

# Social Sciences Notes

## HOMOSEXUALITY

### Research begins

A research program in homosexuality is planned by the National Institute of Mental Health. The Institute has appointed a panel of social scientists to lay out the program, to encourage research in the field and to examine current laws and practices used by society to deal with homosexuals.

In appointing the task force, NIMH director Stanley F. Yolles estimated that about four percent of the adult men in the United States are exclusively homosexual. He said the figure was conservative.

"This presents a social problem of considerable magnitude and one which has been somewhat neglected by scientists, partially due to the stigma which attaches to work in the field."

Some projected areas of study include interpersonal relationships, hormonal functions, genetic influences and the development of gender roles. Also, the task force will look for ways to enable homosexuals to live more satisfactory lives in society.

## AVERSIVE CONDITIONING

### Machine delivers safe shocks

A safe and simple electric shock machine for jolting humans out of neurosis has been devised at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Coral Gables, Fla.

Since the recent popularity of aversive (punishment) conditioning, electric shock has become more common as a means of training people out of phobias and other emotional problems.

Dr. Robert S. Davidson Jr. reports the new electric circuit will prevent such things as "dangerously intense shocks and burns."

The machine has an isolation transformer to separate patient from electric source and a circuit fused in two places—before and after the shock point, the patient's fingers.

The apparatus, described in *PERCEPTUAL AND MOTOR SKILLS* dated June, also times the shocks.

## PSYCHOLOGY

### Deceptive demeanor

To judge a man's honesty and integrity, shut your eyes and listen.

The old saw that appearances can be deceiving turns out to have basis in fact, according to a team of University of Michigan psychologists who tested 200 college students on their ability to judge honesty.

Voice and language carried more truth than demeanor and physical appearance.

To test their hypothesis, Dr. Norman Maier and research assistant James Thurber staged interviews between four "suspects," accused of cheating on an exam, and their "professors." Two of the suspects played cheaters; two played non-cheaters, and the students tried to distinguish between them after either watching the interviews, listening to tapes or reading transcripts.

The listeners and readers were better judges, by a significant margin, than those who had both seen and

heard the interviews.

"Juries are composed of untrained observers and often must make judgments about the integrity of a witness. The witness is always present and . . . may serve as a distractor," suggest the psychologists.

## COMMUNICATION

### New language of the hands

A Michigan biophysicist thinks it would be possible to develop a hand language as far advanced over speech as speech is over grunts.

Research money would be well-spent on developing new methods of personal communication, considering the misunderstandings that arise through language, Dr. John R. Platt of the University of Michigan told urban specialists who met in Washington for a seminar on "The Next Fifty Years."

There are 19 bones in each hand. A skilled violinist can manipulate them all, and with practice, said Dr. Platt, other people could probably learn.

That means 19 simultaneous channels of communication, once a vocabulary is established for the bone movements. The actual communication, however, would be electrical.

A rubber glove with several electrical contacts would pick up pulses from muscles that control the bones and transmit them via a citizen's band radio to a second rubber glove-radio apparatus. The listener would receive the signals as prickles from 19 small electrodes on the back of his hand, explained Dr. Platt.

## ALCOHOLISM

### The safe drinkers

The non-alcoholic drinker is usually one who has had early contact with alcohol, often as a food, and who knows the ground rules for imbibing.

Among people who drink, a new report shows, the lowest incidence of alcoholism is associated with such habits and attitudes as early exposure to small quantities of alcohol within a family or religious group; consumption of alcoholic beverages with meals; no inclination to view drinking as necessary to prove virility and tendency to disapprove of excessive drinking.

The National Institute of Mental Health, which released the report on alcoholism, carefully notes it does not advocate that children learn to drink, only that they learn about drinking.

NIMH estimates that the alcoholism risk among drinkers is about 5.6 percent—that is, one in eighteen become alcoholics.

## MENTAL HEALTH

### Inexpensive drug

Lithium carbonate, the simple salt that promises effective treatment for manic-depressive psychosis (SN: 6/17), costs only 45 cents a pound, compared to \$350 per pound for other tranquilizers. The entire U.S. mental health need for this chemical is estimated at less than 100 tons a year.