

TRANSVESTISM

Why Dr Prince fooled congress

by **CHRISTINE DOYLE**
our Medical Reporter

PSYCHIATRISTS and social workers, engrossed in analysing 'The Sick Society' at an international congress in London last week, had the wool firmly pulled over their eyes by one of the speakers during a discussion on the problems of transvestism.

Fifty-six-year-old Dr Virginia Prince—a blonde, smartly-dressed social worker from Los Angeles—was in reality a man. After the meeting, Dr Virginia 'Charles' Prince explained that 'her' reason for hoodwinking delegates was to dispel, in a professional atmosphere, some of the misunderstanding that surrounds the lonely lives led by many transvestites.

'I'm not an exhibitionist who just wants to dress in drag,' insisted Dr Prince, who for the past 15 months has lived more or less completely as a woman and has 'cross-dressed' since the age of 12.

Previously, Dr Prince was a chemist—hence the doctorate—but now studies transvestism, runs a magazine for transvestites, has written a book on the transvestite and his wife, and broadcasts.

Overlapping

Dr Prince said the lives of many transvestites were reduced to misery—sometimes resulting in suicide—because they thought that their compulsion to dress as the opposite sex meant they were homosexual.

'Only in recent years have psychologists come to realise that sex and gender are not the same thing, and that the sexual variant known as homosexuality is not the same thing as the gender variant known as transvestism.'

Dr Prince blamed the rigid polarisation of Western society. 'Modern psychology accepts the fact that while one is *born* with a sex, one *learns* a gender.' Many children whose sex was mistaken at birth grew up psychologically as the wrong sex, but might cope adequately until their identity was unmasked.

Since there are many overlapping traits and characteristics in both men and women, Dr Prince does not find it surprising that with some men the feminine traits do not get completely 'turned off' during



Dr Prince in 'drag': Unisex may be the right idea.

childhood and adolescence. By dressing as a woman, contact is established with the part of himself that society demands him to suppress.

'But doctors, psychiatrists, police and employers have little understanding or no information about this phenomenon. The result is a lonely, guilt-ridden, fearful and ashamed person who locks all his feelings inside himself.'

'Unigender'

Few are 'cured.' Dr Prince is not advocating transvestism, but is pressing for more understanding by psychiatrists so that transvestites can learn to come to terms with their handicap.

The present younger generation may have the right idea, thought Dr Prince. The unisex trend meant that both sexes could display both masculine and feminine characteristics as and when they felt like it.

'But unigender would be the better word. The young man who dresses in clothes that 50 years ago would have been considered effeminate does not want to change his sex. He wants to adopt some feminine traits—perhaps only temporarily—and he doesn't feel inhibited.'