



Rising Beyond the Self: Awe, Self-Transcendence, and Optimism in College Students, A Quantitative Correlational Analysis in the Philippine Context

Leilani Santos^{1,*}, Melissa Necitas Alcazaren¹, Hafsah Macaraya¹ and Lloyd Ryan Lagmay¹

¹ Psychology Department, Philippine Women's University, Manila 1004, Philippines

Abstract

This study examined the relationships among awe, self-transcendence, and optimism among Filipino college students within the framework of positive psychology and the Sustainable Development Goals. Using a quantitative correlational design, data were gathered from 134 college students enrolled in various higher education institutions in Metro Manila, selected through convenience sampling. Standardized instruments—the Awe Experience Scale, Self-Transcendence Scale, and Life Orientation Test—were administered through an online survey using Google Forms. Descriptive statistics were used to determine levels of awe, self-transcendence, and optimism, while Pearson Correlation assessed relationships among variables. The findings showed that students generally reported moderate levels of awe, self-transcendence, and optimism. Significant relationships were found among the three variables, suggesting that awe and self-transcendence may contribute to students' optimistic outlook. These results highlight the psychological strengths that

support Filipino students' well-being in the context of academic demands and social challenges. The study underscores the importance of cultivating awe-inspiring experiences, reflective practices, and values-based learning as pathways for enhancing resilience and holistic development. Implications were discussed for educational programs that aim to promote students' mental health and positive functioning. The study suggests incorporating awe-inspiring experiences into academic and counseling curricula to enhance students' comprehensive development and psychological resilience.

Keywords: awe, self-transcendence, optimism.

1 Introduction

In the Philippines, college is an important stage for young people as they discover their identity, prepare for future careers, and pursue higher learning. During this period, students face many emotional, social, and academic challenges that shape their well-being and how they view the world. In recent years, positive psychology has gained attention as a



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*Corresponding author:

✉ Leilani Santos

lrsantos@pwu.edu.ph

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helpful way to understand how students can thrive even in difficult circumstances. Concepts such as awe, self-transcendence, and optimism are key to developing positive psychological functioning. Each plays a unique role in helping young people build resilience, find purpose, and maintain overall life satisfaction.

In a culture like the Philippines—where collectivism, spirituality, and strong community connections are valued—experiences of awe and self-transcendence often arise from nature, faith, and harmonious social relationships. Filipino college students may feel awe through inspiring events such as group achievements, the beauty of nature, or acts of kindness, which help them think beyond their individual concerns. Similarly, self-transcendence is reflected in cultural values like bayanihan (community cooperation) and kapwa (shared identity), which strengthen students' sense of connection and empathy. These cultural values also support optimism, as Filipino students commonly view challenges as opportunities for growth and maintain hope despite difficulties.

Understanding how awe, self-transcendence, and optimism interact within the Philippine college setting provides important insights into how young people develop psychological strengths aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being and SDG 4: Quality Education). This study aimed to explore how these dimensions work together to support the holistic well-being of Filipino college students in a dynamic academic and social environment.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The study aims to examine the relationship among awe, self-transcendence, and optimism in the lives of college students, framed within the lens of positive psychology and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being, SDG 4: Quality Education).

1. What is the profile of the respondents in terms of:
 - Age
 - Sex
 - Year Level/Course
2. What is the level of awe experienced by college students?
3. What is the level of self-transcendence among college students?

4. What is the level of optimism of college students?
5. Is there a significant relationship among awe, self-transcendence, and optimism?
6. What recommendations can be proposed to enhance positive psychological strengths of students in alignment with sustainable well-being and the SDGs?

1.2 Hypothesis

In line with this perspective, the study formulated the following hypotheses to determine whether significant positive relationships exist among the three variables.

- H_{01} : There is no significant relationship between Awe Experience and Self-Transcendence among respondents.
- H_{02} : There is no significant relationship between Awe Experience and Life Orientation (Optimism).
- H_{03} : There is no significant relationship between Self-Transcendence and Life Orientation (Optimism).

2 Literature Review

2.1 Awe as a Catalyst for Positive Psychological States

Awe, as a self-transcendent emotion, fosters openness, humility, and a feeling of interconnection, enabling humans to transcend a self-centered viewpoint. Prior studies indicate that awe expands cognitive and emotional perspectives, improves meaning-making, and promotes hopeful thought. Pan et al. [12] revealed that astonishment prompts individuals to reconceptualize problems as possibilities for progress, so enhancing their optimistic outlook on the future. Jiang et al. [10] similarly discovered that awe inspires the quest for one's real self via self-transcendence, resulting in constructive behaviours and prosocial meaning-making. Chen et al. [14] highlighted that awe synchronises individual well-being with relationship harmony, emphasising its significance in fostering deeper connections with others. These findings together underscore astonishment as a psychological trigger that broadens perspective and perhaps fosters optimism, a concept key to the first hypothesis of the current study.

2.2 Self-Transcendence as a Means to Psychological Resilience

Self-transcendence entails redirecting focus from egocentric issues to more expansive sources of

significance, so enhancing psychological resilience and purpose. Wong et al. [13] shown that self-transcendence safeguards individuals from suffering, particularly in emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic. Centeno et al. [5] noted that mindfulness-based therapies assist Filipino students in developing empathy and self-compassion, which are essential signs of transcendence. Cordero [9] included a spiritual aspect, demonstrating that religion and contemplative activities assist Filipino students in managing anxiety and despair by grounding themselves in a purpose beyond the individual. These findings collectively indicate that self-transcendence enhances emotional stability and adaptive coping, establishing a theoretical foundation for anticipating its favourable correlation with optimism in the current investigation.

2.3 Optimism and Student Prosperity in the Face of Adversity

Optimism, defined as a forward-looking optimism in positive life outcomes, has repeatedly been associated with student well-being and motivation, especially in times of uncertainty. Banares et al. [3] discovered that hope, thankfulness, and optimism collectively enhance student thriving throughout the epidemic. Despite an excess of knowledge, Filipino adolescents maintained optimism as a coping strategy, as demonstrated by Cleofas [7], highlighting the persistence of optimistic expectations even under stressful circumstances. Chuateco et al. [6] also noted that optimism aided student-athletes in preserving their performance identity and motivation despite interruptions in training and routine. These findings underscore the significance of optimism as a crucial psychological asset and warrant an investigation into its possible predictors—such as awe and self-transcendence—in this study.

2.4 Awe and Self-Transcendence as Predictors of Optimism in Collegiate Experience

Contemporary scholarly discussions indicate that awe and self-transcendence may together enhance hopeful thinking by expanding views, improving meaning-making, and promoting human development. Awe, by fostering transcendence, can redirect focus from present concerns to a more comprehensive knowledge, thereby improving life perspective and future outlook. Balba et al. [2] discovered that students' self-concept and self-awareness greatly affect future outlooks, suggesting that transcendent experiences—frequently

induced by awe—can augment optimism in both academic and personal spheres. Notwithstanding these theoretical associations, actual research directly correlating awe, self-transcendence, and optimism among Filipino college students is few. Consequently, this study makes a distinctive contribution to positive psychology by synthesising these dimensions into a unified model and experimentally examining their interconnections. This theoretical integration results in the formulation of the study's hypotheses: that awe and self-transcendence are positively correlated with optimism and with one another.

2.5 The Filipino Collegiate Experience: Adaptation, Significance Construction, and Development

The Filipino higher education setting offers a culturally enriched framework for comprehending the emergence of wonder, self-transcendence, and hope in times of hardship. Studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic indicated that Filipino students predominantly utilised meaning-making and faith as adaptive coping strategies, as evidenced by Asiones [1] and Cleofas [8]. These processes exemplify the Filipino inclination towards *pagpapakatao* (enhanced self-awareness) and *pakikipagkapwa* (interpersonal connection), both of which align with transcendent experiences identified in positive psychology. Moreover, research conducted by Arnett [15] and Blanco et al. [4] underscored the impact of self-efficacy and self-confidence on students' endurance in online learning, accentuating personal agency as a catalyst for resilience and development. Lim et al. [11] noted that mental health outcomes among Filipino students are intricately associated with social connection, digital engagement, and culturally rooted coping strategies—factors that reflect self-transcendent processes and communal meaning-making. Collectively, these findings indicate that Filipino students inherently utilise awe-inspiring experiences, relational transcendence, and future-oriented optimism to address academic problems. This contextual comprehension substantiates the justification for investigating how awe and self-transcendence could forecast optimism among Filipino college students, so establishing the present study as a significant addition to culturally informed positive psychology.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to determine the relationship among awe, self-transcendence, and optimism among college students in Metro Manila. The design was deemed appropriate as it aimed to identify the strength and direction of relationships among these variables without manipulating any of them. The research was framed within the lens of positive psychology and the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) and SDG 4 (Quality Education).

3.2 Respondents and Sampling Technique

The respondents of the study were undergraduate college students enrolled in various higher education institutions across Metro Manila. Convenience sampling was utilized to select participants, as it allowed for easy access to respondents within the researcher's reach. Participants were invited to take part in the study through online platforms such as student group pages, institutional emails, and social media networks. The inclusion criteria specified that respondents must be currently enrolled college students aged 17 years and above who willingly provided their consent to participate. Responses that were incomplete or failed to meet attention checks were excluded from the analysis. A total of 134 students participated in the study.

3.3 Research Instruments

Three standardized instruments were used to collect data. The first was the Awe Experience Scale (AWE-SF), which measured participants' awe experiences through 30 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). The scale assessed six factors of awe: altered time perception, self-diminishment, connectedness, perceived vastness, physical sensations, and the need for accommodation. Respondents were first asked to recall and describe a recent awe experience before answering the scale items. The second instrument was the Self-Transcendence Scale, which measured the extent to which individuals expanded their personal boundaries. It consisted of items rated on a 4-point scale, from 1 (Not at all) to 4 (Very much). The third instrument was the Life Orientation Test (LOT), which assessed the level of optimism among the respondents. The LOT used a 5-point Likert scale, where positive items were rated from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5

(Strongly Agree), while negative items were reverse scored. A demographic section was also included to gather information on the respondents' age, sex, year level, and course.

3.4 Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, permission to use the standardized questionnaires was secured, and expert validation was conducted to ensure the suitability and clarity of the instruments in the Philippine context. The survey was pilot-tested among a small group of students to evaluate reliability, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients were computed to establish internal consistency. Ethical clearance was obtained from the appropriate institutional review board. The respondents were informed of the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, and the assurance of anonymity and confidentiality. They were also informed that they could withdraw at any time without penalty. Contact information and psychological support resources were provided in case of discomfort during participation. Data were collected through an online survey distributed over a period of several weeks. Each participant accessed the link, read the informed consent form, and completed the questionnaires. After the data collection phase, responses were screened for completeness and validity. Incomplete or inconsistent entries were removed. The data were then encoded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

3.5 Data Analysis

The data gathered from the respondents were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods with the aid of statistical software. Descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage were utilized to describe the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of age, sex, year level, and course. To determine the level of each main variable—awe, self-transcendence, and optimism—the mean and weighted mean were computed, and the results were interpreted using a corresponding verbal scale. These descriptive measures provided an overview of how the respondents generally perceived and experienced each construct.

To determine whether significant relationships existed among the three variables, inferential statistics were employed using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation coefficient. This statistical test was applied to examine the association between awe, self-transcendence, and optimism. A significance

level of 0.05 was used as the decision criterion, wherein a p-value less than 0.05 indicated a statistically significant relationship. The results revealed significant relationships among the three variables, suggesting that awe is positively linked to self-transcendence and optimism among college students.

4 Results and Discussions

The data showed in Table 1 that the majority of the respondents (47.8%) were aged 18 to 21 years old, followed by those aged 22 to 25 years old (37.3%), while only 14.9% were above 25 years old. This indicated that most participants were in late adolescence to emerging adulthood, a developmental period marked by identity exploration and emotional growth. According to Arnett [15], individuals within this age range often engage in self-discovery and meaning-making, which aligns with the study's focus on awe, self-transcendence, and optimism. Experiences of awe and transcendence may be particularly salient during this phase, as college students encounter new environments, ideas, and social roles that shape their perspectives about life.

Table 1. Age of the respondents.

	Age	Frequency	Percent
Valid	18-21	64	47.8
	22-25	50	37.3
	Above 25	20	14.9
	Total	134	100.0

As presented in Table 2, 71.6% of the respondents were female, while 28.4% were male. This imbalance reflected the common gender distribution in many tertiary institutions in the Philippines, where female enrollment tends to exceed male participation [16]. Previous studies have suggested that females often report higher emotional expressiveness and greater openness to awe-inspiring experiences. Moreover, women have been observed to engage more frequently in reflective and transcendental thinking, which could contribute to higher self-transcendence and optimism [19]. Hence, the predominance of female respondents may have influenced the overall levels of awe and transcendence observed in the study.

The findings revealed in Table 3 that 47.0% of the respondents were second-year students, followed by third-year students (19.4%), fourth-year students (18.7%), and first-year students (14.9%). This

Table 2. Sex of the respondents.

	Sex	Frequency	Percent
Valid	Female	96	71.6
	Male	38	28.4
	Total	134	100.0

distribution implied that the majority of participants were in the middle phase of their academic journey, a period where students typically adjust to academic demands while developing greater self-awareness. Exposure to academic and social challenges may prompt awe and self-transcendence experiences as students find meaning beyond self-centered concerns.

Table 3. Year level of the respondents.

	Year Level	Frequency	Percent
Valid	1st Year	20	14.9
	2nd Year	63	47.0
	3rd Year	26	19.4
	4th Year	25	18.7
	Total	134	100.0

In terms of course distribution, as shown in Table 4, the largest proportion of respondents were enrolled in Science-related courses (44.8%), followed by Arts (17.9%), Computer (13.4%), Business (11.2%), Engineering (7.5%), and Education (5.2%). The diversity of academic backgrounds suggested that participants represented a range of cognitive orientations—from empirical reasoning in sciences to reflective and creative engagement in the arts.

Table 4. Courses distribution of the respondents.

	Courses	Frequency	Percent
Valid	Arts Courses	24	17.9
	Business Courses	15	11.2
	Computer Courses	18	13.4
	Education Courses	7	5.2
	Engineering Courses	10	7.5
	Sciences Courses	60	44.8
	Total	134	100.0

As presented in Table 5, the computed weighted mean of 4.6554 indicated that respondents somewhat agreed with the statements describing awe experiences. This suggested that college students moderately experienced feelings of wonder, vastness, and connection when exposed to awe-inspiring situations. High mean scores were observed in items related to physical sensations such as "I had goosebumps"

Table 5. Level of awe experienced by the respondents.

Awe Experience	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
1. I noticed time slowing.	4.2313	Neutral
2. I sensed things momentarily slow down I noticed time slowing.	3.9478	Neutral
3. I felt my sense of time change.	5.0299	Somewhat Agree
4. I experienced the passage of time differently.	4.7463	Somewhat Agree
5. I had the sense that moment lasted longer than usual.	4.9552	Somewhat Agree
6. I felt that my sense of self was diminished.	3.9179	Neutral
7. I experienced a reduced sense of self.	4.0746	Neutral
8. I felt my sense of self shrink.	4.0597	Neutral
9. I felt my sense of self become somehow smaller.	3.7537	Neutral
10. I felt small compared to everything else.	3.9254	Neutral
11. I experienced a sense of oneness with all things.	4.5896	Somewhat Agree
12. I felt a sense of communion with all living things.	4.6791	Somewhat Agree
13. I had the sense of being connected to everything.	4.8881	Somewhat Agree
14. I had a sense of complete connectedness.	4.5522	Somewhat Agree
15. I felt closely connected to humanity.	4.7985	Somewhat Agree
16. I perceived something that was much larger than me.	5.0970	Somewhat Agree
17. I felt the presence of greatness.	4.8806	Somewhat Agree
18. I felt that I was in the presence of something grand.	4.6269	Somewhat Agree
19. I experienced something greater than myself.	4.8358	Somewhat Agree
20. I perceived vastness.	4.5821	Somewhat Agree
21. I had goosebumps.	5.2985	Somewhat Agree
22. I gasped.	4.9552	Somewhat Agree
23. I had chills.	5.0896	Somewhat Agree
24. I felt my jaw drop.	4.2090	Neutral
25. I felt my eyes widen.	5.1567	Somewhat Agree
26. I felt challenged to understand the experience.	4.7239	Somewhat Agree
27. I found it hard to comprehend the experience in full.	4.6940	Somewhat Agree
28. I struggled to take in all that I was experiencing at once.	4.9701	Somewhat Agree
29. I felt challenged to mentally process what I was experiencing.	5.1866	Somewhat Agree
30. I tried to understand the magnitude of what I was experiencing.	5.2090	Somewhat Agree
Weighted Mean	4.6554	Somewhat Agree

Legend: 1.00 – 1.49 (Strongly Disagree), 1.50 – 2.49 (Disagree), 2.50 – 3.49 (Somewhat Disagree), 3.50 – 4.49 (Neutral), 4.50 – 5.49 (Somewhat Agree), 5.50 – 6.49 (Agree), 6.50 – 7.00 (Strongly Agree)

($M = 5.2985$) and cognitive accommodation such as "I tried to understand the magnitude of what I was experiencing" ($M = 5.2090$). These findings supported the conceptualization of awe as a complex emotion involving perceptual, cognitive, and physical responses.

Consistent with Stellar et al. [18], awe allows individuals to transcend self-boundaries, enhancing feelings of connectedness and meaning. In the Philippine context, awe may arise from cultural, religious, or natural experiences that evoke humility and appreciation of life's vastness. The moderate level of awe observed may also reflect students' exposure to academic pressures that limit engagement with awe-eliciting moments, emphasizing the need for

programs that encourage mindfulness, reflection, and nature-based experiences.

As shown in Table 6, the overall weighted mean of 3.2164, interpreted as "Somewhat," indicated that respondents demonstrated a moderate level of self-transcendence. The highest mean score ($M = 3.6119$) was found in the item "Helping others in some way," suggesting that students found meaning through altruistic actions. Moderate endorsement of items such as "Finding meaning in my spiritual beliefs" ($M = 3.00$) and "Accepting myself as I grow older" ($M = 3.2836$) reflected the participants' ongoing process of personal development. In the Filipino collectivist culture, transcendence often manifests through interpersonal harmony, spirituality, and service [17]. These

Table 6. Level of self-transcendence among respondents.

Self-transcendence	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
1. Having hobbies and interests I can enjoy	3.4701	Somewhat
2. Accepting myself as I grow older	3.2836	Somewhat
3. Being involved with other people or my community when possible	3.0746	Somewhat
4. Adjusting well to my present life situation	3.2687	Somewhat
5. Adjusting well to changes in my physical abilities	2.8507	Somewhat
6. Sharing my wisdom or experience with others	3.2985	Somewhat
7. Finding meaning in my past experience	3.2537	Somewhat
8. Helping others in some way.	3.6119	Very Much
9. Having ongoing interest in learning	3.4104	Somewhat
10. Able to move beyond things that once seemed so important	3.3060	Somewhat
11. Accepting death as a part of life.	3.2910	Somewhat
12. Finding meaning in my spiritual beliefs	3.0000	Somewhat
13. Letting others help me when I may need it	2.8582	Somewhat
14. Enjoying my pace of life	3.2164	Somewhat
15. Letting go of my past losses	3.0522	Somewhat
Weighed Mean	3.2164	Somewhat

Legend: 1.00 - 1.49(Not at all), 1.50 - 2.49 (Very little), 2.50 - 3.49 (Somewhat), and 3.50 - 4.00 (Very Much).

Table 7. Level of optimism among respondents.

Optimism	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
1. In uncertain times I usually expect the best.	3.3806	Neither Agree nor Disagree
2. It is easy for me to relax.	2.9104	Neither Agree nor Disagree
3. If something can go wrong for me, it will.	3.5896	Agree
4. I'm always optimistic about my future.	3.2388	Neither Agree nor Disagree
5. I enjoy my friends a lot.	4.1791	Agree
6. It's important for me to keep busy.	3.8433	Agree
7. I hardly ever expect things to go my way.	3.5597	Agree
8. I don't get upset too easily.	2.7612	Neither Agree nor Disagree
9. I rarely count on good things happening to me.	3.4851	Neither Agree nor Disagree
10. Overall, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad.	3.7239	Agree
Weighed Mean	3.4671	Neither Agree nor Disagree

Legend: 1.00 – 1.49(Strongly Disagree), 1.50 – 2.49 (Disagree), 2.50 – 3.49 (Neither Agree nor Disagree), and 3.50 – 4.49(Agree). 4.50 – 5.00 (Strongly Agree)

results suggested that while students were aware of self-transcendent values, many were still navigating the process of integrating them into their personal identities. Educational interventions that foster reflection, service-learning, and spiritual growth could further enhance transcendence among youth.

Table 7 shows that the respondents demonstrated a moderate level of optimism with an overall weighted mean of 3.4671, interpreted as “Neither Agree nor Disagree.” This indicates that college students held a balanced outlook toward life, showing both positive and cautious expectations about the future. The

highest-rated statement, “I enjoy my friends a lot” (M = 4.1791), reflected strong social optimism and the importance of friendships in fostering positivity. Meanwhile, items related to relaxation and emotional stability received lower means, suggesting uncertainty in managing stress. Some negatively worded statements also revealed traces of doubt or pessimism. Overall, the findings suggest that students were moderately optimistic, showing positivity in social and productive aspects but remaining cautious in uncertain or emotionally challenging situations.

As presented in Table 8, the correlational analysis

Table 8. Relationship between significant relationship among awe, self-transcendence, and optimism.

Correlations		Awe Experience	Self- Transcendence	Life Orientation (Optimism)
Awe Experience	Pearson Correlation	1	.258**	.556**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.003	.000
	N	134	134	134
Self- Transcendence	Pearson Correlation	.258**	1	.575**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003		.000
	N	134	134	134
Life Orientation (Optimism)	Pearson Correlation	.556**	.575**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	134	134	134

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

revealed significant positive relationships among Awe Experience, Self-Transcendence, and Life Orientation (Optimism) among the 134 respondents. Awe Experience showed a moderate positive correlation with Self-Transcendence ($r = .258$, $p = .003$), suggesting that individuals who frequently experience awe are slightly more likely to report higher levels of self-transcendent feelings or perspectives. A stronger positive correlation was found between Awe Experience and Optimism ($r = .556$, $p < .001$), indicating that greater awe experiences are associated with more optimistic life orientations. Similarly, Self-Transcendence demonstrated a strong positive correlation with Optimism ($r = .575$, $p < .001$), implying that individuals with higher self-transcendent tendencies also tend to have a more optimistic outlook. Overall, these results suggest that awe, self-transcendence, and optimism are interconnected psychological constructs that reinforce one another in a positive manner. Moreover, Yaden et al. [19] found that awe and transcendence contribute to positive emotions and hope, which are critical components of well-being. The present study affirmed that cultivating awe-inspiring and transcendental experiences may promote optimism, resilience, and meaning among students.

5 Conclusion

The study's results provided important insights into how awe, self-transcendence, and optimism influence college students in Metro Manila. Most respondents were 18 to 21 years old, a stage known as late adolescence to emerging adulthood, which is a crucial period for identity formation and emotional exploration. Respondents in this age group are naturally open to new experiences and meaning-making, which matches the study's focus

on positive psychological traits. Most participants were female (71.6%), reflecting the usual gender distribution in Philippine colleges. This may have influenced the results, as women often show greater emotional awareness and openness to awe and transcendence. Many respondents were second-year students, meaning they were still adjusting to academic demands and developing a sense of self. The variety of courses, especially in the sciences, showed that students were exposed to different ways of understanding awe and meaning, from scientific reasoning to personal reflection.

Findings on awe showed that students "somewhat agreed" with the statements, suggesting a moderate sense of wonder. They described feelings of vastness, connection, and amazement, supporting the idea that awe reduces self-focus and increases feelings of unity with the world. As Stellar et al. [18] propose, awe may make students more humble and open-minded. However, the moderate levels could be due to academic stress or limited exposure to awe-inspiring environments. The moderate level of self-transcendence ($M = 3.2164$) indicated that students were still developing the ability to find meaning beyond themselves. The most frequent response—"Helping others in some way"—reflected the Filipino value of bayanihan, showing that young people often experience transcendence through helping others and spirituality rather than through abstract thinking.

For optimism, the overall score ($M = 3.4671$) showed that students generally had a positive yet realistic outlook. They found joy in friendships and being productive, but their mixed responses to emotional challenges suggested a cautious form of optimism. This aligns with research showing that young adults

balance hope for the future with an awareness of life's uncertainties. Lastly, the strong relationships among awe, self-transcendence, and optimism showed that these qualities are connected. Awe appears to encourage self-transcendence, which then strengthens optimism and well-being. This supports positive psychology theories that say emotions like awe promote purpose, resilience, and hope. The results also highlight the value of incorporating awe-filled, reflective, and service-oriented activities in education to support long-term well-being, aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 3 and SDG 4).

In conclusion, the study showed that awe, self-transcendence, and optimism are interconnected parts of healthy psychological development among Filipino college students. Encouraging these traits through meaningful learning, community involvement, and emotional reflection can help young adults move beyond self-centered concerns and develop a deeper sense of purpose and well-being.

6 Recommendations

The findings of this study suggest that several evidence-based strategies can help strengthen the positive psychological traits of Filipino college students, particularly awe, self-transcendence, and optimism. The participants' moderate levels of awe highlight the importance of giving students experiences that inspire wonder and broaden their perspectives. Universities could offer nature trips, art and cultural activities, and guided reflection sessions to help students pause, appreciate their surroundings, and think beyond themselves. These activities may increase feelings of connectedness, humility, and gratitude—qualities that support overall well-being.

The results also show that students are still developing their ability to find meaning beyond their personal experiences. Schools can support this by promoting community involvement, volunteer work, peer mentoring, and mindfulness practices. These programs can help students build empathy, a sense of purpose, and meaningful relationships, which strengthen resilience and support emotional growth in both academic and personal areas. The balanced scores in optimism highlight the need for strategies that support positive future thinking and healthy coping. Workshops on goal-setting, problem-solving, stress management, and gratitude can help students stay hopeful and focused despite academic and personal challenges.

Integrating these strategies into academic programs, co-curricular activities, and student services can help create an environment that nurtures psychological strengths. These efforts not only support personal development but also align with global sustainability goals by promoting mental well-being, resilience, and lifelong learning. Overall, the strategies presented show promise in fostering well-rounded, adaptable, and purpose-driven students. They contribute to Sustainable Development Goals 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and 4 (Quality Education) and offer practical ways to enhance positive psychological functioning in higher education.

Data Availability Statement

Data will be made available on request.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

AI Use Statement

The authors declare that no generative AI was used in the preparation of this manuscript.

Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate

This study received ethical clearance from the appropriate Institutional Review Board of Philippine Women's University in accordance with institutional guidelines and the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki (2013) and the Code of Ethics of the Psychological Association of the Philippines (2022). Participation was voluntary and anonymous. All respondents provided electronic informed consent by reading the consent form at the start of the online survey (via Google Forms) and proceeding only if they agreed. They were fully informed about the study purpose, procedures, right to withdraw at any time without penalty, confidentiality of responses, and absence of identifiable data.

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Leilani R. Santos is a faculty member at Centro Escolar University, currently pursuing her Ph.D. in Psychology at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines. With over a decade of experience in teaching, research and academic writing, she has served in various higher education institutions, including Philippine Women's University, Jose Rizal University and Rizal Technological University. Her scholarly work focuses on positive psychology, educational psychology, and mental health advocacy, with several publications on empathy, prosocial behavior, and occupational stress. (Email: lrsantos@pwu.edu.ph)



Melissa A. Alcazaren Melissa Necitas Cariño Arkoncel-Alcazaren, Ph.D., RPsy, Rpm, is a licensed psychologist and psychometrician with extensive experience in academia and psychological practice. She currently serves as a Consultant and former Program Chair of the Psychology Department at the Philippine Women's University. Dr. Alcazaren earned her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from the University of Santo Tomas and her M.A. in Psychology from the Philippine Women's University. Her professional background spans roles as dean, guidance counselor, and human resources specialist in various institutions. She has presented research at national conventions and served as a resource speaker on mental health and well-being. Dr. Alcazaren is an active member of the Psychological Association of the Philippines and the American Psychological Association.



Hafsa H. Macaraya is a psychologist and university lecturer with a strong commitment to advancing mental health and education. She has taught and mentored emerging professionals in psychology, equipping them with the skills, insight, and empathy needed for ethical, evidence-based practice. In her clinical work, she supports a diverse client base, including students, professionals, and individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Deeply committed to mental health accessibility, she also provides pro bono counseling to those facing financial hardship. Her work is driven by a belief in the transformative power of education and the importance of inclusive, compassionate care. (Email: hmacaraya@pwu.edu.ph)



Lloyd Ryan T. Lagmay has been a collegiate psychology instructor since 2010. He holds a Master's degree in Psychology with a specialization in Industrial Psychology and became a licensed psychometrician in 2019. His teaching is guided by a strong commitment to mental health and student growth. Beyond teaching, he conducts research on mental health and organizational behavior and enjoys discussing politics and philosophy. In his

personal life, he values fitness and basketball, believing that physical activity supports overall well-being. (Email: ltlagmay@pwu.edu.ph)