

Aleksandra Tłuściak-Deliowska

The Maria Grzegorzewska University
adeliowska@aps.edu.pl, ORCID: 0000-0002-0952-8931

The nature of peer violence in schools: a psycho-evolutionary perspective and its pedagogical implications

Abstract: The position of evolutionary psychology assumes the existence of certain psychological mechanisms that have been shaped over the lifetime of thousands of generations in response to specific adaptation problems. Moreover, it emphasizes the interactive nature of human actions, which allows to draw attention to the fact that the appropriate constellation of the perpetrator's, victim's, social context and the adaptation problem may lead to aggressive actions treated as a strategic solution. Through the prism of this perspective, one can look at the problem of peer bullying in the school environment, and this is what has been done in this article. According to the adopted optics, bullying is understood as a phenomenon that results from goal-oriented, strategic aggressive behaviors that harm others in the context of power imbalance and that serve as a potential way of acquiring social resources. **Key words:** aggressive behavior, bullying, evolutionary approach, evolutionary psychology, bully.

Introduction

Bullying¹ is neither a new nor exclusively contemporary problem. It has always been part of social life. It has been documented in all modern cultures studied, as

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¹ In the text, the terms "bullying," "harassment," and "victimization" will be used interchangeably to refer to the same phenomenon. Justification of such choice of terms in the text: Tłuściak-Deliowska 2017.

well as by anthropologists studying hunter-gatherer groups and historians studying ancient civilizations (cf. Cunningham 2005; Koo 2007; Volk et al., 2012). Bullying occurs almost equally across all socioeconomic levels (Tippett and Wolke, 2014) and is widely prevalent in both time and space. However, as Leon Radzinowicz and Joan King (1977) stated, nowadays “we are much more sensitive to violence than our less civilized ancestors” (p. 10). Although the first major scientific article that dealt with bullying among young people was published by Fredric L. Burk in 1897 (cf. Tłuściak-Deliowska, 2017), there was a significant gap before the topic was revisited. Since the 1970s, research on bullying – which began in Scandinavia (e.g., Pikas 1975; Olweus 1978) – has been and continues to be developed in relation to different social contexts and using different approaches (review: Tłuściak-Deliowska, 2017).

An interesting perspective to explain the existence of the problem of peer bullying is provided by evolutionary psychology. It represents a synthesis of contemporary psychology and evolutionary biology and is based on the belief that human beings are born specifically equipped and prepared to process certain types of information (Buss 2001, p. 11). Brunon Hołyst (2010) states that although in this approach it is believed that selection operates most strongly at the level of genes, it can also occur at many other levels. This author analyzed crime precisely from the point of view of evolutionary psychology. The theory and research in the field of evolutionary psychology focus on the functional basis of social behaviors – on what behaviors serve in terms of adaptively appropriate goals and motives. The inclusion of an evolutionary perspective also means a strong presence of biological themes.

Explaining aggression through evolutionary psychology or referring to biological mechanisms, including instincts, is nothing new, as these approaches were among the first through which attempts were made to explain aggressive behavior (cf. Krahe, 2006; Buss, 2001). Aggression is not a uniform phenomenon. This is because it consists of a number of strategies that are revealed only under special circumstances. From the point of view of evolutionary psychology, the mechanism that triggers aggression emerged as a tool for solving various adaptive problems. Dawid M. Buss (2001) listed the following among the basic adaptation problems: (1) Appropriation of another’s property, (2) Defense against attack, (3) Imposing costs on sexual rivals, (4) Fighting for a place in the hierarchy, (5) Deterrence of potential aggressors, (6) Restraining regular partners from infidelity (pp. 309–313). The position of evolutionary psychology assumes the existence of certain mental mechanisms, formed over the course of thousands of generations in response to specific adaptive problems. In addition, it emphasizes the interactional nature of human actions, which helps to draw attention to the fact that the right constellation of characteristics of the perpetrator, the victim, the social context and the adaptive problem can lead to aggressive actions treated as a strategic solution. The problem of peer bullying in the school environment can be viewed through this perspective, and this is what will be discussed in this text.

The problem of peer bullying at school and its specifics

Various definitions of bullying are available in the literature, among which the most popular are the following: “An individual is being bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students” (Olweus, 1993, p. 9). David P. Farrington (1993) states that bullying means the repeated oppression of a person of lesser strength, physically or mentally, by a stronger person. Peter K. Smith and Sonia Sharp (1994) define bullying as “the systematic abuse of power.” Ken Rigby (2002), on the other hand, stated that bullying includes: a desire to hurt another person, a harmful action, an imbalance of power, repetition, an unjust use of power, a clear “pleasure”² on the part of the perpetrator, and generally a sense of being oppressed/victimized in the victim. Although definitions of bullying may vary semantically, most authors agree that bullying involves aggressive behaviors (Dodge, 1991; Olweus, 1993; Smith & Thomson, 1991) that are repeated and characterized by an imbalance of power. It is also understood that bullying is not limited to physical aggression, with which this problem was initially identified (cf. Olweus, 1993; Tłuściak-Deliowska, 2021). As noted by Hyojin Koo (2007), in the past, bullying was perceived as a precisely defined and simpler set of behaviors compared to the present. According to descriptions in old documents from the 18th to the early 20th century, bullying was generally described as physical (or verbal) harassment that often involved strong isolation or coercion among school-aged children. Since the late 1980s, the scope of behaviors that make up bullying has expanded and now also includes direct verbal taunting, hate speech, social exclusion, and electronic aggression, i.e., aggressive behaviors using modern technology (review and analysis of the forms of violence constituting bullying at work: Tłuściak-Deliowska, 2021). It should also be noted that bullying has been observed and identified in every society where attempts have been made to study it (Smith, 1999). Regardless of the forms it takes and the length of time it has been analyzed, bullying is still a serious problem and a challenge for educational and preventive measures in schools. Victims – by definition – find it difficult to cope on their own, and teachers and other adults often know little about the problem. The question then arises – what is the reason for this? Why, despite so many years of research, diagnoses, descriptions, explanations, prevention programs developed, is this problem still a challenge? Why do so many adolescents in so many different cultures engage in potentially harmful and/or antisocial behavior?

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² This theme is also pointed out by the students themselves, cf. Tłuściak-Deliowska, 2021.

Anthony Volk and colleagues (2012) note that traditionally scholars working on the issue have viewed bullying as the result of maladaptive development. Bullying was thought to be what happens when something goes “wrong” in the development process of children and adolescents. This type of perception dominated the understanding and explanation of the problem of peer bullying for some time. An implication of this approach, for example, is the analysis of risk factors for becoming a perpetrator or victim of peer violence, so characteristic of the personological approach to bullying (cf. Tłuściak-Deliowska, 2017a). The assumption is that the problem of bullying occurs because a student, whose upbringing and socialization went wrong in some way, exhibits aggressive behavior towards another student, who, due to their own developed characteristics, is susceptible to such actions (cf. Walton, 2005, p. 94). A negative consequence of such problem orientation is the association of bullying with an individual whose certain “imperfections”, seen as their “defects”, are considered the source of the problem and responsible for their systematic display of aggressive behavior and/or their systematic victimization. However, when analyzing the prevalence rates of this problem and the behaviors associated with it (abstracting from differences in measurement methods), one could conclude that something is “going wrong” with the development of 100–600 million adolescents each year (cf. Volk et al., 2006). Moreover, data from non-industrialized societies suggest that the same maladaptive developmental impact would have to account for the occurrence of bullying in very different cultural and environmental contexts inhabited by groups in different geographic spaces. This prevalence of bullying – seen from a comparative, cross-cultural, socioeconomic and historical perspective – somewhat undermines the belief regarding the social incompetence or some deficits of the perpetrator of bullying. Moreover, this type of explanation of bullying has been verified by numerous studies on the phenomenon (cf. Volk et al., 2012; Tłuściak-Deliowska 2017a), which have succeeded in drawing attention to its distinctive properties that facilitate its understanding, which go beyond the simplistic identification of this phenomenon with analyses solely through the prism of the individual level. Bullying is not just a simple series of negative actions taken and repeated by the same student. A comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon can be achieved by considering various processes, including internal dynamics within the group, with a particular focus on the process of social positioning, differentiation of power, status, and prestige in peer networks and groups, through which bullying is constituted (Tłuściak-Deliowska 2017a). Bullying is the result of social processes, but it is also the result of created and sustained collective action. This type of conundrum also draws attention to the functionality of the behaviors and the phenomenon itself, whether for the individual or the group, and this in turn directs considerations toward a psycho-evolutionary perspective.

A look from a psycho-evolutionary perspective: adaptive and functional dimensions of peer bullying

Through an evolutionary approach, it is hypothesized that incidents of bullying among adolescents are not the result of maladaptive individuals, but on the contrary, some behaviors evolve because they are at least partly the result of evolutionary adaptations. This hypothesis gains significance when one considers the fact that bullying involves targeted aggressive behaviors that cause harm to others within the context of power imbalance, and that it serves as a potential means of acquiring social resources at the expense of others (Pouwels et al., 2016). This way of looking at the problem under analysis has been exposed for some time in works devoted to this issue.

From an evolutionary perspective, organisms exhibit behaviors that increase the likelihood of their survival and reproduction. If violence is beneficial, this type of behavior should contribute to survival and reproduction. Since evolution by natural selection is driven by differences between individuals in reproductive success, the evolutionary significance of any risky behavior ultimately depends on its costs and benefits in terms of organismal fitness (i.e., contribution to future generations). Bruce J. Ellis and colleagues (2012) note that individuals are not necessarily adapted to the direct pursuit of reproductive success, but rather to the pursuit of more tangible goals such as food, security, status and optimal parental investment that reliably lead to reproductive success in evolutionary history. It should not be forgotten that cultural evolution has added another layer of behavioral conditioning, causing people to pursue culturally defined goals that do not necessarily contribute to genetic fitness (Richerson and Boyd, 2005).

An evolutionary view of peer bullying suggests that the behavior is an instrument for creating a “pecking order,” similar to that found among other species where group hierarchy is meaningful and stable. It turns out that bullying is common among animals, from fish to chickens to chimpanzees³, where it provides access to physical, social and sexual resources (reviewed in: Ellis et al., 2012). Referring to ethology, one can recall the base work of Thorleif Schjelderup-Ebbe from 1922 (quoted from: Hawley, 1999, p. 98), describing the linear pecking order in domestic fowl. From the observations of the cited author, it appeared that these birds sometimes fight for status and position in the flock more aggressively than for food or a mate/partner. Moreover, an implication of this “order” is the regularity that the lower a hen is in the hierarchy, the more frequently it gets

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³ I agree with the position of David M. Buss (2001, p. 307), who states that cases of aggression in animals by themselves do not necessarily say anything about aggressive behavior in humans, but the analogies noticed can lead to some (new) insights and explanations of the analyzed phenomena.

pecked, as it is pecked by hens higher in the hierarchy than itself. At the same time, the higher the hen's position in the hierarchy, the more often she pecks at others below it (see also: Tłuściak-Deliowska, 2017b). This concept inspired Patricia H. Hawley (1999), who presented a model of social dominance (resource acquisition strategy), now known as resource control theory (RCT; Hawley et al., 2007). According to this author, social dominance means controlling certain sets (sources), thanks to winning the competition for valued although scarce resources. In the course of competition, individuals can employ prosocial strategies based on cooperation, as well as coercive strategies, which involve aggressive and antisocial behaviors (see Tłuściak-Deliowska, 2017b).

The aggressive behavior that constitutes bullying is rather rarely the result of provocation, frustration or simple expression of anger. Attention is paid to the instrumental side of these behaviors as behaviors that are significantly motivated, have causes, and are aimed at a specific goal. Selective use of aggression plays an important role in shaping social standing in peer groups. Children begin forming peer groups at preschool age and become more selective in their choice of friends as they mature (Harwas-Napierała & Trempała, 2005). Hierarchical social structures emerge when certain students and groups gain prominence by influencing other students and groups. Beginning in elementary school, students begin to engage in interpersonally aggressive behavior to protect and improve their social standing. Popular students manipulate and use aggressive behavior to publicly assert their superiority over others (Farmer & Cadwallader, 2000). With regard to peer bullying, established hierarchies prevent constant power struggles and make it easier to maintain group stability (Zwaan, Dijkstra and Veenstra, 2013). From this point of view, aggressive behavior by students in a given social situation simply pays off. Perceived in this way, peer bullying already solves three adaptive problems identified by David M. Buss (2001), i.e. fighting for a place in the hierarchy, defense against attack and deterrence of potential aggressors. Students who bully others are believed to demonstrate power, and their dominance is thought to prevent them from becoming targets of similar behavior. Their aggressive behavior and reputation thus serve as a deterrent. The drive for social dominance explains why "strong" perpetrators tend to attack weaker victims (Veenstra et al., 2010), and this is because the act of bullying can be an effective (albeit simple and easily accessible) way of signaling one's power. This is because the cost of aggression depends on the victim's willingness to retaliate, and this is extremely rare. The power imbalance between perpetrator and victim is an inherent characteristic of peer bullying. Young people with more "power" choose those with less power to demonstrate and maintain their dominance and position in the hierarchy of the group. Although it may seem counterintuitive that winning against a stronger individual, rather than a weaker one, should guarantee high status, research on social dominance from an evolutionary perspective suggests something entirely different. Furthermore, to achieve their goals, the perpetrators

of bullying also require the presence of bystanders, i.e., the students who witness the dominance, reputation, and effectiveness of their actions (Salmivalli, 2020; Komendant-Brodowska, 2014; Tłuściak-Deliowska, 2017a, 2021). These displays of aggression in the presence of bystanders allow the perpetrators to “cultivate” their unquestionable reputation, which can deter potential rivals from future aggression towards them. This is because potential rivals are less likely to challenge these individuals as they see the failure of their colleagues. This sensitivity to the context of events is an inalienable element of evolutionary hypotheses (Buss, 2001 p. 313).

According to the perspective adopted in this text, it is noted that peer bullying brings significant benefits to the perpetrators (Koh & Wong, 2017; Volk et al., 2012; Tłuściak-Deliowska, 2021). Of these benefits, the discussed link between bullying and social reputation, dominance and popularity in the peer group has been particularly well documented (Reijntjes et al., 2013) and has also been confirmed in various cultures (Pronk et al., 2017; Vaillancourt et al. 2003). Students identified by their peers as perpetrators of bullying are also identified as individuals with high perceived popularity among their peers (Juvonen et al., 2003). Popular adolescents, meanwhile, have a great deal of influence over their peer group, making it a valuable goal to strive for (Cillessen & Rose, 2005). There is a consensus among researchers of this issue to conclude that bullying is associated with an actual increase in social dominance (i.e., power or perceived popularity). This results in the accumulation of social capital. Students are also aware of this state of affairs, as evidenced by proprietary research, describing the perpetrators as “cool” and popular students who are “kings/queens” ruling over the peer group. Their sociometric statuses seem to confirm this (Tłuściak-Deliowska, 2021).

When analyzing the phenomenon of peer bullying from an evolutionary perspective, one would also need to pay attention to the issue of reproduction and adaptive problems associated with sexual competition. Accordingly, male perpetrators of bullying are believed to be more dominant, exhibit physical strength and have more material resources, while female perpetrators of peer bullying are believed to be more attractive and therefore exhibit characteristics that may contribute to higher social status and greater reproductive opportunities (Volk et al., 2012; Kretschmer et al., 2021). Indeed, this is supported by empirical studies indicating that such high status in the group, dominance, and popularity of perpetrators somehow contribute to more frequent dating, sexual activity, and having a greater number of partners during adolescence and early adulthood (Dane et al., 2017; Farrell and Vaillancourt, 2019; Provenzano et al., 2018; Volk et al., 2015). For example, adolescent boys who exhibited aggressive behavior toward peers at the beginning of the semester were more likely to date later in the year, indicating adaptive properties associated with aggression during adolescence (Pellegrini & Bartini, 2001). Adolescent girls who exhibited high levels of indirect

aggression were more likely to start dating at a younger age compared to their female peers and reported more dating and sexual partners (Dane et al., 2017; Gallup et al., 2011; Lapiere & Dane 2020). This research suggests that perpetrators of bullying appear to have an advantage in an evolutionary sense because they are sexually attractive to more potential partners, which should increase their reproductive capacity. Although perpetrators of bullying (regardless of gender) begin dating earlier than their peers, the relationships they enter, however, seem to be less supportive and less lasting (Connolly et al., 2000). This likely paves the way for frequent changes of partners in a relationship, which, at least for men, can be seen as beneficial. This is because it means that a greater number of female partners can provide them with greater reproductive opportunities and, consequently, the number of offspring. From this point of view, therefore, it can be considered that one of the benefits of peer group dominance achieved through bullying is the simplification of the process of dating and entering into multiple intimate relationships. I would consider these effects as additional outcomes of the analyzed aggressive behaviors that constitute bullying, rather than goals in themselves. Indeed, it is worth considering another adaptive problem highlighted by David M. Buss (2001), which is inflicting costs on sexual rivals. Aggression aimed at bringing shame to rivals can manifest itself in a variety of ways, from name-calling to brawls. Teasing same-sex peers means depreciating them in the eyes of the opposite sex. According to the evolutionary hypothesis, a cost imposed on a rival means a benefit for the one who imposes it, so the function of verbal and physical aggression in this case is to bring costs to rivals of the same sex. In order to substantiate this hypothesis with regard to peer violence, two points are worth noting. First, I would like to refer to homophobic bullying (cf. Tłuściak-Deliowska, 2021), the perpetrators of which are boys, and whose victims are not only boys who declare non-heteronormativity, but also those who simply violate “normative” masculine norms in the opinion of their peers. A study by Ann Phoenix, Stephen Frosh and Rob Pattman (2003) involving teenage boys who were interviewed provided interesting results. It has been found that a crucial theme in boys’ relationships is the importance of presenting oneself as sufficiently masculine, primarily to avoid being targeted by other boys through being labeled as “gay.” Boys therefore had to weigh what they did or said for fear of being considered effeminate and therefore experiencing discredit in front of their peers. Therefore, they themselves manifested and maintained homophobic attitudes to confirm their masculinity in this way.

In the case of girls bullying other girls, the situation is as follows. Referring to the evolutionary perspective, it is important to remember that traits that increase a woman’s chances of attracting partners will trigger competition with other women. For example, physical attractiveness, a slimmer physique and provocative clothing are characteristics that indicate a partner’s high value or greater ability to attract male attention (Buss, 1989). Taking into account that boys/men highly

value the attractiveness of a potential partner, girls/women may more often perceive attractive peers as their rivals and engage in tactics such as indirect aggression to undermine their reputation and, consequently, reduce their chances in the dating market (Leenaars, Dane, & Marini, 2008; Vaillancourt & Sharma, 2011). Indirect aggression can be a useful strategy to facilitate competition, as it involves destroying the reputation of rivals by spreading rumors, discrediting and accusing them of promiscuity and infidelity (see also: Tłuściak-Deliowska, 2021). Indeed, spreading rumors and making accusations can undermine girls' chances in cross-gender relationships and even deter their current partners. It turns out that men are more susceptible to negative statements about a woman's attractiveness compared to positive or neutral statements, especially when the statements were made by another woman (Fisher & Cox, 2011). Although indirect aggression is also used by boys and men, it is preferentially used by girls and women (Osterman et al., 1998; cf. Tłuściak-Deliowska, 2021). Analyses conducted by Tracy Vaillancourt and Jamie A. Krems (2018) indicate that such indirect aggression among girls is in fact effective. Compared to boys and men, girls and women who are victims of indirect aggression by their peers are more likely to be discouraged and withdraw from interpersonal relationships due to depression and increased levels of anxiety, consequences of the victimization experienced. Accordingly, the social status of girls obtained through the use of effective aggression is closely guarded.

The cost of engaging in peer bullying: the optional dimension of violent actions

The above considerations provide some understanding of why bullying occurs, but do not explain why not everyone engages in such behavior. One potential answer is that intimidation, however, is a risky strategy that, in addition to the benefits already analyzed, comes with various costs. Given that (1) adolescence is a critical time for establishing status in a group, (2) "anything worth having is worth fighting for," and (3) position in social hierarchies is a zero-sum game with winners and losers, status, popularity and social success are not easily achieved and are easily lost. According to the handicap hypothesis (Zahavi & Zahavi, 1997), generating behaviors that confer status must simply be costly. Involvement in peer bullying, in addition to the benefits analyzed above, involves the risk of incurring such costs as retaliation, resentment from peers, and punishment from adults, among others (Volk et al., 2014). Indeed, the effective taking of risks, especially in the face of real danger, is often admired and can contribute to gaining status. This means that the actions taken must be valid and reliable signals of socio-competitive competence, or be the result of some individual's prowess, which cannot be faked. Otherwise, everyone could engage in these behaviors, the effects would be available to everyone, and therefore would not be of such value.

Despite the adaptive results, peer bullying is considered antisocial behavior that is not always accepted by the peer group. For example, although adolescent perpetrators are perceived as popular and have a high status in their peer group, they do not receive many indications in terms of social acceptance and peer sympathy (de Bruyn et al., 2010; Tłuściak-Deliowska, 2017a, 2021).

The costs and benefits of engaging in peer bullying may vary depending on individual differences related to physical strength, social context and/or personality or temperament (Ellis et al., 2012). Anthony Volk and colleagues (2021) suggest that bullying is an optional adaptation, which is more likely to occur when personal (e.g., strength, personality), social (e.g., presence of student witnesses such as defenders, reinforcing peers and assistants to the perpetrator), and environmental (e.g., cultural context) conditions favor the individual committing bullying. The research conducted by these authors legitimizes the interpretation of bullying as a potentially adaptive, short-term solution to the problem of gaining social dominance. They conclude that bullying can be seen as a contingent adaptation used by people with inherited personality traits characterized by impulsivity, the use of exploitation and manipulation of others, who compare their personal goals and capabilities with the opportunities and costs created by their environment and culture.

The analysis of basic adaptation problems according to the evolutionary perspective shows that there is no single biologically or environmentally determined pattern of aggressive behavior, independent of circumstances. They appear as a result of some combination of different factors and circumstances, and offer an interesting and promising explanation for the nature of peer bullying.

Pedagogical implications

Based on conducted analyses, the statement that peer bullying appears to be strategic and adaptive becomes valid. This means that fully understanding and preventing bullying requires incorporating a psycho-evolutionary lens to understand the forms and functions of bullying among adolescents. This perspective also underscores the importance of the ecological context in understanding this phenomenon, which is influenced by many social and environmental factors.

Based on the analyses of peer bullying from a psycho-evolutionary perspective, several conclusions can be drawn for psycho-pedagogical practice. The analyses conducted suggest that it is important to consider the goals and functions of bullying in developing effective prevention and intervention programs. It may be unreasonable to expect students to stop engaging in social behaviors that are successful for them (albeit costly), through which they achieve goals that are important at that developmental moment.

As Bruce J. Ellis and colleagues (2015) noted based on their analysis of prevention programs aimed at reducing peer bullying, in general, the actions

taken through the programs put in place did not lead to a reduction in bullying. Particularly ineffective were and are programs for which the basic approach is zero-tolerance to school violence or empathy training. This ineffectiveness is not surprising from an evolutionary perspective, given the complete lack of consideration in such programs of goals achieved through harassment. There is little reason for students to give up an effective social strategy in exchange for nothing, and that is exactly what happens – nothing – when schools implement a zero tolerance policy⁴ (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). And while some empathy training programs report a positive effect, a more general review of the intervention literature suggests that they are only effective with younger children who are just learning to understand the consequences of their actions (cf. Ellis et al., 2016).

The effectiveness of Scandinavian programs such as the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP; Olweus, 2005) and KiVa (Salmivalli, Karna, and Poskiparta, 2010) has been demonstrated. However, their highest effectiveness is observed in countries where they have been developed and implemented (see also: Tłuściak-Deliowska, 2017a). From an evolutionary perspective, the effectiveness of these programs can be explained as follows: firstly, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program increases the costs borne by the bully through disciplinary actions (i.e. negative consequences for inappropriate behavior, collaboration with parents). This increased cost discourages bullying behavior. Secondly, the KiVa program reduces the benefits of bullying by encouraging peers to intervene and by devaluing bullying as a means of gaining popularity. Lessons learned and effective elements from these projects have been incorporated into the evolutionary approach-inspired program The Meaningful Roles Intervention (Ellis et al., 2016). This program takes into account the adaptive, goal-oriented nature of peer bullying and attempts to offer alternative yet pro-social strategies for achieving goals appropriate for adolescents. The program is based on the basic principle of adolescent development, i.e. it takes into account the growing importance of vital roles and clearly visible contributions to the group as a basis for social status. The program includes universal actions that encompass the entire school through improving the school climate, as well as targeted actions towards students by providing meaningful responsibilities to virtually all students. An integral part of this approach is moving away from treating students as recipients of adult messages and instead treating them as valuable resources in their school community. This provides each student with numerous opportunities to participate

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⁴ An attempt to implement such a solution was also made in Poland; however, the program was not introduced due to significant limitations (criticisms) of an educational nature raised by educational and academic communities, as well as institutional-jurisdictional thinking about the problem of violence in schools. Additionally, the role of various contextual and developmental factors related to student behavior was not taken into account (I wrote about this in the text: Tłuściak-Deliowska, 2018).

and engage in the school community (e.g., a role as a tutor for younger students, a specialist for setting up laptops, etc.), with each role being important to the overall success of the school. As a universal strategy, the program promotes a school culture in which pro-social behavior is reinforced and expands opportunities for students to use socially acceptable strategies to achieve meaningful goals for young people. Student duty/job offers in this program are carefully designed and assigned to provide students with an alternative, pro-social way to gain status, resources and recognition, thus the key targets of bullying behavior. The program seems to be an interesting alternative, and the initial results of its implementation are encouraging, but further evaluation and verification are required to talk about its effectiveness. The presented program and the conclusions resulting from the analysis of peer bullying through the lens of evolutionary psychology provide new inspiration for both further research in this area and the design of preventive and educational measures.

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