

# AP misreports brain study, researcher says

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## AP reports 'gay brain' study incorrectly

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By Robert Knight

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A new and widely reported Swedish study that suggests that lesbians respond differently from heterosexual women when exposed to sex hormones has been seriously misinterpreted, one of the researchers says.

The Associated Press story noted that a similar study was done last year on men, and that with the new female study, "the findings add weight to the idea that homosexuality has a physical basis and is not learned behavior."

In response to an e-mail inquiry from Grove City College Professor of Psychology Dr. Warren Throckmorton, researcher Dr. Ivanka Savic of the Stockholm Brain Institute said of the AP interpretation of her work, "This is incorrect and not stated in the paper."

The study was published in the May 9, 2006, edition of the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, although the link to the piece was not available at the academy's website as of yesterday.

The AP report was carried widely in major newspapers and on television and radio. Most reports cited the study as more "evidence" for a genetic or biological cause for homosexuality without noting that no credible study suggesting direct biological causes has ever been replicated and that many have been refuted.

The Swedish study merely found that lesbians respond differently, not that their brains were hardwired that way before any sexual activity. Recent brain research also shows that brain patterns may emerge in response to certain activities.

"It's reasonable to believe that prior sexual behavior would predict future sexual responses," Throckmorton said.

[Here is Monday's posting on Dr. Throckmorton's blogsite.](#) In italics is the e-mail he sent to Dr. Ivanka Savic about the study of lesbians' response to putative pheromones. Her responses to each of his queries follows in capital block letters:

*Dr. Savic:*

*The Associated Press story came out today about your study and I think they have reported it incorrectly.*

*First I am wondering if you can help me understand things more clearly. I am enclosing a link to the AP report:*

<http://www.forbes.com/entrepreneurs/feeds/ap/2006/05/08/ap2729698.html>

*First, in the report the reporter writes: "It's a finding that adds weight to the idea that homosexuality has a physical underpinning and is not learned behavior."*

THIS IS INCORRECT AND NOT STATED IN THE PAPER

*As I understand your article in PNAS, you specifically offer learning as a hypothesis for your findings. Isn't this true? I believe the reporter is misleading on that point.*

THIS IS VERY UNFORTUNATE; AND YOU ARE ABSOLUTELY RIGHT

*Second, the AP report says: "In lesbians, both male and female hormones were processed the same, in the basic odor processing circuits, Savic and her team reported." I understand that the study did show that AND (male condition) was processed akin to other odors by lesbians. But wasn't there also some hypothalamic processing of EST (female condition) by lesbians?*

YES! AND ALSO CONJUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS SHOWED A COMMON HYPOTHALAMIC CLUSTER IN THE HYPOTHALAMUS

*It was weaker and apparently not in the anterior hypothalamus but didn't you also find dorsomedial and paraventricular hypothalamic activation? So it would be inaccurate, would it not, to say "both male and female hormones were processed the same?"*

YOU ARE FULLY CORRECT

THANK YOU VERY MUCH. HOW DO I ACCESS THE AP REPORT??

Dr. Throckmorton told Concerned Women for America's Culture & Family Institute yesterday that he had just sent the correspondence to Associated Press yesterday morning and was in dialogue with a reporter about it.

A common flaw in interpreting "gay gene" studies is the supposition that supposed differences in the brain are genetic in origin rather than the result of behavioral change.

Dr. Savic "did not want to create the impression that the study proves sexual response is not learned. In fact, [the Swedish research team] seems pretty open to plausible interpretations. However, at present, from this study, nothing definitive can be concluded," Throckmorton said.

The trend in research suggesting the idea that homosexuality is inborn began in 1991, with the publication in the journal *Science* about differences in the hypothalamus portion of the brain. Authored by Salk Research Institute's Dr. Simon LeVay, it became a media sensation.

LeVay evaluated the brains from the corpses of 35 men – 19 homosexuals and 16 alleged heterosexuals – and found that a set of nodules in the hypothalamus was generally larger in the "straight" men than in the homosexual men. However, LeVay noted many exceptions to the finding, and later admitted that he had no way of determining the "sexual orientation" of the heterosexual sample, six of whom were white men from the San Francisco Bay area who had died of AIDS-related causes. He said he designated the "heterosexual" sample as such because most people are straight. He also issued this warning after the media declared his study as proof that people are born "gay":

*It's important to stress what I didn't find. I did not prove that homosexuality is genetic, or find a genetic cause for being gay. I didn't show that gay men are born that way, the most common mistake people make in interpreting my work. Nor did I locate a gay center in the brain ... Since I looked at adult brains, we don't know if the differences I found were there at birth, or if they appeared later.*

Similarly, all the subjects in the Swedish study were sexually experienced, Throckmorton noted. So any differences could have developed as a result of exposure to certain behaviors rather than constitute evidence of cause.

For more information on the claims of "gay gene" research, see the Culture & Family Institute Special Report "[Born or Bred: Science Does Not Support the Claim that Homosexuality Is Genetic](#)."

[Robert Knight](#) is director of the [Culture & Family Institute](#), an affiliate of [Concerned Women for America](#).