



# Think and Act Positive: How to Deal with Conformity and Purpose in Life During Adolescence

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## Abstract

**Background:** Adolescence is a period that a person develops from being juvenile into adulthood; therefore, training female adolescents is of great importance since it is a preparation stage for psychosocial demands. Psychologists should not only think about solving adolescence's problems, but they must also help them to achieve a happier, and more fulfilled life. Excitement and the promotion of the meaning of life can have desirable aspects for the person, in individual and social conditions. Because when conformity appears in the form of normative influence, it improves the quality of life.

**Objectives:** The purpose of the present study was to examine the effectiveness of positive psychotherapy on conformity and the purpose in life among female adolescents.

**Methods:** The research method was quasi experimental with pretest-posttest and control group. The population included high school female students in Neka, Mazandaran province, Iran in 2017. Thirty female adolescents selected using purposeful, and convenience sampling methods as the samples of the study. Fifteen subjects were then randomly assigned into each of the experimental and control groups. The experimental group received psychoeducational based on positive psychotherapy during 8 weeks, one session per week and each session lasted for 90 minutes; the control group did not receive any intervention. Measurements of the study were conformity L-72 test, and purpose in life questionnaire that respectively includes 55 and 20 items. The reliability of both tools was higher than 0.7.

**Results:** Results revealed that in the experimental group, the means of conformity in pretest, posttest and follow up were 85.13, 69.00 and 67.93, and the mean of purpose in life were 103.67, 120.47 and 121.40. The positive psychotherapy had a significant effect on declining conformity and elaborating purpose in life among subjects ( $P < 0.001$ ).

**Conclusions:** Positive psychotherapy, by relying on positive attributes, can be effective on individual and social health and growth of adolescent girls. It is recommended to be used for adolescents who have low-level of purpose in life in or conformity.

**Keywords:** Positive Psychotherapy, Conformity, Purpose in Life, Female Adolescent

## 1. Background

In the cycle of a lifetime, adolescence, which is between the childhood and adulthood, is very important. Many physiological and psychosocial changes occur during this period. Adolescence is more challenging than childhood (1). During this transition stage, many people (such as family members, friends and teachers) ask adolescents new questions (e.g., "What do you want from life"? or "How do you see your future?"). It seems that when adolescents find the cognitive capacity necessary to process abstract concepts, they will be more inclined to accept the responsibility in defining their personality and contributing to construct their identity. They will gradually expand their view

of the world to concentrate on their future goals and understand the meaning of their daily experiences (2). During adolescence, many juveniles try to find the meaning of life, they are often exploring and asking about their life goals, their motivations, and what they want to do with their life. It could state that the main concern of growth in this period is related to the sense of purpose or meaning in life (3). People who have found the meaning of life to a large extent, realized the fact that there is meaning in their past and present lives, and hence their lives become purposeful (4). The meaning of life fundamentally has a cognitive essence because it comprises the individual's views about the existence of an ultimate aim in life, belief in spirituality and the life after death (5). Thus, finding meaning

in life could be attributed to individual and social conditions, in this sense, the community and its related factors such as observations, requirements, demands. affect the meaning of life. One of the areas studied in social psychology is the study of influential factors on social influence, which includes obedience and conformity (6). Group conformity is one type of social influence and adolescents are particularly prone to multiple influences from peers and the media. Social influence means that others try to make us think, feel and behave in their own way using different strategies (7). Shamsaee, et al., found that the conformity is influenced by group behaviors and demands. It seems that if people receive adequate educational experiences from the early ages, in addition to maintaining and promoting self-esteem, they will have more resilience and power to withstand perceived social pressures (8). Positive psychotherapy, derived from positive psychology, is a method to increase the well-being and prosperity of individuals, institutions and society. The conceptual framework of positive psychotherapy is concentrated on increasing the level of participation (in everyday life), enjoyment (positive feelings) and meaning (belonging and serving something bigger than yourself).

Therefore, positive psychotherapy instead of traditional approaches is a source-centered approach that aims to use patients' social and personal resources to perform therapeutic changes (9). Positive psychotherapy refers to operational methods or voluntary activities whose purpose is to develop positive emotions, behaviors and perceptions instead of treating feelings, thoughts and negative or unpleasant behaviors. Positive approach has emphasis hope, gratitude, optimism and flexibility (10). Positive group intervention not only has the benefits of group intervention but also it has effect on achieving the goals of a positive approach, because participation in the group causes an increase in positive excitement, sharing the excitement, and the positive experiences of others, the development of social communication networks and friendship (11). Despite the potential impact of positive psychology in preventing mental disorders, positive psychology still rarely relies on reducing the symptoms of mental health disorders and increasing the well-being of students (12). Overall, limited research exists in this area, and no research, so far, has been conducted in Iran to investigate the effectiveness of positive psychotherapy training on the conformity and purpose in life of female adolescents. Because there might be negativism, aimlessness, and conformity in undesirable social situations during the susceptible years of adolescence, it is necessary to do some interventions in eliminating the above-mentioned cases and improving the growth of adolescents and promoting their

mental health.

## 2. Objectives

The purpose of the present research is to investigate whether the positive psychotherapy training could reduce the conformity and increase the purpose in life among female adolescents.

## 3. Methods

The present study was extracted from an M.Sc thesis in Islamic Azad University, Sari branch, which has been approved ethically by research deputy of the university.

This research is a quasi-experimental design with pretest-posttest and a control group. The population of the present study includes high school female students in Neka, Mazandaran province, Iran in 2017.

Before performing the study, subjects filled the consent form. Purposeful and convenience sampling method was used for sample selection. At first, purpose in life questionnaires (13) were given to 60 students. These subjects were selected based on some criteria such as student satisfaction, lack of background in problematic behaviors and studying at high school. Among them, 30 subjects who scored lower than the average score were selected and randomly assigned into the experimental and control groups (15 subjects in each group). According to similar articles (14-17) in the field of intervention, the number of people in each group was 15.

$$n = \frac{(Z_{1-\alpha/2} + Z_{1-\beta})^2 (S_1^2 + S_2^2)}{(\mu_1 - \mu_2)^2} \quad (1)$$

$$\alpha = 5.00\%; 1 - \alpha/2 = 0.975$$

$$\beta = 20.00\%; Z_{1-\alpha/2} = 1.96$$

$$SD_1 = 7.85; 1 - \beta = 0.8$$

$$SD_2 = 9.01; Z_{1-\beta} = 0.84$$

$$d = 8.64; (Z_{1-\alpha/2} + Z_{1-\beta})^2 = 7.84$$

For randomizing the subjects in experimental and control groups, in the pre-test stage, the questionnaires were distributed with equal numbers of the form A and B. The subjects of form A were the experimental group and the subjects of the form B were the control group. It should be noted that variables such as age, gender, marital status, education in this study, were all controlled. Therefore the groups were 100% matched based on gender, educational grade, marital status and age. Allocation of the subjects was performed by random assign; that is each subject had an equal chance to contribute to groups by draw lots; the process was carried out based on the name list of subjects.

Before the intervention, both groups took the conformity L-72 test and purpose in life questionnaire Crumbaugh and Maholick (1969) as pretest.

Afterwards, the experimental group received an intervention on positive psychotherapy during 8 weeks, one session per week and each session lasted for 90 minutes while the control group did not receive any intervention. After the intervention, both groups took the posttests. The group sessions were run according to a predetermined schedule using Parks and Seligman's protocol (18). The instruments were conformity L-72 test and purpose in life questionnaire. The conformity L-72 test includes 55 questions, which can measure the degree of conformity in real life. The items that the participants responded to do not allocate to unreal and artificial positions, but they are behaviors and beliefs that the subjects experienced during a long period of time and in real groups. The cutoff point of this questionnaire is 87.43. Scores below this value indicate conformity and scores above this value show complete non-conformity. In the research by Shamsaee et al. (8), an appropriate internal consistency was reported for the questionnaire. Also, in the Baron-Oladi et al. study (19), the validity of the questionnaire was 0/90 obtained by Cronbach's alpha. The purpose in life questionnaire, developed by Crumbaugh and Maholick (13), includes 20 items that measure the individual's sense of purpose in life. The total score range varies from 20 to 140. A higher score represents a higher purpose in life.

Of course, a score of 140 from the participant is unrealistic and indicates an exaggeration to show life meaningful. In a research by Issazadegan et al. (20), the reliability of the questionnaire was 0/91 calculated by Cronbach's alpha (13, 20). Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics such as ANCOVA were used to analyze the data. In order to test the assumptions of using covariance analysis, the researchers used the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, independent *t*-test, Levene's test and linear relationship between dependent variable and also homogeneity of regression line slopes in each group.

#### 4. Results

In the present article, single female first grade of high school students, (15 years old) were studied as demographical variables. That were matched 100% in two groups.

To control the effect of age, gender, marriage and education; the researcher identified 15-year-old girls in high school and then randomly divided into two groups by forms A and B in the pre-test process.

Table 1 shows that the means of conformity in pretest, posttest and follow-up in the experimental group were

85.13, 69.00 and 67.93, and in the control group were 79.80, 82.53 and 82.00. Also, the mean of purpose in life in pretest, posttest and follow-up in the experimental group were 103.67, 120.47 and 121.40, and in the control group were 101.13, 101.33 and 101.80. In the experimental group, a decreasing trend was observed in the score of conformity and an increasing trend in purpose in life.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	Pretest, Mean ± SD	Posttest, Mean ± SD	Follow-Up, Mean ± SD
<b>Conformity</b>			
Experimental	85.13 ± 17.23	69.00 ± 14.48	67.93 ± 13.761
Control	79.80 ± 21.26	82.53 ± 16.57	82.00 ± 18.00
<b>Purpose in life</b>			
Experimental	103.67 ± 25.83	120.47 ± 20.51	121.40 ± 19.31
Control	101.13 ± 18.76	101.33 ± 17.42	101.80 ± 16.93

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention in the post-test and follow-up stages, ANCOVA was executed; before the test, the assumptions for covariance analysis were made during the measurements, which are presented. By using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk test at the significance level of 0.05, the assumption of normality for conformity and purpose in life in the pre-test, post-test, and follow-up were confirmed ( $P > 0.05$ ).

In pretest, there is no statistically significant difference between experimental and control groups for mean values of conformity and purpose in life ( $P > 0.05$ ).

The results of Table 2 show that the assumptions of equality of variances for the conformity variable and for purpose in life variable in the pre-test, post-test and follow-up were confirmed ( $P > 0.05$ ).

The existence of a linear relationship between pre-test and post-test values, post-test and follow-up, and pre-test and follow-up as one of the other prerequisites for using covariance analysis has been investigated. In this study, the analysis on conformity and purpose in life showed that there was a significant linear relationship between the post-test and the pre-test, post-test and follow-up, and pre-test and follow-up ( $P < 0.05$ ).

In Table 3, for two variables of conformity and purpose in life, the results of covariance analysis with interaction effects showed that, in the post-test and follow-up stage, the assumption of homogeneity of regression line slopes of the two control and experimental groups was confirmed, since the P value of interaction effects for all of them are not significant ( $P > 0.05$ ).

Table 4 indicates that at post-test, positive psychother-

**Table 2.** Results of Equality of Variance by Levene's Test

	Pretest		Posttest		Follow-Up	
	F	P	F	P	F	P
<b>Conformity</b>	1.361	0.253	0.161	0.691	1.789	0.192
<b>Purpose in life</b>	2.484	0.126	0.479	0.494	0.326	0.572

**Table 3.** Results of Homogeneity of Regression Line in Post-Test and Follow-Up

Sources	SS	df	MS	F	P
<b>Conformity</b>					
<b>Posttest to pretest</b>					
Group	26.878	1	26.878	0.177	0.678
Pretest	2186.996	1	2186.996	14.387	0.001
Pretest*group	227.388	1	227.388	1.496	0.232
Error	3952.235	26	152.009		
<b>Follow up to posttest</b>					
Group	126.079	1	126.079	1.159	0.291
Posttest	3825.194	1	3825.194	35.178	< 0.001
Posttest*group	179.697	1	179.697	1.653	0.210
Error	2827.186	26	108.738		
<b>Follow up to pretest</b>					
Group	0.140	1	0.140	0.003	0.955
Pretest	5318.462	1	5318.462	122.471	< 0.001
Pretest* group	110.597	1	110.597	2.547	0.123
Error	1129.085	26	43.426		
<b>Purpose in Life</b>					
<b>Posttest to pretest</b>					
Group	407.096	1	407.096	5.009	0.034
Pretest	7734.199	1	7734.199	95.158	< 0.001
Pretest*group	120.739	1	120.739	1.486	0.234
Error	2113.216	26	81.278		
<b>Follow up to posttest</b>					
Group	1.809	1	1.809	.057	0.813
Posttest	8201.090	1	8201.090	258.219	< 0.001
Posttest*group	0.145	1	0.145	.005	0.947
Error	825.767	26	31.760		
<b>Follow up to pretest</b>					
Group	474.884	1	474.884	9.754	0.004
Pretest	7726.514	1	7726.514	158.702	< 0.001
Pretest*group	153.037	1	153.037	3.143	0.088
Error	1265.831	26	48.686		

apy was effective in reducing the score of conformity (improvement of the condition) among female students ( $F_{1,27}$

= 12.445,  $P = 0.002$ ). The effect size was 0.315. The follow-up study on post-test indicated that positive psychotherapy

had its effects on the reduction of conformity score (Table 4). However, the level of changes made in this stage was not significant between the two groups ( $F_{1,27} = 0.690, P > 0.05$ ). Even though, the follow-up on pre-test showed that the difference between the experimental and control groups was significant ( $F_{1,27} = 52.244, P < 0.001$ ) in which the effect size was 0.659 in follow up of pretest.

**Table 4.** Results of ANCOVA on Conformity and Purpose in Life Among Female Adolescent Students

Sources	MS	F	P
<b>Conformity</b>			
<b>Posttest to pretest</b>			
Pretest	2600.111	16.796	< 0.001
Group	1926.455	12.445	0.002
Error	154.801		
<b>Follow up to posttest</b>			
Posttest	4126.050	37.049	< 0.001
Group	76.792	0.690	0.414
Error	111.366		
<b>Follow up to pretest</b>			
Pretest	5893.251	128.354	< 0.001
Group	2398.754	52.244	< 0.001
Error	45.914		
<b>Purpose in Life</b>			
<b>Posttest and pretest</b>			
Pretest	7905.111	95.543	< 0.001
Group	2223.633	26.875	< 0.001
Error	82.739		
<b>Follow up to posttest</b>			
Posttest	8410.089	274.936	< 0.001
Group	27.900	0.912	0.348
Error	30.589		
<b>Follow up to pretest</b>			
Pretest	7817.131	148.754	< 0.001
Group	2348.376	44.688	< 0.001
Error	52.551		

Table 4 also shows that positive psychotherapy was effective in increasing the level of purpose in life (improvement of the condition) among female students ( $F_{1,27} = 26.875, P < 0.001$ ). Group effect size was 0.499. Posttest follow-up showed that positive psychotherapy was still effective in increasing conformity score slightly, but the level of changes made at this stage was not significant between the two groups ( $F_{1,27} = 0.912, P > 0.05$ ). While pretest

follow-up indicated that the difference between the control and experimental group was significant ( $F_{1,27} = 44.688, P < 0.001$ ).

### 5. Discussion

The results showed that group positive psychotherapy was effective on decreasing conformity and elaborating purpose in life among female students; this finding is consistent with the findings of Shoshani and Steinmetz (12) who conducted a study on the effects of positive psychology in the school environment to improve the well-being and mental health of the adolescents. The findings of this research were supported by the findings of Sin and Lyubomirsky (21), who reported an increased psychological well-being and decreased symptoms of depression.

The findings are also consistent with other research findings such as Kwok et al., (10) who conducted a study on the effect of positive psychotherapy training on reducing children’s depression and increasing their life satisfaction. It can be noted that positive psychology, as a new approach to psychology, focuses on understanding and explaining the happiness and mental sense of well-being, as well as the precise prediction of the factors affecting them (22). Instead of paying attention to disabilities and human weaknesses, positive psychology focuses on human abilities such as happiness, enjoyment, problem solving and optimism (23).

In this treatment, with positive interventions, the conformity of students decreased. By introducing this attribute to the students, they provide the necessary backgrounds for assessing social situations and choosing the conformity. In fact, students improved their self-confidence, motivation and love of life by recognizing their own inner abilities and potentials; and made more efforts to create and achieve a purpose in life.

Adolescence might be accompanied by the feeling of emptiness and aimlessness; the purposefulness that determines the course and destination and gives human self-confidence, motivation and meaning in life. according to the above mentioned, adolescence plays a very important role in the future of people, the brick of human beliefs will build future buildings, if these bricks are arranged strongly, appropriately, stably and orderly, the most beautiful future will be made for the human.

Positive psychotherapy leads to the development of the adolescents, it increases their self-confidence and makes them more determined in achieving the goals of life and constructing future building by reinforcing and highlighting the strengths and positive attributes of the individual both individually and socially.

**Table 5.** A Summary of Group Positive Psychotherapy Exercises According to Parks and Seligman (18)

Session	Session Content
1. Using your strengths	Recognize your five highest strengths and state how you use them.
2. Three good things	Each night, note down the three good things that happened to you that day and mention why these good things happened.
3. Gratitude visit:	Write a gratitude letter to individuals who you are thankful to them but whom you have never appreciated them appropriately. Appreciate them and read the letter on phone or in his/her presence.
4. Savoring	Once a day, spend some time to enjoy things which you do in a hurry (such as eating a meal, taking a shower, walking in class). Note down the time to finish and write down how you did it differently from the previous days and how you feel when you compare it with the previous one.
5. Active/constructive responding:	A constructive and active response is a reaction that a person responds positively and enthusiastically to good news from someone else. At least once a day, respond this way to a person that you know.
6. Life summary	Suppose that one day, after your retirement, somebody writes a book about your satisfying and useful life. What would you like the book to state about you? Write a one to two-page essay and state briefly what you prefer to be mainly mentioned in the book. What qualities and achievements would you like to describe you? What heritage would you like to be left behind you?
7. Positive service	Choose two areas that you would like to use your capabilities (for example religion, politics, science, community, family). Note down your thoughts for service in each area. Be clear and precise about how each of the service would employ your strengths. Choose one of your thoughts and make it practical this week. The aim is to start to conduct a "positive" service, therefore do not select an area in which you were active previously.
8. Maintenance	Participants would receive feedback from the strengths and weakness of each exercise with the purpose of finding ways to amend each exercise and apply it into their lives. Also, different types of new exercises will be discussed. Concentration on enhancing and amending exercises can lead to a habit on a weekly or daily base. Each participant would be required to select one or two exercises to practice on a regular basis for the next following months in order to maintain their obtained findings.

The findings of the present research should be generalized cautiously due to some limitations in investigating the long-term effects of the intervention, having a small sample size, and being limited to a specific geographical area. The findings of this study showed that positive psychotherapy is effective in decreasing conformity and elaborating purpose in life among female adolescents. The present research limitations include the use of a single gender group, an age group, and limited research resources. So, it is suggested that this approach be studied in other communities and it is also suggested that the effectiveness of this intervention be investigated in other age and gender groups (e.g. childhood, adulthood, middle age and also to be performed for boys), and other measurement tools can also be used for future studies; more educational settings could benefit results of positive intervention to present inappropriate thoughts and behavior among students. Alternatively, positive trainings might help students to take a hopeful perspective about the world.

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### Footnotes

**Authors' Contribution:** Mohsen Jadidi presented the research title and content. Maryam Shahnasi executed the

research protocol. Mohammad Bagher Saberi Zafarghandi supervised and corrected scientific and executive issues.

**Conflict of Interests:** The authors declared no conflict of interest.

**Ethical Approval:** The present study was extracted from an M.SC thesis in Islamic Azad University, Sari branch which is approved ethically by research deputy of the university. Ethical issues which included in the study were: Consent staff forms for entering high schools administrating, consent from student administration of anonymous questionnaires; full protection of confidentiality of subjects, leaving out the session voluntary whenever subjects intent and reaching results and findings of the study.

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