

Beyond Individual Agency: An Integrative Perspective on Human Agency Through existential Philosophy, Social Psychology, and Filipino Psychology

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ABSTRACT

Human agency is often defined as the ability to make decisions, take deliberate action, and shape one's own life. When agency is viewed primarily as an individual possession, that description is no longer complete. Individuals make decisions about relationships, groups, institutions, cultural norms, and material circumstances. In addition to incorporating a Filipino psychology perspective that centers personhood around relationality and cultural meaning, this integrative conceptual review integrates recent work in existential and humanistic psychology with social-psychological research on social agency, identity, collective action, and agency–structure relations. Conceptual fragmentation, an overemphasis on the individual agent, a lack of attention to lived meaning and responsibility, a limited integration of agency with structural conditions, and the underrepresentation of culturally grounded accounts of relational personhood are the five interrelated issues that the review identifies in the literature. Building on these gaps, the paper offers a three-dimensional framework that simultaneously understands agency as relational-social, structural-contextual, and personal-existential. Filipino ideas like *kapwa*, *pakikipagkapwa*, *pagpapakatao*, *pagdududa*, and *ginhawa* are employed as theoretical tools for reevaluating what an agent is and how agency is carried out rather than as ornamental cultural examples. The need to shift from individual-centered accounts to family agency is further supported by recent research on Filipino transnational families. The resulting model views agency as a situated process that people use to understand situations, make decisions, collaborate with others, act, face repercussions, and change their course of action. Proposals for empirical research, measurement, qualitative inquiry, cross-cultural comparison, and multilevel study are developed in this paper. It concludes that going beyond individual agency does not lessen personal accountability; rather, it situates accountability within the connections and circumstances that enable action

Keywords: human agency, existential psychology, social psychology, relational agency, collective agency, Filipino psychology, *kapwa*, family agency, agency–structure relations, *Sikolohiyang Pilipino*

INTRODUCTION

Human agency is central to explanations of human action. People make plans, form commitments, respond to difficulties, cooperate with others, resist expectations, and attempt to change the conditions of their lives. Yet agency remains difficult to define in a single way. Cavazzoni, Fiorini, and Veronese (2022), in a review of research on agency measures, found substantial variation in definitions and instruments. The lack of a shared measurement standard reflects a deeper conceptual question: what does it mean to be an agent?

Much familiar language about agency begins with the individual. A person chooses, intends, acts, and experiences some degree of control over consequences. This perspective captures an important feature of human life. At the same time, an individual-centered account can become too narrow if it treats agency as an inner capacity operating independently of social relationships and conditions. Bazzani (2023), for example, conceptualizes agency as a conversion process in which resources become actual possibilities for action through conditions operating across micro, meso, and macro levels.

Existential approaches bring another concern into the discussion: what it is like to be a person who must choose and take responsibility within circumstances that are never completely under personal control. Recent scholarship treats freedom as situated rather than unlimited. Yanchar (2024) emphasizes lived tensions, including contradiction, resistance, uncertainty, and competing demands, while Baumeister (2025) argues that existential approaches can understand freedom as relative to the situation rather than as absolute choice.

Social psychology adds a further layer. Agency is exercised in relationships and groups, where identity, recognition, cooperation, conflict, and shared goals shape what people can do. Silver et al. (2021) describe social agency as varying with interaction and cooperation. Shteynberg et al. (2022) distinguish collective identity from collective agency, and Greenaway (2024) shows how group identification can sometimes provide resources for personal efficacy and control. Tomasello (2025) likewise argues that humans are capable of creating joint and collective agencies with others. At the same time, Le Besnerais et al. (2024) caution against assuming that joint action necessarily creates a distinct subjective “we-agency.”

The Filipino literature adds an important cultural challenge to an individual-centered starting point. Sikolohiyang Pilipino developed as an approach grounded in Filipino experience, language, and social realities rather than simply importing Western psychological categories (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). Within this tradition, *kapwa* is a particularly important relational concept. Labor and Gastardo-Conaco (2021) empirically elaborated *kapwa* as a social-relational construct, while Maninang (2025) discusses *kapwa* as shared identity and *pakikipagkapwa* as an interpersonal ideal grounded in equality, dignity, and mutual recognition. Cervantes (2025) extends this line of thought by describing Filipino psychology as transpersonal, emphasizing the interrelationship of self, other, culture, and world.

Recent Filipino scholarship also connects cultural relationality directly to existential and agency questions. Salvador and Mendoza (2026) identify *pagpapakatao*, *pagdududa*, and *ginhawa* as culturally grounded constructs relevant to Filipino existential psychotherapy. Grava, Keil, and Elizabeth (2026), drawing on empirical research with Filipino transnational family members, argue that Western relational theorizing can still default to agency as the property of an individual and propose family agency as a more appropriate way of understanding action in collectivist family contexts.

Taken together, these literatures suggest that the question is not simply whether individuals possess agency. A more useful question is how agency is formed and expressed within personal meaning, relationships, cultural understandings of personhood, and structural conditions. The present paper therefore develops an integrative framework that connects three dimensions: personal-existential agency, relational-social agency, and structural-contextual agency. The Filipino perspective is incorporated as a substantive theoretical contribution to the relational and existential dimensions of this model rather than as an afterthought.

Research Problem, Questions, and Contribution

Research Problem

The contemporary agency literature is rich but fragmented. Individual measures emphasize perceived control, autonomy, intentionality, or goal pursuit. Existential approaches emphasize freedom, responsibility, meaning, and situated choice. Social-psychological approaches examine identity, interaction, cooperation, and collective processes. Agency–structure scholarship examines resources, institutions, norms, and opportunities. These perspectives answer different questions, but they are rarely organized into one framework that explains how they operate together.

A second problem is cultural. Many influential accounts begin with an implicitly autonomous individual and then add social relationships as contextual influences. Filipino psychology offers a different starting point: the person is understood through culturally meaningful relations with others. *Kapwa*, for example, challenges a strict self-versus-other distinction and provides a culturally grounded language for thinking about recognition, responsibility, belonging, and coordinated action.

The conceptual problem addressed here is therefore twofold: how can agency be integrated across personal, relational, and structural dimensions, and how can culturally grounded accounts of personhood revise rather than merely illustrate existing theories of agency?

Review Questions

- How is human agency conceptualized across existential, social-psychological, and agency–structure scholarship?
- What is gained by treating relationality and cultural meaning as constitutive dimensions of agency rather than external influences?
- How can Filipino psychology, particularly kapwa and recent Filipino work on existential experience and family agency, extend an integrative account of human agency?
- What propositions and research directions follow from a multilevel, culturally grounded conception of agency?

Contribution of the Paper

The paper makes four conceptual contributions. First, it connects literatures that are often treated separately: existential agency, social agency, collective agency, and agency–structure relations. Second, it places relationality inside the definition of agency rather than treating relationships only as background variables. Third, it uses Filipino psychology to show that relational personhood can be a theoretical starting point for agency, not merely a cultural moderator. Fourth, it translates the synthesis into testable propositions and a research agenda.

Review Method

This article uses an integrative conceptual review. It is not presented as a systematic review, meta-analysis, or empirical study. The purpose is theoretical integration: to compare scholarship that addresses different dimensions of human agency and to identify conceptual connections and unresolved tensions among those traditions.

The review was bounded by a primary publication window of 2020–2026, with foundational Filipino psychology literature published before 2020 retained when necessary to establish the conceptual origins of Sikolohiyang Pilipino and kapwa. The final conceptual corpus comprised 19 scholarly sources: 18 sources published from 2021 to 2026 and one foundational source from 2000. This corpus was used as the evidentiary base for the conceptual synthesis; the number should not be interpreted as an exhaustive retrieval count or as the result of systematic screening.

The principal search concepts reflected the review questions and the domains represented in the final corpus. They included combinations of: “human agency,” “agency,” “existential agency,” “free will,” “freedom,” “responsibility,” “meaning,” “social agency,” “relational agency,” “collective agency,” “identity,” “joint action,” “we-agency,” “agency and social structure,” “agency–structure relations,” “Filipino psychology,” “Sikolohiyang Pilipino,” “kapwa,” “Filipino existential psychology,” “family agency,” and “transnational Filipino families.” The manuscript records the scholarly sources ultimately consulted rather than claiming a database-by-database systematic search log.

Sources were retained when they made a substantive conceptual contribution to at least one of four analytic domains: (a) conceptualization or measurement of agency; (b) existential meaning, freedom, responsibility, or intentionality; (c) relational, social, identity, collective, or family processes; and (d) structural, institutional, material, cultural, or opportunity conditions. Filipino scholarship was examined additionally for concepts that could refine, challenge, or culturally qualify these categories.

Literature was organized thematically rather than statistically. Four analytic questions guided the synthesis: (a) how agency is defined; (b) how agency is experienced as meaningful and responsible action; (c) how agency is

shaped through relationships, identity, and groups; and (d) how social structures, cultural norms, and resources enable or constrain action.

Because the article is conceptual, no claims are made about causal effects, prevalence, or population-level generalization. The framework and propositions require empirical testing. The inclusion of recent Filipino scholarship is intended to broaden theoretical scope and generate culturally grounded hypotheses rather than to claim that Filipino concepts describe all Filipino people or all forms of agency.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Agency as a Contested Construct

Agency is widely used but not uniformly defined. Cavazzoni et al. (2022) found substantial variation in instruments used to assess agency, suggesting that autonomy, mastery, control, participation, and contextual opportunity may be treated as related but nonidentical ideas. This supports a process view in which intention, action, and opportunity must be distinguished.

Bazzani (2023) offers a useful bridge between psychological and structural explanations by describing agency as a conversion process. Personal resources do not automatically become action; their conversion depends on contextual factors at several levels. Phillips and Plunkett (2024) likewise examine how a core capacity for agency can be related to empirical sciences without reducing philosophical questions about action to a single psychological measure. Bortolotti (2025) further illustrates the conceptual complexity of agency by questioning simple assumptions about rationality and action. These contributions support the need to preserve distinctions among capacity, intention, action, and the conditions under which action becomes possible.

Existential and Humanistic Agency

Existential approaches begin with the person's situated existence. People encounter circumstances they did not choose, yet they still have to respond. Agency therefore involves not only selecting among options but interpreting circumstances, deciding what matters, and taking responsibility for a response. Williams et al. (2021) argue for an account that preserves meaning and purpose without reducing agency to unrestricted choice.

Yanchar (2024) develops this point through lived tensions. Agency can involve hesitation, contradiction, uncertainty, competing obligations, and resistance. Baumeister (2025) similarly argues for understanding freedom as relative and situated. These approaches are important because observable behavior alone does not reveal the meaning a person assigns to action.

The Filipino existential perspective adds culturally grounded terms to this discussion. Salvador and Mendoza (2026) identify *pagpapakatao* as an endeavor of becoming human, *pagdududa* as the experience of doubt, and *ginhawa* as a felt embodied experience of wholeness and wellness. These constructs suggest that existential agency can be studied not only through abstract concepts such as freedom and responsibility but also through culturally situated understandings of becoming, uncertainty, and well-being.

Relational and Social Agency

Agency is not exercised in a social vacuum. Silver et al. (2021) argue that social agency varies with interaction and cooperation. Relationships can support action by providing trust, information, recognition, or coordination, but they can also restrict action through exclusion, conflict, or unequal power.

The concept of *kapwa* offers a culturally grounded way to theorize this relational dimension. Labor and Gastardo-Conaco (2021) empirically examined how Filipinos construe *kapwa* and developed a measure reflecting relations with the social other, perceived negative characteristics, and difference from the self. Their work is important for the present framework because it shows that relationality is not simply a philosophical claim; it can be investigated empirically.

Maninang (2025) further interprets *kapwa* as shared identity and *pakikipagkapwa* as a deeper interpersonal orientation grounded in equality, dignity, and mutual recognition. This perspective is compatible with the present argument that recognition and relational responsibility are part of the setting in which agency is enacted.

Identity, Groups, and Collective Agency

Identity provides a bridge between personal and social agency. Shteynberg et al. (2022) distinguish collective identity from collective agency: knowing who “we” are is not identical to acting as a “we.” Greenaway (2024) argues that group identification can provide personal efficacy and control rather than simply restricting autonomy. Tomasello (2025) similarly emphasizes human capacities for joint and collective agency.

A necessary qualification comes from Le Besnerais et al. (2024), who critically review the notion of a distinct subjective *we*-agency and argue that current evidence does not justify multiplying agentic states. The present framework therefore distinguishes coordinated action, shared intention, collective identity, family agency, and subjective sense of agency rather than assuming that they are interchangeable.

Agency and Social Structure

Agency is shaped by the conditions under which action occurs. Bazzani (2023) emphasizes conversion factors, while Zhao (2022) examines the reciprocal relationship between human agency and social structure. Education, material resources, organizational rules, social roles, and cultural expectations can change the practical possibilities available to a person.

The structural dimension is especially important in the Filipino transnational family literature. Grava et al. (2026) draw on empirical research with Filipino transnational family members in Aotearoa New Zealand and argue that Western relational theories can marginalize forms of agency that are exercised differently in collectivist family contexts. Their concept of family agency is directly relevant to the present framework because it describes agency as collectively constituted and oriented toward family objectives while remaining embedded in migration structures.

This perspective also prevents a common conceptual error: treating constrained action as evidence of weak agency. People can exercise agency through negotiation, coordination, adaptation, resistance, care, and collective decision-making even when structural choices are limited.

Filipino Psychology as a Theoretical Extension of Agency

The Filipino contribution to agency theory is not simply the addition of local vocabulary. *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* emerged partly in response to the problem of explaining Filipino experience through categories developed elsewhere. Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino (2000) describe the tradition as an “indigenization from within,” in which concepts and methods emerge from Filipino language, experience, and sociocultural realities. This has direct implications for agency theory: if personhood is culturally organized, then theories of agency should not assume that the autonomous individual is the only or primary unit of action.

Kapwa and Relational Personhood

Kapwa is central to this argument. Labor and Gastardo-Conaco (2021) show that *kapwa* has empirical content as a social-relational construct. Maninang (2025) emphasizes shared identity and *pakikipagkapwa* as a value-laden orientation involving equality, dignity, and mutual recognition. Cervantes (2025) places *kapwa* within a broader transpersonal account in which self, other, culture, and world are interconnected.

For the present framework, *kapwa* does not mean that individual agency disappears into collectivism. Rather, it suggests that the social other can be part of the way a person understands selfhood, responsibility, and meaningful action. This supports the proposition that agency may be personal in expression while relational in constitution. The statement is offered here as the paper's synthesis, not as an established empirical conclusion.

Filipino Existential Agency

Salvador and Mendoza (2026) provide a particularly direct connection between Filipino psychology and existential thought. Their formulation of pagpapakatao foregrounds becoming human; pagdududa makes doubt part of meaningful psychological experience; and ginhawa describes an embodied sense of wholeness and wellness. These constructs broaden the existential dimension of agency by showing that culturally grounded experiences of becoming, uncertainty, and well-being can be analytically relevant to how people understand and enact choice.

Family Agency and Collective Orientation

Grava et al. (2026) provide an especially close empirical case for the present argument. Their study of Filipino transnational family members argues for family agency as a form of agency that is collective in constitution and orientation. This is important for distinguishing the present model from a simple claim that relationships influence individual agency. The stronger claim is that, in some contexts, the unit through which agency is organized may itself be relational.

Decolonizing the Concept of Agency

The Filipino literature also raises a methodological issue. If researchers import measures developed around autonomy, individual control, or self-directed goal pursuit without cultural adaptation, they may capture only one portion of agency. This does not make existing measures invalid; it means that construct equivalence should be established rather than assumed. Filipino psychology therefore supports a cross-cultural research strategy in which local concepts inform construct development and interpretation.

Theoretical Framework

The proposed framework integrates three analytically distinct but empirically connected dimensions of agency. The dimensions should not be treated as sequential stages or as separate traits. They are different lenses on the same process of situated action.

Dimension	Central question	Key processes	Filipino theoretical contribution
Personal–existential	What does the person understand as possible and meaningful?	Meaning, intention, reflection, responsibility, commitment, doubt	Pagpapakatao; pagdududa; ginhawa
Relational–social	With whom and through what relationships is action formed?	Recognition, identity, trust, cooperation, conflict, shared action	Kapwa; pakikipagkapwa
Structural–contextual	What conditions make action possible, difficult, or consequential?	Institutions, norms, resources, roles, inequality, opportunities	Family and migration structures; culturally situated opportunity

Personal–Existential Agency

This dimension includes situated freedom, intentionality, meaning, reflection, responsibility, commitment, and the interpretation of circumstances. It asks what the person sees as possible, what matters, and how the person takes a position toward circumstances. Filipino existential work suggests that becoming human, doubt, and embodied well-being should also be considered where culturally appropriate.

Relational–Social Agency

This dimension includes identity, recognition, trust, cooperation, conflict, belonging, social support, and shared action. Kapwa strengthens this dimension by providing a culturally grounded account of the person-in-relation.

The relational dimension does not imply that all action is collective; rather, it specifies that the formation and meaning of action may depend on relationships.

Structural–Contextual Agency

This dimension includes institutions, cultural norms, material resources, organizational arrangements, social roles, migration systems, and unequal opportunities. It addresses the practical conditions under which intentions can be converted into action. The model also allows action to reproduce or alter these conditions.

Operational Boundaries Between the Three Dimensions

To reduce conceptual overlap, the three dimensions are distinguished by the primary question being asked and by the level at which the relevant process is located. Personal–existential agency concerns the person's interpretation of circumstances, meaning-making, intention, commitment, responsibility, and position toward what is possible. Its guiding question is: “What does the person understand as possible and meaningful, and what position does the person take?” Relational–social agency concerns processes constituted through interaction or social connection, including recognition, identity-in-relation, trust, belonging, social support, cooperation, conflict, negotiation, and shared intention or coordination. Its guiding question is: “With whom and through what relational or social processes is action formed?” Structural–contextual agency concerns the institutional, material, organizational, cultural, and role-based conditions within which action becomes possible, difficult, or consequential. Its guiding question is: “What conditions make action possible, difficult, or consequential?”

Several constructs may appear across dimensions, but their placement depends on the analytic focus. Identity is personal–existential when the focus is on a person's self-understanding or commitment, but relational–social when the focus is on identification with a group or identity-in-relation. Social support is primarily relational–social when it refers to interpersonal provision of recognition, information, trust, or coordination; material or institutional support belongs to the structural–contextual dimension. Resources are structural–contextual when they refer to material, economic, organizational, or institutional means, although a person's interpretation or use of resources can also be examined at the personal–existential level. Family obligations may be personal–existential when experienced as commitments, relational–social when negotiated among family members, and structural–contextual when embedded in durable economic, migration, or institutional arrangements. Institutional opportunity is structural–contextual because it concerns the external conditions under which action can be enacted.

The distinction is therefore not a claim that a construct belongs permanently to one level. Rather, the level of analysis is specified before measurement or interpretation. This is consistent with Cavazzoni et al. (2022), who caution against treating different indicators of agency as interchangeable, and with Shteynberg et al. (2022), who distinguish collective identity from collective agency. The same event may consequently be examined through more than one dimension without collapsing the dimensions into one construct.

Agency as a Feedback Process

Agency is cyclical. People interpret circumstances, make commitments, coordinate with others, act, experience consequences, and revise their future understanding or behavior. Relationships may change as a result of action, and social conditions may be reproduced or challenged. The process therefore connects person, others, culture, and structure over time.

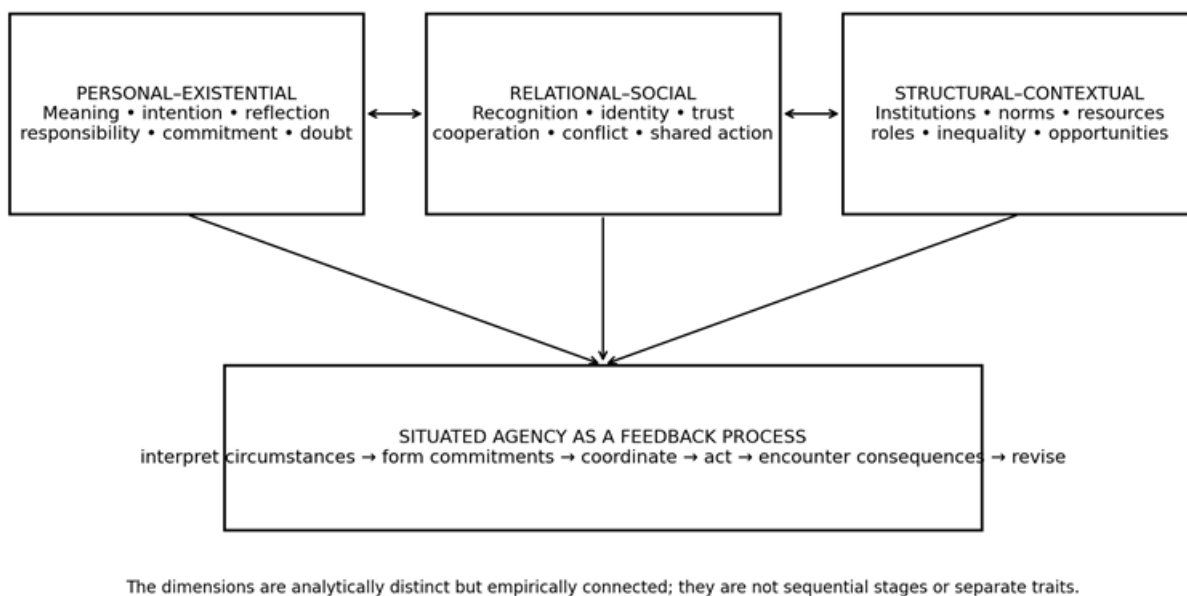


Figure 1. Integrative model of human agency across personal-existential, relational-social, and structural-contextual dimensions.

Research Propositions

- P1. Human agency is better modeled as a situated process than as a fixed individual trait; its expression varies with personal resources, relationships, cultural meanings, and social conditions.
- P2. The experience of freedom is compatible with constraint; agency can be expressed through interpretation, negotiation, resistance, acceptance, coordination, and response rather than only through unrestricted choice.
- P3. Meaning and responsibility are constitutive dimensions of agency because actions are undertaken for reasons that actors experience as significant.
- P4. Relational conditions influence the formation and expression of agency; recognition, trust, cooperation, and social support can expand practical possibilities, whereas exclusion, conflict, and lack of recognition can restrict them.
- P5. Kapwa-related orientations should predict forms of relational coordination and responsibility that are not fully captured by measures of individual autonomy or perceived control.
- P6. Collective action should be distinguished empirically from collective identity, shared intention, family agency, and subjective sense of agency.
- P7. Structural conditions affect the conversion of intentions and resources into action, while repeated individual and collective actions can reproduce or modify those conditions.
- P8. In culturally collectivist or relational contexts, the unit of analysis for some forms of agency may be relational or family-based rather than exclusively individual.
- P9. Culturally grounded concepts such as pagpapakatao, pagdududa, ginhawa, and kapwa can contribute incremental explanatory value to models of agency when their meanings are operationalized carefully rather than assumed to be universal.
- P10. A fuller account of human agency requires simultaneous attention to personal-existential, relational-social, and structural-contextual dimensions.

DISCUSSION

The central shift proposed in this paper is from asking “How agentic is this person?” to asking “How is agency being formed and expressed in this situation?” The first question encourages a trait-like interpretation. The second directs attention to the interaction among meaning, relationships, culture, resources, and conditions of action.

The framework preserves an important insight from existential thought: people remain responsible for how they respond to circumstances. At the same time, it avoids turning responsibility into blame by recognizing that the range of meaningful and feasible action is socially and materially conditioned. This distinction is consistent with recent existential accounts of situated freedom (Baumeister, 2025; Yanchar, 2024).

The social-psychological contribution is equally important. Agency is not simply what happens after an individual has decided. Recognition, identity, cooperation, and group membership can shape what is seen as possible and worthwhile. Greenaway (2024) shows that groups can support personal efficacy, while Silver et al. (2021) demonstrate the relevance of cooperation to social agency.

The Filipino perspective pushes the integration further. Kapwa suggests that the boundary between self and other cannot always be treated as the starting point for theorizing. The person may experience action, responsibility, and meaning through relationships that are constitutive of self-understanding. Grava et al. (2026) make a related point through family agency, showing why individual-centered theories can miss forms of action organized around family objectives.

This does not justify replacing individual agency with collective agency. Le Besnerais et al. (2024) caution against assuming a distinct subjective we-agency without sufficient evidence. The present framework therefore maintains individual agency while widening the possible units and processes through which agency may be organized.

The structural dimension completes the model. A person can intend to act and have supportive relationships yet still face institutional or material barriers. Conversely, changes in resources, institutions, or social arrangements can create new possibilities. Agency is therefore neither pure autonomy nor pure determination. It is the ongoing conversion of possibilities into action within a field of relationships and conditions.

Implications for Research and Practice

Measurement

Future measurement should distinguish at least four components: personal-existential processes, relational-social conditions, structural-contextual opportunity, and enacted agency. Personal-existential indicators may include meaning-making, intentionality, reflection, commitment, responsibility, doubt, and interpretation of possibilities. Relational-social indicators may include recognition, identity-in-relation, trust, belonging, social support, cooperation, negotiation, shared intention, and coordination. Structural-contextual indicators may include material and institutional resources, organizational arrangements, social roles, inequality, migration conditions, and opportunities. Enacted agency concerns the actions through which persons or relational units pursue goals, negotiate, adapt, coordinate, resist, or alter conditions.

Researchers should avoid treating autonomy, self-efficacy, perceived control, participation, and goal attainment as interchangeable indicators. Cavazzoni et al. (2022) demonstrates why measures should be mapped to the construct they actually assess. Filipino constructs should be operationalized through culturally grounded item development and validation rather than by translating Western scales alone.

The operational boundaries proposed in Section 6.4 should guide measurement decisions. Identity, social support, family obligations, and perceived possibility should be assigned according to the level of analysis being tested. Future studies should examine whether the three dimensions are empirically distinguishable while

remaining correlated, and whether relational and structural indicators explain variation in enacted agency beyond individual-level measures.

Qualitative and Phenomenological Research

Qualitative research can examine how people narrate agency when they face competing obligations, uncertainty, family expectations, or structural barriers. Interview and narrative methods are especially appropriate for studying meaning, responsibility, doubt, and the interpretation of possibilities. Filipino concepts such as *kapwa* and *pagpapakatao* can be examined through participants' own language rather than imposed definitions.

Multilevel and Longitudinal Research

The model predicts interactions across dimensions. Longitudinal research could examine how changes in relationships or institutional access alter perceived possibilities, how actions change relationships, and how repeated action contributes to structural reproduction or change. Multilevel designs could test whether relational and structural variables explain variance in agency beyond individual-level predictors.

Cross-Cultural Research

Cross-cultural research should test whether commonly used agency measures demonstrate measurement equivalence across cultural contexts. Filipino psychology provides a case in which relational concepts may be central to personhood. The goal should not be to claim that Filipinos are uniformly collectivist, but to test whether culturally grounded constructs explain aspects of agency that individual-centered measures overlook.

Counseling and Humanistic Practice

For counseling and humanistic practice, the framework suggests attending simultaneously to personal meaning and social conditions. A client may need help clarifying values or making decisions while also facing family obligations, economic constraints, institutional barriers, or relational conflict. Salvador and Mendoza's (2026) Filipino existential framework illustrates how culturally meaningful constructs can inform such work.

Education and Organizations

Educational and organizational settings can support agency through meaningful participation, access to information, recognition, resources, and opportunities to influence decisions. A relational model also suggests that agency-supportive environments should not be defined only by individual autonomy; they should include trust, cooperation, belonging, and fair participation.

Limitations and Future Research

This article is conceptual and does not report original empirical data. The proposed three-dimension framework should therefore be treated as a theoretical model rather than a demonstrated causal model. Its dimensions and propositions require operationalization and empirical testing.

The review has a deliberate emphasis on recent scholarship from 2020–2026. This improves contemporary relevance but means that older theoretical traditions are represented selectively. Foundational Filipino scholarship was retained because it is necessary for understanding the origins of *kapwa* and *Sikolohiyang Pilipino*.

A further methodological limitation is that the review documents the final conceptual corpus and principal search concepts rather than a database-by-database systematic search history. The corpus should therefore not be interpreted as exhaustive. A future systematic review could extend this work by preregistering search strings, database coverage, screening procedures, and inclusion counts.

A further limitation concerns cultural scope. Filipino psychology provides a valuable challenge to individual-centered assumptions, but Filipino people are not culturally homogeneous. Class, region, generation, migration

status, gender, religion, language, and other social positions can shape how relationality and agency are experienced. Future research should therefore investigate variation within Filipino populations rather than treating Filipino culture as a single explanatory variable.

Future empirical work should test whether the three proposed dimensions are statistically distinguishable while remaining correlated; whether kapwa-related measures predict relational agency beyond individual autonomy; whether family agency can be differentiated from ordinary collective action; and whether culturally grounded existential constructs add explanatory value to established models of agency.

CONCLUSION

Human agency cannot be fully understood by looking only inside the individual. People make choices and take responsibility, but they do so within relationships, groups, cultural meanings, institutions, and material conditions. Recent scholarship increasingly recognizes these connections, yet personal, existential, social, collective, and structural accounts remain too often separated.

This paper proposes an integrative alternative. Human agency is understood as a situated process involving personal-existential, relational-social, and structural-contextual dimensions. The personal dimension keeps freedom, meaning, intention, and responsibility in view. The relational dimension explains how identity, recognition, cooperation, kapwa, and family relations shape action. The structural dimension explains how institutions, resources, norms, roles, and unequal opportunities shape what people can actually do.

The Filipino literature strengthens this model by showing that relationality can be a theory of personhood rather than merely a contextual variable. Kapwa, pakikipagkapwa, pagpapakatao, pagdududa, ginhawa, and family agency provide culturally grounded resources for reconsidering the boundaries of the agent. They also point toward a broader methodological lesson: theories of agency should be tested across cultures rather than assumed to be universal.

Going beyond individual agency does not mean diminishing the individual. It means understanding the individual more realistically—as a person who chooses and acts, but always from somewhere, with others, through culturally meaningful relationships, and under conditions that both limit and make possible what can be done.

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