

## "Gay Sheep" Study Offers Intriguing Evidence

[ScienCentralNews.com](http://ScienCentralNews.com) has just published "Gay Brains," a news article that details the claims of researchers who are experimenting with male sheep that mount other males.

The original research was published in February, 2004, in the journal *Endocrinology*. In that study, researchers from the Oregon Health and Science University collaborated with Oregon State University and the USDA Sheep Experiment Station in Idaho to study rams that had an exclusive same-sex preference.

The researchers compared the brain structure of the "homosexual" rams with heterosexual rams and also with the brains of ewes. As in Simon LeVay's earlier research, they examined a small cluster of brain cells in the hypothalamus called the "sexually dimorphic nucleus."

The rams with same-sex preferences had brain cell clusters that were the same size as that of the brains of females. The heterosexual male rams had brain-cell clusters twice as large as the "homosexual" male rams. Thus the "homosexual" rams had brains that were relatively female-like.

Some scientists interviewed about the study emphasized its importance in implicating biological factors in the development of sexual orientation. But "the one thing all these scientists can agree on," the *ScienCentral* news report concluded, "is that both biological and social factors likely

interact" in setting the stage for homosexuality in humans.

The study's conclusions were challenged by Dr. Jeffrey Satinover, a NARTH Scientific Advisory Board Member.

He noted that the report from the researchers involved in the study is "harmful in two ways. It lends weight to the false dichotomy 'innate versus choice,' because that is not an accurate dichotomy to begin with. And second, it lends weight to the idea that homosexuality is innate, which is incorrect."

Satinover continued: "Do the changes in the brain come first and then the behavior follows, or does the behavior happen first, leading to changes in the brain?"

Scientist William Byne also cautioned against concluding too much on the basis of this study.

"Twin and family studies have provided strong evidence for a genetic contribution," Byne said, "but those same studies have provided very compelling evidence for a social contribution... So I think the issue is not: Is it biological or is it social? But the important issue is: What biological factors are involved, what social factors are involved, and how do these factors interact in shaping sexual orientation?"

*Gay Brains* provides more details on this ongoing debate. ■