomenon" (1966), the endocrinologist who heads the Harry Benjamin Foundation in New York, has been treating transsexuals for over 15 years. Most of the patients being evaluated at Johns Hopkins were referred there by the Foundation.

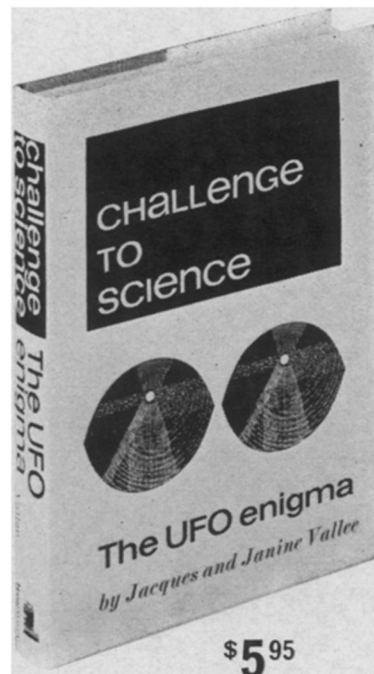
The operation to change a man into a woman, physically but not biologically, is the easier and more frequent of the two types. It involves three steps: castration, penis amputation and plastic surgery to create an artificial vagina, clitoris, labia and other external genitalia. Scrotal and other sensitive genital tissue are used to make the new organs. Building the vagina is perhaps the most crucial part of the operation, for the goal is to have a functioning passage, enabling the patient to enjoy heterosexual sex relations. Dr. Benjamin describes a procedure used by a French surgeon as the most "ingenious" and "successful" he has seen. The skin is stripped from the penis, then inverted like the finger of a glove, and used to line the newly

formed vaginal passage. Penile skin has nerve endings that give it the closest resemblance to that of a functioning female sexual organ.

Surgery to transform a woman into a man is also a threefold procedure requiring total hysterectomy, mastectomy or reduction of the breasts so they resemble a male, and creation of an artificial penis. No other male genitalia can be reproduced and though the penis carries out a urinary function,

it has no capacity for sexual response. Therefore, the woman turned man cannot experience normal sexual relations like her male counterpart.

"In order to create a phallus," said a spokesman for the Hopkins surgeons, "incisions are made in the abdominal wall. One flap of skin is rolled inside another to make a tube within a tube, which is then connected to the urethral orifice," creating an external urinary organ.



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