1. **THOUGHTFULLY NOTATE THIS ARTICLE TO SHOW EVIDENCE OF YOUR THINKING THROUGHOUT YOUR READING (text-to-self, text-to-text, text-to-world, and vocab strategies).**
2. **RESPOND TO THE “Food for Thought” SECTION BELOW THE ARTICLE.**

**Interview: Who's a bully?**

**Psychologist Tracy Vaillancourt on kids who bully and what parents can do**

**By Andre Mayer,** [**CBC News**](http://www.cbc.ca/news/credit.html) **Posted: Sep 28, 2011 4:41 PM ET**



*What types of kids bully other kids? A study by psychologist Tracy Vaillancourt found that 'the most popular kids in school were the most abusive.' CBC News interviewed Vaillancourt about bullying and what parents can do. (Reuters)*

Bullying has become a recurring motif of the news cycle. Whether it's the 1997 murder of Victoria's Reena Virk or the 2010 suicide of Tyler Clementi, a gay teen at Rutgers University in New Jersey, the effects of bullying are intense and real.

The most recent example is Mitchell Wilson, a Pickering, Ont., boy with muscular dystrophy who was brutally mugged in November 2010 by one of his classmates who wanted Mitchell's iPhone .

The 11-year-old Wilson took his life on Sept. 6, hours after learning that he would have to face his tormentor in Ontario court.

Mitchell Wilson’s suicide is obviously an extreme outcome, but many bullying cases start with mild taunts that escalate to threats and even physical violence.

The effects of bullying — from anxiety to depression — are well-documented, but not as much is written about the psychology of the bullies themselves. How are these tormentors made? How can their behaviour be reformed?

CBC News spoke to Tracy Vaillancourt, Canada Research Chair in children’s mental health and violence prevention at the University of Ottawa, about the nature of bullying, how it evolves and what parents can do to mitigate it. Dr. Vaillancourt is a clinical psychologist.

**CBC NEWS: How can you tell if your child is a bully?**

**Dr. Tracy Vaillancourt:** There are two types of kids that bully. There are the habitual bullies, and they tend to be really impulsive and have poor emotional regulation. And that represents about 10 per cent of kids who bully others.

The rest are everyday kids, so it tends to be hard to identify them. They tend to be really popular; because they have power, they can abuse power. So if your child is very popular, that could be something to keep in mind. When you watch your kids’ peer interactions, it gives you insight into how they use power and abuse power.

The impulsive kid is pretty easy to identify, because the schools have already identified him: you’re getting the note from the principal’s office, they’re constantly telling you your child’s in trouble again.

Whereas the other type of bully is so Machiavellian in their use of aggression, they’re pro-social and they’re anti-social, that parents get blindsided that their kids are bullying somebody else, and they tend to deny it. They take the kid’s side without any consideration that there might be some truth to what is being alleged.

**Because they haven’t seen the evidence.**

Well, they *have* seen the evidence, if they sit back and look more critically. That’s the challenge for educators: when you confront parents about these kids, it’s like a really toxic reaction – you almost get bullied yourself for suggesting their little angel could be doing something like this.

I published a study [in 2003] that showed that the most popular kids in school were the most abusive of their peers. They were four times more aggressive than non-popular kids who bullied others.

**Is it because they think their popularity or power is in jeopardy?**

They use aggression to achieve popularity and maintain popularity. But they also have a lot of things that the peer group values – they tend to be good-looking kids; if they’re boys, they tend to be good athletes; they come from affluent families. There’s a pervasive sense of entitlement. That entitlement can come from their family and they impose that entitlement on their peer group.

**How can you, as a parent, identify this second class of bully?**

These popular bullies are so socially skilled, they know how to charm their mom and dad and teachers – in a sense, they’re hoodwinking everybody. My daughter mentioned this once to me, and it’s a brilliant analogy.

We’ll just call him “Fred.” Fred has two personalities: the personality that he has when he’s got his baseball cap on, which is when he’s out on the playground and there are no teachers watching him; and then there’s Fred in the classroom. Fred in the classroom is a delight; the Fred with the baseball cap is to be avoided.

**Is bullying an addiction?**

It could be. I published this study on respect and fear, and I think that what bullies don’t understand is that the feedback they get from their peer group seems like respect, but really it’s fear, so they have a really hard time figuring out those messages.

When they’re picking on somebody, because people are frightened and don’t want to be the next target, [the group members] tend to reinforce them, and the [bully] has a misattribution on that — they think, Here’s more evidence that what I’m doing is OK, I’m special.

**We often hear that bullies torment others because they themselves have low self-esteem. Is this true?**

We want to believe that kids who bully others do so because they have poor self-esteem, but the literature suggests that most kids bully others because they have high self-esteem — but high self-esteem that’s a little bit fragile. It’s this pervasive entitlement, this pervasive narcissism that exists in society today.

If you really had low self-esteem and I told you were an idiot, you would say, "You’re right, I am,” because you don’t think well of yourself. You’re not going to fight back on that. You fight back when somebody says something that’s counter to what your belief system is.

I think bullying is motivated by jealousy a lot; a person’s power-holding position is threatened. A lot of girls bully other girls because they’re prettier than they are; boys think that other boys are more athletically competent than they are. If you just had bad self-esteem, you would just believe that you weren’t worthy of anyone’s attention or affection.

I personally believe that most bullying is based on competition. It’s about people trying to position themselves as better than others. I think we often don’t want to acknowledge the elephant in the room, and the elephant in the room is that kids feel good about abusing others.

And I don’t mean that crazy stuff where they’re spitting on them and calling them names and shoving them into the locker.

I’m talking about the subtle stuff they do: the eye-rolls, the making fun of somebody, putting them down. It’s a complicated thing, and I really believe it’s rooted in our evolutionary past.

**Food for Thought (You may have to write on the back):**

1. **What main features show you that this is an interview, rather than a regular article? (Applying)**
2. **A) Describe how the interview format forces you to read differently; B) Explain how this format affects your understanding. (Analyzing, Understanding)**
3. **Based on your own experience, explain why you agree or disagree with Ms. Vaillancourt’s findings on bullies. (Evaluating)**