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## How power can be as addictive as cocaine



By Carolyn Morris | Shine On – Tue, 1 May, 2012 6:47 AM EDT



Cocaine acts in the same way as unfettered power, by targeting our brain's reward system, says author Ian Robertson. (Credit: Thinkstock)

A power trip can be just as addictive as a cocaine-induced high, according to the author of an upcoming book on power and the brain.

"Power changes the brain triggering increased testosterone in both men and women," [Ian Robertson](#), psychology professor and founding director of the [Trinity College Institute of Neuroscience](#) in Dublin, [writes](#) in the *Telegraph*.

His forthcoming book, [The Winner Effect: How Power Affects Your Brain](#), will be released in June.

"Testosterone and one of its by-products called 3-androstenediol, are addictive, largely because they increase dopamine in a part of the brain's reward system called the nucleus accumbens," he [explains](#).

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He writes that cocaine acts in the same way as unfettered power, by targeting our brain's reward system. In both cases, short-term pleasure gives rise to a long-term addiction.

Cocaine's short-lived high [gives](#) users a feeling of euphoria, confidence and alertness. But then withdrawal comes with symptoms like anxiety, insomnia, depression and paranoia.

"Too much power - and hence too much dopamine," [writes](#) Robertson, "can disrupt normal cognition and emotion, leading to gross errors of judgment and imperviousness to risk, not to mention huge egocentricity and lack of empathy for others."

Does that sound like your power-hungry boss?

Mark Franklin, counselor at Toronto's [CareerCycles](#), agrees that satisfaction from power can be short-lived.

"Power can be a high, for a while," he says. "And after a while it can erode, if it doesn't create a sense of career well-being."

**Also see: [Helping others makes us feel like we have more free time: study](#)**

But for most of the high-powered professionals, including senior executives, he sees at his career-counseling practice, unfettered power is hard to come by. It is often the power struggle among other powerful players that is the most common stressor.

"When you have a fairly senior person, they're bumping up against other people who have power," he says. "People get fatigued, they get worn down by the battles inside larger organizations."

While some people decide to move to a less stressful line of work altogether, others will look for an opportunity that affords them a little more control. As long as it doesn't get out of hand, Franklin doesn't see power as a bad thing.

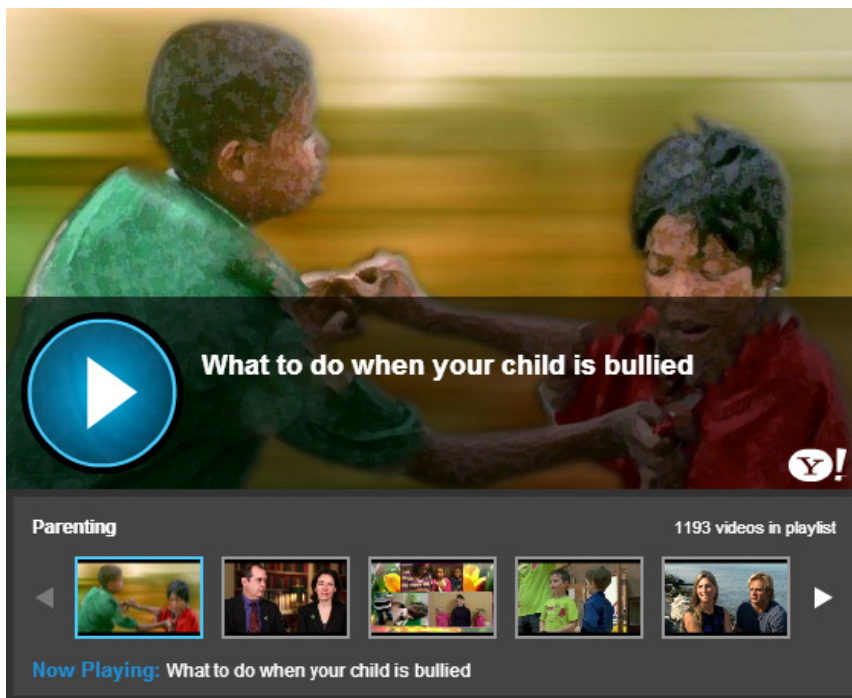
"People like to make a difference," he says. "They like to influence and persuade. When they have a position of power they get to make a difference in a bigger way. They have a bigger sandbox to play in. People like that."

And in another plug for power, Ian Robertson admits that despite all the negative effects power can have on our brains and our behaviour, it can also boost our intelligence.

"Power also makes people smarter," he **writes**, "because dopamine improves the functioning of the brain's frontal lobes."

So power may be a drug, but it isn't killing your braincells, as we are used to being warned about illicit substances. But that doesn't mean the addiction is good for you -- or for those around you.

*Check out the video below about one of the worst representations of power among children -- bullying.*



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