



## IMPORTANCE PURPOSE IN LIFE IN REDUCING AGGRESSIVE RESPONSE IN ADOLESCENCE

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### KEY WORDS

*Sense of Life*  
*Aggressive Behavior*  
*Reactive*  
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*Adolescence*

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### ABSTRACT

*In order to study the Purpose in Life related to the Aggressive Behavior, we applied the translated version of "Life Purpose Test" by Crumbaugh and Maholich and the Violent Behavior Scale (CA) by Little on 771 subjects, of which 354 were men and 409 were women, with ages between 11 and 17 years, all of them students schools belonging to the province of Valencia. The results are congruent with the initial hypothesis; The Purpose in Life is negatively correlated to the subject's Aggressive Behavior, so that people having a high level of Sense of Life will less involved in aggressive behavior.*

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## Introduction

During adolescence, a person faces different changes among which figures the search for an identity and finding a meaning to one's life. This research supposes an important psychosocial adjustment that, frequently, is made difficult because of the implication of the adolescent in aggressive acts (Cava, Buelga, Musitu & Murgui, 2010). So, it is important to examine the relationship between finding a meaning and aggressive behaviour, above all taking into account the shortage of investigation literature which connects both factors.

Viktor Frankl defines the meaning of life in the context of the named logo therapy as "psychotherapy focussed on the meaning and as such, wishes to aid the fight for a meaning, maybe the most human of all human ambitions" (Lukas, 1983:10). But logo therapy is also a therapeutic method, a general conception of a person (Noblejas de la Flor, 2004), having as a principal motivation the search for a meaning to life. The meaning of life is defined as the capacity to guide oneself correctly, to be self-responsible and to look for a self-improvement project (Magaña, Zavala, Ibarra, Gomez & Gomez, 2004), which also positively affects a person's mental health (Rodríguez, 2007).

More recent work emphasized the search for meaning as an important psychological construct separate from meaning in life. They define the search for meaning in life as the strength, intensity, and activity of people's desire and efforts to establish and/or augment their understanding of the meaning, significance, and purpose of their lives (Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan & Lorentz, 2008). On the other hand, Martinez (2011), defines the meaning of life, the affective-cognitive perception of values that invite the person to act in one way or another in specific situations or life in general, and giving the person coherence and identity.

In the last decades several instruments have attempted to measure the meaning of life and the aggressive behavior during adolescence. In a review of Martinez, Trujillo, Diaz Del Castillo & Jaimes (2011), found results in that line. By *Life Purpose Questionnaire* (Damon, Menon & Cotton Bronk, 2003), Melton & Schulenberg (2008) conclude that the meaning of life is negative correlated to depression, anxiety, drug, alcohol and aggressive response. Moreover, Debats (1990) support the negative correlations between the purpose in life and negative and hostile behavior in a sample of university students based on the *Life Regard Index* (Francis & Hills, 2008).

It is usually considered that the meaning of life presents four different aspects (Noblejas de la Flor, 1994): Perception of sense, which includes questions about the capture of reasons to live life and the evaluation of this in general: Experience of meaning, due to which the questions included feeling one's personal existence to be full of good things having a more positive attitude

towards daily life: Objectives and Tasks, which includes questions connected to the position of objects connected to concrete actions in life and the responsibility we feel towards these, and Dialectic freedom-destination which considers questions like the tension between freedom and man's destination in life and facing up to death as the inevitable destination.

Besides, in recent years there has been an increasing interest in the study, evaluation and treatment of aggressiveness. For Cangas, Gazquez, Perez-Fuentes, Padilla & Miras (2007) in the Spanish context, approximately 40% of school children see or participate daily in aggressive behaviour. For Cosi, Vigil-Colet & Canals (2009) this increase produces a big social impact in the educational, work and family fields.

This aggressive behaviour is defined as a physiologic answer, of human nature, which encourages the individual to act violently for the survival of the species (Benítez, Medranda de Lázaro & Montón, 2006). We highlight, depending on the type, of manifests aggressiveness, which implies a direct confrontation with other to harm them with strike, insults and threats and, relational aggressiveness indirect, which includes damaging interpersonal relationships with another person avoiding direct confrontation with the victim (Card, Stucky, Sawalani & Little, 2008; Gómez, Gala, Lupiani, Bernalte, Miret, Lupiani & Barreto, 2007; Griffin & Gross, 2004).

And depending on the behaviour, Little, Brauner, Jones, Nock & Hawley (2003) distinguish between pure aggressiveness, produced naturally and spontaneously in the person directly approaching the objective; reactive aggressiveness, connected with the behaviour that implies a defensive response due to a third party's provocation, and finally instrumental aggressiveness, deliberate behaviour that implies a behaviour in order to obtain an objective.

The investigation of aggressive behaviour has concentrated principally in the relationship between this with different variables adjustment indicators. Literature confirms a strong and constant union between the adolescent's psychosocial adjustments and aggressive response, either in aggressors (Cava, Buelga, Musitu & Murgui, 2010; Estevez, Murgui, Moreno & Musitu, 2007).

So, negative relationships of reactive aggressiveness have been found with family self-esteem and satisfaction with life (Buelga, Musitu, Murgui & Pons, 2008; King, Huebner, Suldo & Valois, 2006), the family climate (Decker et al., 2007; Jaureguizar & Ibabe, 2012; Estévez, Murgui & Musitu, 2009; Gómez, 2010) and the relationship of determined factors of upbringing (Tur-Porcar, Mestre, Samper & Malonda, 2012).

In particular, reactive manifests aggressiveness is associated with the presence of mood problems such as depression and anxiety in adolescence (Card & Little, 2006; Fite et al., 2010), which would put these adolescents at risk of drug use (Fite et al., 2012; Pardini, Lochman y Wells, 2004), finding the point of un-

ion between the two levels of impulsivity that characterize this type of aggression (Moeller, Barratt, Dougherty, Schitz & Swann, 2001).

Never the less investigation between reactive aggressiveness and obtaining a meaning is scarce. So, some studies analyze the relationship between both variables. Martinez et al. (2011) found that the lack of a sense of life is directly related to increased aggressive response in the adolescence. Different studies show that, by one hand, adolescence is characterized by conformism and lack of goals and objectives, as well as destructive behaviors, frustration and unhappiness (Risco, Cabaco & Urchaga, 2011) and, on the other hand, it is a period characterized by the search for meaning and answers about life and existence (García Ramos, 2009).

In this sense, Anderson & Bushman (2002) find a positive relationship between aggressive conduct and personal factors such as a lack of empathy, impulsive behaviour, irritability and a positive reaction towards aggression. On their side, Magaña et al. (2004) obtain a positive relationship between a lack of sense in their lives and emotional maladjustment with feelings of boredom y desperation that, on occasions, produce aggressive behaviour.

In this way, the main objective of this investigation is the analysis of youth's aggressive response or reactive aggressiveness, both manifest and related, combined with a lack of meaning in their lives during adolescence, and the existence of sex differences in both variables.

## Method

### Participants

Out of 715 participants in the investigation, 10 of them did not complete the trials totally, so their information was not considered in further analysis. The sample was made up to 40% masculine. The students were between 11 and 17 years old and studying from 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> of E.S.O.

10 schools were chosen, at random from the city of Valencia and it's metropolitan area, nevertheless, two of them refused to participate. The investigation team contacted the management of the rest of the schools to inform them about the objectives of the investigation. From the eight interested schools, one finally declined to participate because the trials could not be carried out within the school programme. From seven centres, three were Public and the rest Private and Concerted.

### Instruments

The following scales were administered.

*Purpose of Life Questionnaire* (Crumbaugh y Maholik, 1969; Noblejas de la Flor, 1994) made up of 40 items that evaluate the meaning of life and the void

that exists in the human being. It is composed by 4 factors: Perception of purpose (My life..."; alpha de Cronbach = .87); Experience of purpose ("My life...", alpha de Cronbach = .64); Goals and Tasks ("regarding the realization of objectives in life...", alpha de Cronbach = .77), and Dialectic fate/freedom (Regarding death I am ..."; alpha de Cronbach = .69).

*Scale of Violent Conduct at School* (Estevez, Murgui, Musitu y Moreno, 2008; Little, 2003). Describe the adolescent's level of aggressiveness regarding his companions with a 4 point scale (1= never; 4= always). For this investigation the factors of reactive aggressiveness were used, both manifest (for example "When somebody hurts me, I hit him", alpha de Cronbach= .78), or reaction (for example, when somebody makes me angry, I treat them with indifference or I stop speaking to them"; alpha de Cronbach = .62).

## Results

In the first place a MANOVA was carried out to see if differences existed due to gender in the four aspects of meaning achievement: perception of purpose-goals and tasks- experience of purpose-dialectic fate/freedom. The results showed significant statistical differences between the two genders (Wilks = .976;  $F_{4,712} = 3.558$ ;  $p < .01$ ).

The results of the ANOVA showed differences in: dialectic fate/freedom ( $F_{1,715} = 6.795$ ;  $p < .01$ ) and the men scored over women. No significant differences in perception of purpose were found ( $F_{1,715} = .241$ ;  $p > .05$ ); experience of purpose ( $F_{1,715} = .080$ ;  $p > .05$ ) nor in goals and tasks ( $F_{1,715} = .225$ ;  $p > .05$ ).

The MANOVA calculated with the two types of reactive aggressiveness showed gender differences (Wilks = .788,  $F_{2, 714} = 84.881$ ,  $p < .01$ ), although the result of individual ANOVA show significant statistical differences exist between the two genders in the aggressive variable reactive manifest ( $F_{1,715} = 148.338$ ;  $p < .01$ ), but not in relational reactive aggressiveness ( $F_{1,715} = .026$ ;  $p > .05$ ) (see table 1).

Table 1: Means (dt) for Men and Women of Reactive Aggressiveness and Factor of Purpose in Life

	Men	Women
Perception of Purpose	5.44 (1.65)	5.40 (1.65)
Experience of Purpose	5.08 (1.38)	5.06 (1.37)
Goals and Tasks	5.37 (1.31)	5.34 (1.29)
Dialectic fate / freedom	5.10 (.58)	4.92 (.61)
Reactive Manifests Aggressiveness	1.97 (.62)	1.42 (.46)
Reactive Relational Aggressiveness	1.88 (.50)	1.88 (.51)

Source: Senabre, Murgui and Ruiz, 2011.

Then, the correlations between PIL factors and two types of reactive aggressiveness for men and women were calculated (table 2). For males, the rela-

tionship between manifests aggressiveness and PIL factors were not significant. For women, unless the relationship with the dialectic fate / freedom, all were significant (goals and tasks, experience of purpose and perception of purpose).

In respect of relational aggressiveness in the male group only the dialectic fate / freedom had a significant relationship and, in women, dialectic fate / freedom, experience of purpose and goals and tasks.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation between Reactive Aggressiveness, Manifests and Relational, and Purpose in Life for Men and Women

	Perception of Purpose	Experience of Purpose	Goals and Tasks	Dialectic fate /freedom
Reactive Manifests Aggressiveness	-.014 (-.194**)	-.060 (-.202**)	-.097 (-.244**)	-.048 (-.041)
Reactive Relational Aggressiveness	-.024 (-.051)	-.063 (.103*)	-.042 (-.138**)	-.135* (-.116*)

\* p < . 05; \*\* p < . 01

Source: Senabre, Murgui and Ruiz, 2011.

Then, by the stepwise procedure, each type of aggression is returned on variables whose correlations with aggression had been significant. The variables were entered in descending order of the magnitude of their correlations. Table 3 shows the result of the last step for each type of aggression shown.

Table 3: Regression Equation of Reactive Manifests Aggressiveness and Reactive Relational Aggressiveness for men and women

Reactive Aggressiveness:		Manifests	Relational	
		Women	Men	Women
Goals and Tasks	B	-.073	--	-.061
	(S.E.):	(.015)	--	(.036)
	Beta (t):	-.244** (-4.887)		-.088 (-1.683)
Dialectic fate /freedom	B	--	-.089	-.039
	(S.E.):	--	(.036)	(.018)
	Beta (t):		-.135* (-2.428)	-.117* (-2.227)

\* p < . 05; \*\* p < . 01

Source: Senabre, Murgui and Ruiz, 2011.

So, while for men any aspect of PIL was a significant predictor, in the case of women, are the goals and tasks that are related to aggressive behavior manifested reactive (b= -.244, p < .01). Goals and tasks also was significant when predicting reactive relational violence but ceased (but remains in table 2 by approaching significance) in incorporating the dialectic fate / freedom (b= -.117, p < .05). With respect to male, dialectic also significant (b= -.135; p <

0.05). All other variables were not incorporated into the equation for any of the steps.

In order to check the capacity of prediction of the different variables to obtain a meaning for the aggressiveness manifest and reactive relational a regression has been carried out, considering aggressiveness as a dependent variable and establishing each factor of meaning achieved as independent variables. Regarding the regression equation it was significant regarding direct aggressiveness (F4.705=8.707; p<. 01) and, for indirect aggressiveness (F4.699=4.362; p< . 05).

## Discussion

This investigation has analysed the relationship existing between meaning achievement and aggressive behaviour reactive of the adolescent. The results show that a relationship exists directly between both variables, which suggest that when the motives reduce to live one's own life adolescents feel more involved in violent behaviour. These results are in line with those obtained by Mestre, Tur, Samper y Latorre (2004) which obtained a positive relationship between lack of meaning in their lives and emotional lack of adjustment, feelings of boredom and desperateness which on occasions produce aggressive behaviour.

The results of the study also manifest the existing relationship between each one of the factors on achieving a meaning and direct aggressiveness and indirect reactive, which indicates that when the motives are reduced to live one's own life and the value of this, when one has poor personal experience regarding well lived situations, when one has no or due to a situation objectives or goals in life and, the questioning about the meaning of life demises and one faces death as an inevitable destination, adolescent become more involved in direct and cove frustration to find a meaning to life leads to a void existence, characterized by an increase in aggressive reactions. Recent works confirm the relationship between the aggressive response and the search a purpose in life in adolescence (Magaña et al., 2004). In the same line, Gambini (2005) confirm that reaching a meaning is a primary factor in the construction of the self-identity for the young adolescent, where he/she is more vulnerable to the signs of his own weakness, or in the way of irrational ideas and lack of control over his impulses. Actually, Mestre et al. (2010) find that violent behaviour is related to the lack to the lack of emotional control, which characterizes the response to the reactive aggressiveness.

Regarding the gender role, we note the gender as a discriminating factor, showing males to be more aggressive than females, with a higher grading in the subfactor which evaluates the tension between freedom and man's destiny and the facing up to death as an inevitable destination. Other results show that

women obtain a much higher note in the factors that achieve a meaning in adolescents (Gallego-Perez et al., 2007). Other research confirm that no differences between genders in regard to the achievement of meaning of life (Länge, Orgler y Kundi, 2003).

In relation with the aggressive response, gender is shown as a discriminating factor, by showing that the male is more aggressive than response the female in behaviour which implies a direct confrontation towards others as a defensive response to a provocation which implies a particular situation which implies a strong emotional state which overflows the capacity of the individual. Results coinciding with others confirm those males are more aggressive than women (Archer, Ireland & Power, 2007, Tappter y Boulton, 2004). Various studies coincide to show that direct verbal aggressive behaviour and /or physical are more frequent among males (Cava, Musitu y Murgui, 2007; Little et al., 2003).

Regarding the achievement and aggressive behaviour, we have dug deeper using a regression analysis, which permits us to conclude that the absence of targets and objectives permits us to foresee reactive aggressive behaviour directly and indirectly. Maybe, the lack of objectives to fight for and a lack of maturity in the way one faces life and death leads to a state of frustration which implies a high emotional state which when it overflows makes him react in a violent way. Recent work shows as frustration to find the meaning of life leads to existential vacuum, characterized by increased aggressive reactive (Chetan Arvind, 2009).

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