

Does oxytocin deserve title of ‘trust hormone?’

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The claim that the hormone [oxytocin](#) promotes trust in humans has drawn [a lot of attention](#). But now, a group of researchers [are reporting that they’ve been unable to reproduce](#) their own findings concerning that effect.

The new paper, in PLoS ONE, is by Anthony Lane and colleagues from Louvain in Belgium. The same team have previously published evidence supporting the link between oxytocin and trust.

Back in 2010 [they reported that](#) “oxytocin increases trust when confidential information is in the balance”. An intranasal spray of oxytocin made volunteers more likely to leave a sensitive personal document lying around in an open envelope, rather than sealing it up, suggesting that they trusted people not to peek at it.

However, the authors now say that they failed to replicate the 2010 ‘envelope task’ result in two subsequent studies.

But then, why did the original study find such a large effect? Lane et al. point out that it’s extremely unlikely that the original effect was just a fluke: the [effect size](#) in the 2010 study was enormous, and the effect was highly significant at $p < 0.001$.

Instead, the authors suggest that the effect may have been driven by ‘unconscious behavioral priming’. The 2010 study was only [single-blind](#) – the participant didn’t know whether they were getting oxytocin or placebo but the experimenter did know. The researchers might have behaved differently towards the participants based on that knowledge. The replications were double-blind and so were immune to this bias.

Read full, original post: [More Doubts Over The Oxytocin And Trust Theory](#)