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Locus of Control and Emotional Responses as Predictors of Aggressive and Task-Oriented Coping Strategies Among Adolescents in Social Conflict Situations

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Abstract

Objective: The aim of the study was to assess the role of locus of control and emotional responses in the development of aggressive and task-oriented coping strategies among adolescents in social conflict situations.

Method: The study was conducted among 893 students aged 13–15. The following instruments were used: the *Locus of Control Questionnaire* (Polish: *Kwestionariusz do badania poczucia kontroli* – KBPK) by G. Krasowicz and A. Kurzyp-Wojnarska, the *Three-Factor Inventory of States and Traits of Personality* (Polish: *Trójczynnikowy inwentarz stanów i cech osobowości* – TISCO) by C. Spielberger and K. Wrześniewski, and the *Questionnaire for Examining Adolescents' Coping Strategies in Social Conflict Situations* (Polish: *Kwestionariusz do badania strategii radzenia sobie młodzieży w sytuacji konfliktu społecznego* – KSMK) by D. Borecka-Biernat.

Results: The findings indicated that a strong belief in the influence of others on both positive and negative outcomes of events, as well as responding to conflict situations with anger or anxiety, co-occurs with a tendency toward aggressive coping in conflict. The results also demonstrated that a stronger belief in one's own ability to control positive and negative outcomes of events, along with responding to conflict with curiosity, increases the likelihood of adopting task-oriented coping strategies in social conflict situations.

Conclusions: The results provide theoretical guidance for the development of preventive and therapeutic programs aimed at fostering those characteristics in young people that are essential for constructive (task-oriented) coping strategies, which take into account the well-being of all participants involved in relationships and conflicts. Teaching adolescents

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constructive ways of coping with conflict situations constitutes an important element in preparing them for functioning in society.

Keywords: adolescents, locus of control, emotions, coping strategies, social conflict situation

A conflict situation involving another person is considered one of the fundamental types of difficult social situations in human life. The possibility of interpersonal conflict arises wherever interactions between individuals occur. Interpersonal conflicts affect people of different ages and across various social environments. They are unavoidable, as they result from interpersonal interactions between individuals who differ in personality traits, predispositions, and skills. Indeed, conflicts reflect the individuality of particular persons, who are characterized by a diversity of views and attitudes.

Adults often underestimate the extent to which young people must confront numerous difficult situations in their everyday lives. Adolescence constitutes a crucial developmental stage, marked by crises and conflicts. During this period, a young person functions simultaneously within multiple social contexts, such as school, the classroom, peer groups, and the family. The potential for conflict may emerge within each of these domains. Social interactions frequently involve conflicts with teachers, disagreements with peers and romantic partners, as well as disputes with one or both parents and other family members (Garstka, 2011; Gurba, 2013, 2020; Guszkowska et al., 2001; Honness et al., 1997; Jaworski, 2000; Lachowska, 2010; Lohman & Jarvis, 2000; Polak, 2010; Rostowska, 2001; Różańska-Kowal, 2004; Sikorski, 2010). Conflicts occurring across these three primary social domains constitute an integral and unavoidable aspect of adolescents' lives.

A difficult situation of social interaction stimulates the adolescent to engage in activity aimed at restoring balance between demands and available resources and/or improving their emotional state. The activity undertaken in such complex circumstances is considered within a specific situational context as coping strategies in the current difficult situation (Heszen-Niejodek, 2000; Wrześniewski, 1996). As noted earlier, the school environment is particularly stressful for adolescents, especially in situations involving conflicts with teachers, peers, romantic partners, as well as disputes with one or both parents and other family members. It is therefore worth paying attention to how adolescents cope with conflict situations that occur at school, in peer relationships, and within the family home. Numerous studies, as well as everyday observation, indicate that adolescents possess a broad repertoire of coping strategies for dealing with difficult social situations, including social conflict. Coping in such situations may take the form of both destructive and constructive strategies (Borecka-Biernat & Čiuladienė, 2015; Donaldson et al., 2000; Frączek, 2003; Gawryś, 2002; Kobus & Reyes, 2000; Lachowska, 2010; Sikora & Pisula, 2002; Trylińska-Tekielska, 2007). Destructive strategy is not aimed at resolving and overcoming a conflict situation. It has limited value from the perspective of conflict resolution and is

directed solely at reducing unpleasant emotional tension and/or achieving a sense of well-being. This may occur, among other ways, through aggression in the form of an initiated physical and/or verbal attack directed against specific individuals, causing harm to their physical, psychological, and social well-being. By contrast, constructive strategy in the form of task-oriented coping with a social conflict situation, is aimed at resolving and overcoming the conflict. This includes attempts to bring about changes within the conflict situation perceived as threatening, either by modifying one's own actions or by changing the threatening environment.

Cognitive and Emotional Determinants of Aggressive and Task-Oriented Coping Strategies Among Adolescents in Social Conflict Situations

Research findings and observational data indicate individual differences in responses to difficult situations and in mechanisms of coping with excessive emotional tension among adolescents (Pisula & Sikora, 2008). This suggests that individuals employ relatively stable, personally characteristic coping strategies which, apart from situational factors, are largely determined by personality traits. This raises an important question: why do some adolescents in situations of social conflict adopt destructive strategies (aggressive), whereas others employ constructive (task-oriented) strategies? In addressing this issue, the concept of the psychological mechanism of human behavior in difficult situations proposed by M. Tyszkowa (1986) proves particularly useful. According to this author, basic cognitive structures of personality play an important role in the psychological mechanism underlying behavior in difficult situations. These structures determine the way in which an individual cognitively and emotionally perceives and interprets a difficult situation, which, in turn, affects their behavior in that situation.

A person's active influence on the surrounding reality depends not only on the objective characteristics of a given situation but also on how they perceive the relationship between their own actions and their consequences (Drwal, 1978). Differences in the perception of situations in which a person acts are associated with the existence of a particular continuum. It ranges from the belief that the reinforcements one receives are independent of one's own behavior to the belief that these reinforcements are dependent on one's own behavior. This subjective perception determines whether the successes and failures experienced by an individual are attributed to luck, chance, the will of those in positions of power, or unpredictable circumstances – in which case we speak of a "sense of external control" – or whether the outcomes of one's actions are perceived as dependent on one's own behavior or on relatively stable personal characteristics, in which case this is referred to as a "sense of internal control".

A sense of locus of control is an important individual factor modifying a person's functioning in difficult situations and influencing the coping strategies they employ. A person copes more effectively with difficulties and is more likely to attempt to resolve and overcome them when they perceive themselves as

having control over the situation. Belief in one's ability to direct and influence events, freedom of choice, and the ability to effectively influence reality, as well as resistance to pressure from others, promote an active approach to coping with difficult situations (Adesina, 2012; Borecka-Biernat, 2006; Cook & Sloane, 2001; Dijkstra, Beersma & Evers, 2011; Gasparski, 2002; Kurtek, 2005; Miller et al., 1986; Taylor, 2010). It can therefore be argued that a sense of internal control, together with the associated belief in one's ability to influence the course of events, enables independent, active, task-oriented action, particularly in matters that are important to the individual.

In contrast, individuals with a sense of external control tend to function less effectively in difficult situations. In general, the inability to exercise control over unpleasant events negatively affects the effectiveness of their functioning and their satisfaction with the tasks they perform. They most often believe that they are unable to influence or change a difficult situation and therefore do not focus on the source of the problem but rather on themselves, adopting a defensive stance aimed at protecting their threatened "ego". This leads to the use of an aggressive coping strategy and to its habitual application regardless of the level of threat (Borecka-Biernat, 2006; Breet, Mayburgh & Poggenpoela, 2010; Deming & Lochman, 2008; Rostowska, 2001; Österman et al., 1999).

A person responds emotionally to a threatening situation. In a difficult situation, emotions are generally negative in valence. One may experience anger, rage, and anxiety. However, a difficult situation may also sometimes elicit a sense of satisfaction associated with the possibility of overcoming difficulties. Emotions such as anger and rage may lead to aggression, irritation, outbursts of rage, and other seemingly unjustified emotional reactions that can be observed in various types of destructive behavior (Berkowitz, 1992; Borecka-Biernat, 2006; Deffenbacher, 1992; Domińska-Werbel, 2014; Gross, Halperin & Porat, 2013; Kossewska, 2008; Skorny, 1987).

Anxiety is likewise an unpleasant state for an individual, elicited by a threatening situation, and therefore the individual seeks to free themselves from this emotion. Strategies for coping with anxiety involve various forms of activity aimed at eliminating the threat, withdrawing from or escaping the situation, or protecting oneself against the negative consequences of the threat (Borecka-Biernat 2006; Łosiak 2009). The literature on ways of coping with anxiety also contains evidence that when a person has nowhere left to escape, anxiety may become a reason for attacking (Borecka-Biernat, 2006; Janowski 2005; Nowosad 2002; Sikorski, 2015). It is commonly assumed that anxiety is a factor influencing the level of aggression in individuals facing threatening situations.

It is also important to note that the influence of anxiety on behavior depends on its intensity (Kubacka-Jasiecka, 1986; Leary & Kowalski, 2001; Nitendel-Bujakowa, 2001). A person overwhelmed by intense anxiety in a threatening situation withdraws from the situation in which they would have to confront their emotional tension with an actual or anticipated threat, or attempts to defend the threatened "self" through aggression. Such aggression involves moving toward the source of the threat in order to destroy it, thereby reducing anxiety-related tension. When anxiety is mild or moderate, the individual actively copes with

difficulties and obstacles, experiences satisfaction from overcoming difficulties, and receives reinforcement that is important for their sense of self-worth.

Consequently, situations perceived as challenges may elicit positive emotional responses and behaviors oriented toward resolving and overcoming difficulties (Lazarus, 1991). Positive emotions promote play, thinking, and creativity and increase the flexibility of responses, thereby encouraging experimentation, the discovery of new phenomena, and the search for new solutions (Fredrickson, 2001; Spielberger & Reheiser, 2009). Curiosity is one possible positive emotional response elicited by a difficult situation when it is perceived not as a threat but as a challenge. In accordance with the mechanisms underlying emotions, curiosity motivates individuals to seek new information and encourages action and the expansion of experience (Doliński, 2000; Spielberger & Reheiser, 2009; Voss & Keller, 1983). Greater curiosity promotes a stronger belief in one's ability to find ways of reaching a goal and to mobilize oneself to make an effort and, consequently, a stronger belief in one's ability to cope with difficulties (Łaguna & Bąk, 2007). It stimulates searching and exploratory behaviors that contribute to problem solving (Spielberger & Reheiser, 2003).

In general, it can be said that the primary means of regulating emotions are coping strategies used in difficult situations

The Research Problem

The empirical research focused on the cognitive and emotional determinants of aggressive and task-oriented coping strategies among adolescents in social conflict situations, with particular emphasis on the role of locus of control and the level and content of emotional responses. The study aimed to answer the following research question:

1. Which set of cognitive and emotional variables differentiates aggressive and task-oriented coping strategies among adolescents in social conflict situations?

This research question allowed for the formulation of the following hypothesis, which was verified through the analysis of empirical findings:

H1: Due to differences in adolescents' coping strategies in social conflict situations, locus of control as well as the level and type of emotions are expected to differentiate aggressive and task-oriented coping strategies. Adolescents with an external locus of control, high levels of anger and anxiety, and lower levels of curiosity are expected to employ aggressive coping strategies in social conflict situations. In contrast, adolescents with an internal locus of control, low levels of anger and anxiety, and high levels of curiosity are expected to employ task-oriented coping strategies in social conflict situations.

It is worth noting that most studies on adolescents' coping strategies in difficult social situations, including social conflicts, were conducted more than a decade ago. Therefore, the present research contributes to supplementing and updating knowledge in this area (Adesina, 2012; Borecka-Biernat & Čiuladiene, 2015; Domińska-Werbel, 2014; Gross et al., 2013; Gurba, 2020; Lachowska, 2010; Sikorski, 2015; Taylor, 2010).

Method

Participants and Procedure

The study involved a total of 893 adolescents, including 468 girls and 425 boys, aged 13–15 years. The participants were students of public schools located in Wrocław and nearby towns. Schools were selected through random sampling; however, as not all selected institutions consented to participate, several additional schools were invited to ensure an adequate representation. Data collection was typically conducted during homeroom periods in a group-administered format, and participation was voluntary. To ensure anonymity, students signed their questionnaires using pseudonyms or initials. Prior to participation, individuals who had obtained parental consent were thoroughly instructed on the study procedure. All research activities were conducted in accordance with ethical standards for psychological research.

The primary criterion for selecting participants was age. The influence of age on the selection of coping strategies in social conflict situations among adolescents aged 13–15 years (early adolescence). Adolescence represents a critical developmental stage in every individual's life, as it is widely recognized as the transitional period between childhood and adulthood. This stage is accompanied by numerous developmental changes and is often characterized by considerable emotional and psychological turbulence. It is commonly described as a period of "storm and stress". Adolescence is marked by profound biological, psychological, cognitive, motivational, and social changes that frequently challenge young people's ability to adapt their behavior to new situations, developmental tasks, and emerging social roles (Czerwińska-Jasiewicz, 2015). Furthermore, adolescence is characterized by behavioral instability, frequent conflicts with others and with oneself, and a pervasive sense of being misunderstood (Obuchowska, 1996). The development of critical thinking about the surrounding world, the intensive formation of self-concept, heightened emotional reactivity combined with limited emotional regulation, emotional lability, rapid shifts between emotional extremes, the predominance of affective processes over other domains of psychological functioning, as well as the emergence of new forms of social interaction and greater behavioral spontaneity, make adolescents aged 13–15 years a particularly appropriate population for investigating coping strategies employed in situations of intense emotional stress, such as social conflict.

Instruments

The following research instruments were employed:

1. The *Locus of Control Questionnaire* (Polish: KBPK) developed by G. Krasowicz and A. Kurzyp-Wojnarska (1990) consists of 46 forced-choice items; 36 of these are diagnostic items, while the remaining 10 serve as buffer questions. The diagnostic items refer to simple situations from the everyday lives of school-aged adolescents and form two scales: the *Success Scale* (S) and the *Failure Scale* (F). Questions referring to favorable events constitute the *Success Scale* (S), whereas items referring to unfavorable events constitute the *Failure Scale* (F). The sum of scores obtained on the *Success* and *Failure* scales forms a generalized locus of control index (S + F). Low scores on the KBPK indicate an external locus of control regarding the outcomes of events, whereas high scores indicate an internal locus of control. The questionnaire demonstrates satisfactory reliability (the KR-20 internal consistency coefficient is 0.54 for the *Success Scale* and 0.69 for the *Failure Scale*) as well as criterion validity.
2. The *Three-Factor Inventory of States and Traits of Personality* (Polish: TISCO) is the Polish adaptation of the American State–Trait Personality Inventory (STPI) developed by C. Spielberger and his team (Wrześniewski, 1991). The TISCO inventory consists of two independent parts. The first part (SPI – *State Personality Inventory*) is designed to measure anxiety, anger, and curiosity conceptualized as emotional states experienced at a given moment. The second part (TPI – *Trait Personality Inventory*) is used to assess the same emotions conceptualized as personality traits. Thus, the test comprises six scales: state anxiety and trait anxiety, state anger and trait anger, as well as state curiosity and trait curiosity. Each scale consists of 10 short, simple statements referring to the individual's subjective feelings. Responses are provided on a four-point frequency scale, where 1 = *not at all/almost never*, 2 = *rather not/sometimes*, 3 = *often/moderately*, and 4 = *almost always/very much so*. Scores are calculated separately for each subscale. For the purposes of the present study, three subscales from both the SPI and TPI were used to assess specific emotions conceptualized as states and traits. The reliability of the Polish version of the TISCO inventory is comparable to that of the original version, with internal consistency coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) ranging from 0.82 to 0.92 for the first part (SPI) and from 0.68 to 0.88 for the second part (TPI), depending on the sample. These values indicate satisfactory internal consistency. The validity of TISCO was examined in terms of both theoretical and diagnostic validity. The results concerning its validity are satisfactory and comparable to those obtained for the original STPI version.
3. The *Questionnaire for Examining Adolescents' Coping Strategies in Social Conflict Situations* (KSMK) developed by D. Borecka-Biernat (2012) is designed to assess coping strategies employed by adolescents in social conflict situations. The instrument consists of 33 descriptions of social conflict situations. For each situation, four behavioral responses representing different

coping strategies are provided: the first refers to aggressive coping ("A"), the second to avoidant coping ("AV"), the third to submissive coping ("S"), and the fourth to task-oriented coping ("T"). Scores are calculated separately for each scale by summing the responses corresponding to a given coping strategy across the 33 situations. For the purposes of the present study, the *Aggressive Coping Scale* ("A") and the *Task-Oriented Coping Scale* ("T") were used. The questionnaire demonstrates good reliability (Cronbach's alpha coefficient is approximately 0.70 or higher) as well as diagnostic validity.

Results

In order to identify cognitive–emotional predictors of aggressive and task-oriented coping strategies among adolescents in social conflict situations, discriminant analysis was applied. The analysis included results from one scale of the KBPK questionnaire—generalized locus of control (S + F)—and six scales of the TISCO inventory: state anger, state anxiety, state curiosity, trait anger, trait anxiety, and trait curiosity. This method allows for capturing individual differences among participants with respect to their coping strategies in social conflict situations. Discriminant variables, as predictive indicators, provide a basis (to a certain extent) for accurately classifying individuals into one of the two distinguished coping strategy groups (Brzeziński, 1984). In the present study, these groups consisted of adolescents with a high level of aggressive coping strategy and those with a high level of task-oriented coping strategy in social conflict situations. The groups characterized by high levels of aggressive and task-oriented coping strategies were identified based on high scores on the respective KSMK scales: *Aggression* (190 total: 93 girls, 97 boys) and *Task* (132 total: 73 girls, 59 boys).

Data will be presented for the total sample of adolescents who employ aggressive coping strategies in social conflict situations, as well as for those who employ task-oriented coping strategies (see Table 1).

Five cognitive–emotional variables out of seven were included in the discriminant function, jointly differentiating adolescents who employ an aggressive coping strategy in social conflict situations from those who adopt a task-oriented coping strategy. These determinants are as follows: generalized locus of control, anger conceptualized as an emotional state, curiosity conceptualized as an emotional state, anger conceptualized as a personality trait, and curiosity conceptualized as a personality trait. The configuration of mean scores indicates that a lower level of generalized locus of control (M = 21.41), a higher level of anger as a transient emotional state (M = 19.65), a lower level of curiosity as a transient emotional state (M = 25.92), a higher level of learned behavioral disposition to respond with anger (M = 24.21), and a lower level of learned behavioral disposition to respond with curiosity (M = 27.62) significantly determine membership in the group of adolescents who employ an aggressive coping strategy in social conflict situations. Conversely, a higher level of generalized locus of control

(M = 25.67), a lower level of anger as a transient emotional state (M = 15.51), a higher level of curiosity as a transient emotional state (M = 27.37), a lower level of learned behavioral disposition to respond with anger (M = 19.69), and a higher level of learned behavioral disposition to respond with curiosity (M = 29.18) significantly determine membership in the group of adolescents who adopt a task-oriented coping strategy in social conflict situations.

Table 1

Cognitive–emotional Variables Identified as Discriminants Differentiating Adolescents Employing Aggressive (A) and Task-Oriented (T) Coping Strategies in Social Conflict Situations, with Consideration of Gender

Participants	Discriminants	Wilks' Lambda	*F* (for removal)	Level *p*<	1 – Tolerance (R^2)
Total sample	LOC (S+F)	.82	46.57	<.001	.05
	State anger	.77	9.17	.003	.22
	State curiosity	.77	6.03	.01	.11
	Trait anger	.79	23.78	<.001	.27
	Trait curiosity	.77	6.11	.02	.24
Wilks' Lambda: .76; approx. $F(5, 546) = 35.22$, $p < .001$					
Girls	LOC (S+F)	.86	35.57	<.001	0.02
	Trait anger	.81	20.02	<.001	0.15
	Trait curiosity	.79	12.75	<.001	0.14
Wilks' Lambda: .75; approx. $F(3, 272) = 29.77$, $p < .001$					
Boys	LOC (S+F)	.80	17.53	<.001	0.06
	State anxiety	.78	8.80	.003	0.03
	State curiosity	.77	7.00	.009	0.04
	Trait anger	.81	22.81	<.001	0.09
Wilks' Lambda: .75; approx. $F(4, 271) = 22.56$, $p < .001$					

LOC (S+F) – generalized locus of control
Source: authors' own elaboration.

These five cognitive–emotional variables presented in Table 1 account for 24% of the variance. The accuracy of classifying individuals into the group employing an aggressive coping strategy in social conflict situations or into the group employing a task-oriented coping strategy, based on these five discriminant variables considered jointly, is moderate and reaches 73.37%. Notably, classification accuracy is slightly higher for adolescents applying an aggressive coping strategy (73.54%) than for those employing a task-oriented coping strategy (73.18%) in social conflict situations. Detailed results are presented in Table 2.

The question arises as to which configurations of cognitive–emotional variables are characteristic of girls and boys employing aggressive and task-oriented coping strategies in social conflict situations. In each case, the aim is to identify a set of cognitive–emotional variables whose selection differentiates, within each

gender, groups of adolescents using an aggressive coping strategy from those using a task-oriented coping strategy in social conflict situations.

Table 2

Percentage Of Correctly Predicted Classifications of Adolescents Into the Aggressive (A) and Task-Oriented (T) Coping Strategy Groups in Social Conflict Situations Based on the Discriminant Function of Cognitive and Emotional Variables

Participants	Actual group	Predicted group		Total
		A	T	
Total	A	214 73.54%	77 26.46%	291 100%
	T	70 26.82%	191 73.18%	261 100%
Girls	A	94 68.61%	43 31.39%	137 100%
	T	37 26.62%	102 73.38%	139 100%
Boys	A	119 77.27%	35 22.73%	154 100%
	T	43 35.25%	79 64.75%	122 100%

Source: authors' own elaboration.

The discriminant analysis of all seven cognitive–emotional variables, conducted separately for girls divided into two groups, allowed for the identification of three discriminant variables: generalized locus of control, anger conceptualized as a personality trait, and curiosity conceptualized as a personality trait (see Table 1). The results indicate that a lower level of generalized locus of control (M = 19.39), a higher level of learned behavioral disposition to respond with anger (M = 23.91), and a lower level of learned behavioral disposition to respond with curiosity (M = 27.02) significantly determine membership in the group of adolescent girls who employ an aggressive coping strategy in social conflict situations. In contrast, a higher level of generalized locus of control (M = 24.52), a lower level of learned behavioral disposition to respond with anger (M = 20.32), and a higher level of learned behavioral disposition to respond with curiosity (M = 28.73) primarily determine whether the examined girls exhibit a task-oriented coping strategy in social conflict situations.

These three variables presented in Table 1 jointly explain 25% of the variance. The accuracy of classifying individual girls into groups employing an aggressive versus a task-oriented coping strategy, based on these three discriminant variables, is moderate and amounts to 71.02%. Classification accuracy is

higher for assigning girls to the task-oriented coping strategy group (73.38%) than to the aggressive coping strategy group (68.61%) (see Table 2).

Let us now examine which cognitive–emotional variables enter the discriminant function differentiating boys who employ an aggressive coping strategy from those who employ a task-oriented coping strategy. The data presented in Table 1 provide an answer to this question. Of the seven cognitive–emotional variables, four were included in the discriminant function: generalized locus of control, anxiety conceptualized as an emotional state, curiosity conceptualized as an emotional state, and anger conceptualized as a personality trait. The following configuration of cognitive–emotional discriminants: a lower level of generalized locus of control ($M = 21.41$), a higher level of anxiety as a transient emotional state ($M = 22.38$), a lower level of curiosity as a transient emotional state experienced in relation to the conflict ($M = 25.92$), and a higher level of learned behavioral disposition to respond with anger ($M = 24.21$) determine whether boys adopt an aggressive coping strategy in social conflict situations. Conversely, the following pattern of results: a higher level of generalized locus of control ($M = 25.67$), a lower level of anxiety as a transient emotional state ($M = 20.84$), a higher level of curiosity as a transient emotional state experienced in relation to the conflict ($M = 27.37$), and a lower level of learned behavioral disposition to respond with anger ($M = 19.69$) significantly determine membership in the group of boys who employ a task-oriented coping strategy in social conflict situations.

These four variables included in the discriminant function jointly explain 25% of the variance. The accuracy of classifying individual boys into the group employing an aggressive coping strategy versus a task-oriented coping strategy in social conflict situations, based on the discriminant function and thus taking into account these four discriminant variables, is moderate and amounts to 71.74%. Notably, classification accuracy is higher for assigning boys to the aggressive coping strategy group (77.27%) than to the task-oriented coping strategy group (64.75%). Detailed results are presented in Table 2.

Based on the above results, it can be observed that adolescents (overall, considering gender) who use an aggressive coping strategy in social conflict situations are characterized by a generalized external locus of control, a higher level of anger conceptualized as an emotional state, a higher level of the learned behavioral disposition to respond with anger, a higher level of anxiety conceptualized as an emotional state, a lower level of curiosity understood as a transient emotional state experienced in relation to conflict, and a lower level of the learned behavioral disposition to respond with curiosity, in comparison with adolescents (overall, considering gender) who use a task-oriented coping strategy in social conflict situations.

In turn, the analysis of the results for adolescents (overall, considering gender) who employ a task-oriented coping strategy in a social conflict situation, as compared to adolescents (overall, considering gender) who employ aggressive coping strategies in a social conflict situation, revealed a generalized internal locus of control, a lower level of anger conceptualized as an emotional state, a lower level of learned behavioral disposition to respond with anger, a lower level of anxiety conceptualized as an emotional state, a higher level of curiosity understood

as a transient emotional state experienced in relation to the conflict, and a higher level of learned behavioral disposition to respond with curiosity.

In summary, in light of the conducted statistical verification, it should be concluded that the role of discriminants enabling the prediction—with an accuracy of approximately 24–25%—of aggressive and task-oriented coping strategies among adolescents (overall, with respect to gender) in conflict situations is played by a set of specific cognitive–emotional variables: generalized locus of control, anger conceptualized both as an emotional state and as a personality trait, anxiety conceptualized as an emotional state, and curiosity conceptualized both as an emotional state and as a personality trait. The analysis of the empirical data confirmed the validity of the proposed hypothesis.

Discussion

Locus of control constitutes an important variable modifying the functioning of a young person in difficult social situations, such as conflict. The aim of aggressive behavior in conflict is to defeat the opponent, compel them to submit, and thereby expand the scope of one's own control (Balawajder, 2010).The analysis of the findings indicated that conflictual relations with others (e.g., mutual hostility, unkindness, blaming distrust) emerging within the socially organized system of a young person's activity most often co-occur with a generalized external locus of control. A stronger belief in the influence of others on the positive and negative outcomes of one's actions (i.e., a generalized external locus of control) fosters the intensification of aggressive coping strategies among adolescents in social conflict situations. Attributing responsibility for one's successes to chance, luck, fate, or favorable coincidence may predispose adolescents to adopt aggressive coping strategies in social conflict. The tendency toward an external locus of control among adolescents using aggressive strategies is also evident in the face of failure. Most often, they attribute the causes of their failures to fate, bad luck, adverse circumstances, or other external factors beyond their control.

Thus, it appears plausible that a lack of belief in the possibility of achieving desired outcomes through one's own actions, or a lack of responsibility for failures, promotes the manifestation of aggressive strategies in social conflict situations. This suggests that adolescents often perceive themselves as unable to influence the course of a conflict, and therefore do not focus on the source of the problem but rather on themselves, orienting toward the defense of the threatened "self." This leads to the adoption of defensive strategies in the form of aggressive responses in social conflict and their reinforcement through habitual use in such situations (Borecka-Biernat, 2024; Breet et al., 2010; Deming & Lochman, 2008; Rostowska, 2001).

Adolescents involved in a social conflict situation undoubtedly experience a range of emotions. Negative emotions, such as anger and anxiety, predominate among these experiences. Positive emotions, such as curiosity, are also present. The research findings presented indicate that adolescents who use an aggressive

strategy in social conflict situations exhibit higher levels of anger understood as a transient emotional state, as well as a higher level of a learned behavioral disposition to respond with anger. This means that when a situation poses a threat to adolescents' ability to pursue their own goals, an increase in anger, regardless of its underlying basis (state or trait), is accompanied by an increase in the use of an aggressive coping strategy (Borecka-Biernat, 2024; Deffenbacher, 1992; Deming & Lochman, 2008; Domińska-Werbel, 2014). This result appears consistent with the conclusion formulated by S. Rubinstein (1964, p. 612), who stated that "in connection with emerging social contradictions, as real emotional facts, human indignation, outrage, hostility, and hatred arise".

Another emotion associated with aggression is anxiety. It is elicited by situations of real or perceived threat, whether internal or external, present or past (Doliński, 2000; Łosiak, 1995; Wrześniewski, 1983). A learned disposition to perceive objectively non-threatening situations as threatening and to respond with disproportionately intense anxiety is directly related to a learned disposition toward aggressive coping in social conflict situations. It should be noted that attempts to identify determinants of aggressive coping in terms of anxiety as a situational emotional state yielded the expected results in the case of boys. These findings suggest that among boys, an increase in state anxiety is accompanied by an increase in the use of an aggressive strategy. It is worth noting that among girls, a high level of state anxiety appears to be independent of the use of an aggressive coping strategy in a social conflict situation. In attempting to explain this phenomenon, we may, we believe, refer to different forms of aggressive behavior. It can be assumed that a high level of state anxiety in girls elicits indirect forms of aggressive behavior, reflecting distrustful, unfavorable, or hostile attitudes toward their surroundings (Leary & Kowalski, 2001; Nitendel-Bujakowa, 2001). This suggests that aggression serving the function of reducing anxiety arising in a social conflict situation is defensive aggression (Borecka-Biernat, 2006). An insightful perspective on the coexistence of anxiety and aggression is offered by J. Ranschburg (1993, p. 137), who described them as two poles of the same phenomenon, comparing this relationship to a reversible coat: "if the anxious side is outward, aggression turns inward; if aggression is outward, anxiety can be found within".

The presented findings corroborate previous research indicating that high-intensity emotional arousal with a negative valence, resulting from difficulties in problem-solving, forms the basis for aggressive behavior (Domińska-Werbel, 2014; Kossewska, 2008; Łosiak, 2009).

The way individuals perceive the relationship between their behavior and its consequences influences the differentiation of coping strategies in social conflict situations. The conducted research indicates that a tendency to attribute responsibility for the outcomes of one's actions to internal factors enables young people to actively influence the conflict situation, aiming to change it or their position within it. Adolescents characterized by an internal locus of control tend to adopt task-oriented coping strategies, undertaking efforts to overcome emerging difficulties (Kościelak, 2010). Being aware of their own initiative in resolving conflict, they act constructively and strive for peaceful resolution. A belief in

internal control over positive outcomes allows adolescents to manipulate their environment more effectively, as they have reasons to believe that their actions yield expected results. It is also noteworthy that adolescents who cope in a task-oriented manner are capable of taking responsibility not only for successes but also for failures. They interpret setbacks as resulting from insufficient abilities, inadequate effort, or insufficient engagement. Thus, the perceived causal relationship between "what and how one does" and the outcomes of one's behavior influences the adoption of task-oriented strategies focused on resolving emerging conflicts (Adesina, 2012; Borecka-Biernat, 2006; Cook & Sloane, 2001; Dijkstra et al., 2011; Miller et al., 1986; Taylor, 2010).

Adolescents involved in social conflict situations undoubtedly experience a range of emotions. Negative emotions such as irritation, anger, anxiety, fear, sadness, and resentment tend to dominate. However, positive emotions such as hope, joy, satisfaction, relief, interest, and curiosity also occur (Lazarus, 1999), as they are associated with the possibility of overcoming difficulties. Based on the analysis of the empirical material, it can be concluded that adolescents who regulate their behavior in a task-oriented manner in conflict situations are characterized by low levels of anger and anxiety (both as state and trait). This suggests the possible emergence of the adaptive function of negative emotions at lower intensity levels (depending on the situation), as they activate cognitive processes that facilitate problem-focused concentration, mobilize the individual to exert effort, and enable effective overcoming of difficulties (Sęk, 2008; Sikorski, 2015).

Adolescents employing task-oriented coping strategies in social conflict situations also exhibit higher levels of curiosity (state and trait). Curiosity, as a positive emotion, functions as a motivational factor prompting individuals to undertake actions aimed at coping with the events that elicited it (Frijda, 2002). It enhances thinking, creativity, and flexibility of responses, thereby supporting experimentation, discovery, and the search for new solutions (Fredrickson, 2001). Curiosity fosters a belief in one's ability to find ways to achieve goals, mobilizes effort, and supports confidence in overcoming difficulties (Łaguna & Bąk, 2007). The results indicate that the higher the level of state curiosity experienced in connection with a conflict situation and the higher the level of curiosity as a stable personality disposition, the stronger the adolescents' tendency to seek an agreement with their partner in order to find a common solution to the issues in dispute that will be beneficial to both parties and to the future of their relationship. This relationship is supported by previous studies (e.g., Borecka-Biernat, 2024; deCatanzaro, 2003; Doliński, 2000; Domińska-Werbel, 2014; Fredrickson, 2001; Jelonkiewicz & Kosińska-Dec, 2008).

To generalize the research findings discussed above, it can be said that a stronger belief that others influence the positive and negative consequences of one's own actions, together with intense emotional arousal characterized by negative affect (anger and anxiety) resulting from difficulties in resolving a problem, promotes the use of an aggressive strategy by adolescents in social conflict situations. Conversely, a stronger belief in one's own ability to control the positive and negative consequences of events, together with a higher level of curiosity of different origins (state or trait), is associated with a stronger tendency among

adolescents to resolve and overcome conflict situations by changing their own behavior or modifying an environment that threatens the achievement of their goals. The research findings appear to provide theoretical guidance for developing preventive and therapeutic programs aimed at fostering active individuals who are capable of making efforts to resolve and overcome conflicts and of dealing constructively with problems related to school, peers, and the family home.

Declarations

Declaration of conflict of interest
The author declares that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article. The author has no significant financial or non-financial interests that require disclosure, nor any competing interests related to the content of this article. The author also confirms no affiliation or involvement with any organization or entity that could have a financial or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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