

Shaping health behaviors through experience: A qualitative document analysis on the one-month journey to wellness in a health psychology course

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the experiences of the third year Bachelor of Science in Psychology students in their "One Month Journey to a Healthier You" as part of their Health Psychology course through a qualitative document analysis of their narratives. The research aimed to understand how students navigate health behavior changes, the challenges they encounter, and the transformations they experience. Using thematic analysis, three major themes emerged: (1) Physical Transformational Changes, (2) Health-Shaping Barriers and Conflicts, and (3) Health-Oriented Identity. Participants reported improvements in physical fitness, positive body image, and enhanced well-being, yet they also faced barriers such as time constraints, stress, and inconsistencies in maintaining discipline. Despite these challenges, students developed a deeper understanding of health behaviors and showed an ability to adapt to healthier practices, indicating the formation of a health-oriented identity. The study highlights the importance of structured health programs, time management strategies, peer support systems, and interactive learning in fostering long-term health behavior changes. These findings provide insights into how academic institutions can better support students in overcoming health-related challenges and sustaining a health-conscious lifestyle.

Keywords: Health behaviors, document analysis, health psychology.

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INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of optimal health and well-being is a multifaceted journey, particularly for individuals navigating the complexities of higher education. Within the field of psychology, Health Psychology serves as a crucial subdiscipline that provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the interplay between psychological, behavioral, and social factors that influence health outcomes. It concentrates on the role of psychosocial processes in the promotion and maintenance of health together with illness prevention and treatment, and

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further elaborates the relationship between psychosocial factors and physiological processes related to health and disease, including the assessment of health and illness from a biopsychosocial point of view (CMO No. 34, Series of 2017). This orientation positions Health Psychology not merely as an academic discipline but as a dynamic applied field with direct implications for how individuals understand and manage their own health across the lifespan. Within this context, Bachelor of Science in Psychology students occupy a uniquely significant position, as they are simultaneously learners of health behavior theory and individuals who must navigate the personal health challenges inherent in higher education life.

The integration of theoretical knowledge with practical application is a cornerstone of effective learning, especially in applied fields such as Health Psychology. By incorporating personal health projects and reflective assignments into the curriculum, educators aim to empower students not only to understand health behavior theories but also to apply them meaningfully to their own lived experiences. This pedagogical approach recognizes that transformative learning in health-related disciplines requires more than passive acquisition of content knowledge; it demands active engagement with the self as a subject of inquiry. Student-generated documents such as journals, essays, and health logs created within the context of a Health Psychology course represent rich repositories of personal narrative and behavioral reflection, and their systematic analysis through qualitative document analysis offers a methodologically rigorous pathway to understanding how academic exposure to health psychology principles translates into real-world behavioral change.

A central theoretical lens through which this study examines health behavior change is the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which offers a structured and empirically grounded approach to understanding the cognitive factors that drive individual actions. The TPB posits that behavioral intentions, understood as the immediate precursors to behavior, are shaped by three key determinants: attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Pourmand et al., 2020). Attitude reflects an individual's positive or negative evaluation of performing a specific health behavior, such as exercising or maintaining a nutritious diet. Subjective norms capture the perceived social pressure to engage in or refrain from a behavior, shaped by the opinions and expectations of significant others in one's social environment. Perceived behavioral control pertains to an individual's belief in their ability to perform the behavior, encompassing factors such as self-efficacy and the availability of necessary resources. Together, these three components offer a nuanced explanatory model that accounts for both internal cognitive states and external social influences in the formation and enactment of health-related behavioral intentions. By analyzing these components as they emerge in students' documented reflections, specific influences on particular health behaviors can be identified and targeted interventions can be more precisely designed.

The convergence of educational theory, health psychology principles, and the TPB framework situates this study at a productive intersection of scholarship on experiential learning, health promotion, and behavioral science. While the literature broadly affirms the effectiveness of reflective and experiential pedagogies in fostering self-efficacy and health awareness, there remains a notable gap in research that closely examines how psychology students specifically document, interpret, and narrate their own health behavior change processes within the structured context of a Health Psychology course. This study addresses that gap by utilizing qualitative document analysis to delve into the narratives and reflections captured in student-generated documents across a one-month wellness journey. In doing so, it aims to contribute to the broader understanding of how educational interventions can effectively promote health behavior change among psychology students, and to generate insights into the impact of the Health Psychology curriculum on students' self-efficacy, health awareness, and overall well-being. Ultimately, this research seeks to illuminate the ways in

which the integration of personal health projects and reflective writing within a Health Psychology course can serve as a catalyst for shaping lasting and positive health behaviors among future psychologists.

Statement of the problem

1. How do students describe the process of implementing health behavior changes through their course-related written narratives?
2. What challenges do students identify in their documents related to adopting and maintaining healthier behaviors?
3. How do students' reflections in their documents reveal their evolving understanding of health shaping behaviors and their application to personal health?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design using document analysis to examine the narratives of third-year Bachelor of Science in Psychology students enrolled in the Health Psychology course. Specifically, the research focused on analyzing the documented experiences of these students as they participated in the "One Month Journey to a Healthier You" project. This design was deemed appropriate because it allows for an in-depth exploration of personal experiences, perceptions, and reflections related to health behavior changes, enabling the researchers to engage with the subjective dimensions of the students' wellness journeys in a systematic and rigorous manner.

The study involved thirty-seven (37) third-year BS Psychology students enrolled in the Bachelor of Science in Psychology program under the College of Arts and Sciences from one of the universities in the southern part of Manila, Philippines. A purposive sampling method was employed, as participants were specifically selected based on their enrollment in the Health Psychology course and their active participation in the "1-Month Journey to a Healthier You" initiative. This sampling approach ensured that all participants possessed direct and relevant experience with the phenomenon under investigation, thereby enhancing the depth and relevance of the data gathered.

The participants of the study were the same thirty-seven (37) third-year BS Psychology students who voluntarily participated in the "1-Month Journey to a Healthier You" project for the subject Health Psychology. They were enrolled during School Year 2023 to 2024, second semester, under the College of Arts and Sciences from one of the universities in the southern part of Manila, Philippines. Their written narratives served as the primary data source for the study. These narratives provided substantive insights into the participants' thoughts, emotions, and behavioral changes throughout the month-long journey, offering a rich and authentic account of their personal health transformation experiences.

Data were collected through the submission of personal narratives written by the participants at the conclusion of the project. These narratives detailed their experiences, challenges, successes, and overall reflections on their health-related transformations. The collection process was designed to ensure confidentiality and authenticity in capturing the participants' subjective experiences. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to the use of their narratives as data for the study, in accordance with ethical research standards.

The primary research instrument of the study consisted of the written narratives of the thirty-seven (37) BS Psychology students enrolled in Health Psychology. These narratives, collected at the conclusion of the "One Month Journey to a Healthier You" project, provided

qualitative data that captured the students' personal experiences and reflections in their own words. Each narrative detailed the health-shaping behaviors the students practiced throughout the project, including exercising and engaging in physical activities aimed at improving their fitness, as well as their dietary habits and food intake. In addition, students shared the challenges they encountered during the month-long journey along with their self-reflections on their progress, struggles, and achievements, rendering each narrative a multidimensional account of behavioral and cognitive change.

The reflections contained in the students' narratives were analyzed using document analysis, a systematic method used in qualitative research to review and interpret written, visual, or audio materials. As described by Morgan (2022), this method begins with defining the research purpose and selecting relevant documents, such as personal narratives, journals, or official reports, after which the researchers assess the authenticity and credibility of the documents before proceeding with thematic analysis. A deductive thematic analysis approach was utilized to examine the narratives systematically. In the deductive approach, data are analyzed based on predetermined themes guided by prior knowledge, research, or existing theories (Damyanov, 2023). The analytical process unfolded in several sequential stages. First, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data by reading through all narratives multiple times in order to develop a deep and comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences. Next, key statements and recurring ideas were identified and categorized through coding, which allowed for the organization of significant data points into meaningful units. Afterward, emerging themes related to physical transformational changes, health-shaping barriers, and a health-oriented mindset were identified and refined through iterative review. Finally, the identified themes were interpreted within the framework of health psychology theories, providing valuable insights into the students' behavioral and cognitive transformations throughout the project.

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to the commencement of data collection. The confidentiality of students' narratives was strictly maintained throughout the research process, and all identifying information was removed during analysis to protect the privacy and anonymity of the participants.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the qualitative data, several validation techniques were employed throughout the research process. Member checking, also known as respondent validation, was utilized to enhance the reliability of the findings. This involved transcribing the narratives and clearly labeling the roles of both the interviewer and interviewee, allowing participants to review and confirm the accuracy of the recorded information. Additionally, bracketing was implemented to minimize potential researcher bias. By consciously setting aside personal assumptions and preconceptions, the researchers ensured that the analysis remained as objective as possible, thereby strengthening the overall trustworthiness of the study. To further validate the data, data triangulation was conducted by comparing and cross-verifying the perspectives of both the interviewer and the interviewee. By incorporating multiple viewpoints into the analytical process, the study aimed to provide a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of the phenomena being examined. Taken together, these qualitative validation techniques reinforced the rigor and reliability of the research findings and ensured that the conclusions drawn from the data were well-grounded and methodologically defensible.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results and discussion of a qualitative document analysis conducted with thirty-seven (37) third-year Bachelor of Science in Psychology students enrolled in the Health Psychology course during School Year 2023 to 2024, second semester, at a university in the southern part of Manila, Philippines. The study employed a purposive sampling method, and data were gathered through personal narratives submitted by the participants at the conclusion of the "One Month Journey to a Healthier You" project. These narratives served as the primary research instrument and were analyzed using a deductive thematic analysis approach within the framework of document analysis. The analytical process yielded three overarching themes, namely physical transformational changes, health-shaping barriers and conflicts, and a health-oriented mindset, each of which is discussed in relation to the objectives of the study and interpreted through the lens of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). The discussion that follows is grounded entirely in the data gathered from the participants' narratives and is intended to illuminate how engagement with the Health Psychology curriculum shaped the students' health behaviors, self-perceptions, and wellness practices over the course of one month.

Physical transformational changes

The first major theme that emerged from the document analysis was physical transformational changes, which represented the observable and self-reported changes in students' physical condition resulting from their deliberate efforts to adopt healthier behaviors. This theme concentrated on the physical manifestations of the students' health journeys, moving beyond abstract theoretical understanding toward concrete, bodily experiences. The data revealed that for many participants, the one-month project produced genuinely tangible outcomes, including improvements in body mass index (BMI), body composition, energy levels, and overall physical comfort, thus affirming that the integration of experiential health projects into the curriculum can catalyze meaningful physical change.

Within this overarching theme, the first subtheme of improvement in physical fitness was evidenced by student narratives detailing increased endurance, strength, and flexibility. Many participants reported progressing from initial physical limitations to achieving new personal milestones, such as walking longer distances or lifting heavier weights, which in several cases led to measurable improvements in BMI. One participant, identified as P3, reflected on the achievement of a desired weight goal, noting that it required hard work and persistent effort against personal and environmental challenges. P12 reported a weight loss of at least 5 kilograms within the span of one month, expressing eagerness to continue the wellness journey toward an ideal body and a healthy lifestyle. P14 documented a particularly notable physical change, with an initial BMI of 40.1 that decreased to 35.6 following a loss of 9 kilograms during the month, representing the achievement of a target weight. On the opposite end of the weight spectrum, P24 reported gaining four kilograms within less than a month, acknowledging that while the target weight and a normal BMI had not yet been reached, the gain was a significant personal achievement for someone who had historically struggled with weight gain, and served as motivation to continue. P31 described feeling physically lighter during basketball activities and experiencing less fatigue compared to the period prior to the project, and expressed a desire to extend the health journey beyond the one-month requirement. These narratives collectively demonstrate that students engaged with the project not merely as an academic exercise but as a genuine catalyst for physical self-improvement, a finding

consistent with the TPB's proposition that when positive attitudes toward a health behavior, supportive subjective norms, and adequate perceived behavioral control converge, individuals are more likely to commit to and sustain behavioral change efforts (McLeod, 2023).

The second subtheme within physical transformational changes was a positive body image outlook, which captured shifts in students' perceptions of their bodies. The narratives revealed increased body confidence and self-acceptance, a reduction in negative self-talk, and a greater appreciation for their bodies' functional capabilities. Students documented a meaningful transition from focusing on perceived physical flaws to recognizing and celebrating their physical strengths. P4 noted changes in body composition, including growth in the chest area, a more defined back, and increased size in the biceps and triceps, to the point where fitted clothing felt tighter, even though the BMI remained within the same category. P20 described an experience of anxiety around weight measurement that gradually gave way to a newfound confidence, prompted in part by the visibility and accountability created through the project. These accounts illustrate that the health journey fostered not only physical change but also a psychological reorientation toward the self, wherein the body became a source of pride and agency rather than dissatisfaction.

The third subtheme, physical wellbeing manifestations, captured the tangible signs of improved health that students reported beyond weight and fitness metrics, including increased energy levels, enhanced sleep quality, and reduced physical discomfort. P4 noted a decrease in stomach pain and shortness of breath attributed to the physical exercises practiced during the project. P19 expressed pride in the progress made in increasing daily step count and sustaining an active lifestyle. P21, though still categorized as obese according to BMI standards, reflected positively on the progress achieved, drawing on the Filipino expression "malayo pa pero malayo na" to convey that the distance already traveled, though short of the destination, was worthy of recognition and celebration. The participant also highlighted the significance of transitioning from a three-figure weight to a two-figure weight as a meaningful personal milestone. These reflections collectively underscore the profound connection between psychological principles and physical outcomes, and they affirm the practical impact of embedding the Health Psychology course with experiential projects that make theory personally relevant. Interpreted through the TPB, physical transformational changes can be understood as the behavioral output of aligned attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, wherein students who perceived genuine benefits from health behavior change, received social encouragement, and believed themselves capable of succeeding were precisely those who reported the most significant physical transformations (McLeod, 2023).

Health-shaping barriers and conflicts

The second major theme identified in the document analysis was health-shaping barriers and conflicts, which encapsulated the challenges and obstacles students encountered during their one-month journey toward a healthier lifestyle. This theme brought into focus the internal and external conflicts that hindered the participants' progress and revealed the complex realities of implementing health behavior changes within the context of demanding student life. Far from presenting an idealized account of wellness, the narratives within this theme offered a candid and nuanced portrayal of the difficulties inherent in translating health intentions into sustained behavioral practice.

The first subtheme under this theme was time constraints, which emerged as a prominent barrier among the participants. Students frequently cited academic pressures and demanding schedules as significant hindrances to maintaining consistent healthy practices. P1 acknowledged the impossibility of allocating time for structured physical activities and described turning to a phone-based step tracker as a practical alternative, opting to walk

distances that could otherwise be commuted, while also noting reduced step counts during the Holy Week observance due to remaining at home. P7 reflected on the cumulative physical consequences of prolonged sitting required by academic work, recognizing that muscle inactivity was a direct byproduct of the sedentary demands of student life. P10 described March as a particularly hectic month due to numerous face-to-face classes and weekly quizzes across multiple subjects, as well as the considerable travel time commuting between Mandaluyong and Las Pinas, all of which precluded the possibility of regular exercise. These accounts converge on a shared reality that time, as a resource, was the most frequently identified structural barrier to health behavior adoption, a finding that resonates with Leonard's (2020) observation that resources including time, human, financial, and physical assets are the most frequently discussed concept in health system planning literature, and that addressing resource availability is essential to the sustainable implementation of evidence-based health improvements.

The second subtheme, stress and pressure, revealed how academic stress and emotional strain frequently led students to adopt unhealthy coping mechanisms that undermined their wellness goals. P1 described emotional overeating and midnight snacking as established stress coping behaviors that proved difficult to unlearn during the project period, identifying this pattern as the most challenging aspect of the one-month journey. P2 similarly reported that stress associated with memorizing content for Anatomy and Physiology served as a trigger for excessive eating, making dietary regulation during the month particularly difficult. P13 noted the absence of meaningful free time and described sleep as the primary outlet during rare moments of rest, as the combination of academic workload and daily commuting was consistently draining. P21 identified stress during particular periods of the month as a factor that prevented both calorie tracking and scheduling time for exercise. These narratives illustrate the detrimental cyclical relationship between psychological stress and health behavior, wherein academic pressure not only competed with time available for wellness activities but actively generated conditions that undermined the students' behavioral intentions, a dynamic that the TPB accounts for through the construct of perceived behavioral control, which diminishes when internal and external stressors overwhelm an individual's sense of capacity to act (McLeod, 2023).

The third subtheme, lack of discipline and inconsistencies, highlighted the intrinsic barriers students faced in maintaining consistent healthy habits over time. Students openly admitted to struggles with procrastination, behavioral relapses, and difficulty adhering to planned routines. P13 identified consistent eating and physical activity as the greatest personal challenges throughout the month. P14 pointed to discipline in food choices and adherence to the workout plan as the primary obstacles. P15 reflected on a previous successful weight loss attempt in 2020 followed by weight regain, underscoring the difficulty of sustaining long-term behavioral change. P16 acknowledged the challenge of self-discipline in the face of an extremely hectic schedule, noting that hunger during school hours often led to consuming fast food, and that exhaustion upon returning home frequently resulted in skipping planned exercise or walking. P17 attributed the greatest difficulty to personal laziness and lack of discipline around physical activity, describing a pattern of thinking about exercising without translating that intention into action. P18, drawing on experience as an athlete, articulated the challenge of maintaining willpower and consistency, describing recurring feelings of wanting to give up while simultaneously committing to persevere regardless of future challenges. Together, these subthemes offered a realistic and empirically grounded portrayal of the complexities inherent in health behavior change, emphasizing the necessity of developing strategies that simultaneously address external structural constraints and internal psychological barriers. The

data within this theme collectively affirm the relevance of the TPB in understanding how misaligned attitudes, weak subjective norms, and diminished perceived behavioral control can disrupt the pathway from intention to sustained behavioral practice.

Health-oriented mindset

The third and final major theme that emerged from the document analysis was a health-oriented mindset, which captured the evolving sense of self among students as individuals who had come to prioritize and actively engage in health-promoting behaviors. This theme moved beyond the documentation of behavioral actions to reflect a deeper internalization of a health-conscious identity, signaling a fundamental shift in self-perception that extended beyond the formal boundaries of the one-month project.

The first subtheme within this theme, understanding health behaviors, marked a discernible increase in students' knowledge and awareness of health-related concepts. Students documented a deeper comprehension of the intricate link between lifestyle choices and overall wellbeing, as well as a more refined understanding of the psychological and physiological drivers underlying healthy behaviors. P10 described how walking became a central component of the health journey, with a daily average of approximately 6,000 steps, a maximum of 15,000 steps on a single day, and a minimum consistently above 2,000. The participant situated this practice within evidence-based health knowledge, citing research indicating that walking 6,000 to 9,000 steps per day reduces the risk of a cardiovascular event by 40 to 50%, demonstrating how academic exposure to health information translated into personally applied and evidence-informed decision-making. P16 reflected on the importance of maintaining a consistent meal plan and establishing structured strategies for exercise, identifying the absence of such strategies as a key gap in the personal wellness effort. P19 described sustaining a minimum of 2,000 steps and a maximum of 5,000 steps per day across the first and third weeks of March, using walking as a form of exercise to maintain an active lifestyle, and articulating an understanding of how a daily step goal functions as a motivational tool for sustaining physical activity levels. P18 offered a reflective articulation of the broader philosophy of wellness, describing it as a continuous journey rather than a fixed destination, emphasizing the role of conscious decision-making, community support, shared goals, accountability, and a sense of belongingness as integral dimensions of sustainable well-being. P30 acknowledged remaining in the obese BMI category while simultaneously expressing pride in having reached the personal goal weight for the month, reframing the conclusion of the project as the beginning of a longer health journey rather than its endpoint. P15 offered a compassionate and evidence-informed reflection on self-care, advising against rushing transformation or resorting to crash diets, and emphasizing the importance of listening to the body and maintaining a positive outlook. The narrative also situated weight management within a comprehensive understanding of BMI, dietary guidelines, portion control, protein intake for muscle maintenance, the FITT Principle encompassing Frequency, Intensity, Time, and Type, and the role of hydration in sustaining an active lifestyle, reflecting the depth of applied knowledge cultivated through the course. This subtheme showcased the transformative power of health education in equipping students with the conceptual and practical tools needed to make informed health decisions.

The second subtheme, adaptation to health practices, highlighted the students' progressive and successful integration of healthy habits into the fabric of their daily lives. Narratives documented the gradual shift from sporadic wellness efforts to sustained lifestyle modifications, reflecting a transition from externally motivated compliance to intrinsic behavioral identity. P1 described the cultivation of mindful eating as a practice grounded in bodily awareness, articulating a growing belief that heightened consciousness about food choices would progressively yield healthier lifestyle decisions and a more positive relationship

with the body. P9 described the discipline required to forego preferred foods such as sweets and desserts, sustain a consistent exercise regimen, and practice portion control, while acknowledging the role of family encouragement in maintaining motivation during moments of near-abandonment. P10 articulated a philosophy of balanced consumption and physical activity, advising that the body requires the right amount of food to sustain energy, that physical movement should be incorporated into daily routines when possible, and that enjoying food within conscious limits is not incompatible with a healthy lifestyle, framing health as something to be experienced with others and approached with optimism. P16 documented specific dietary substitutions including the replacement of coffee with homemade smoothies, the incorporation of salad with preferred dressings as an alternative to daily rice consumption, and the maintenance of a tea-drinking routine, as well as the adoption of dog-accompanied walks as a preferred form of physical activity. P17 documented a structured approach to physical activity that included running around the village during free afternoon periods and swimming twenty laps in a pool during a family occasion in Laguna when the usual running route was unavailable, demonstrating behavioral flexibility and sustained commitment even in unfamiliar environments. These narratives collectively illustrated that the students' health behavior change extended beyond the duration of the academic project and reflected the internalization of a health-conscious lifestyle as a core dimension of personal identity.

Interpreted through the TPB, the health-oriented mindset that emerged among participants can be understood as the product of a positive alignment among the three central determinants of behavioral intention. When students developed favorable attitudes toward health-promoting behaviors by perceiving the benefits of wellness as outweighing the costs, were supported by subjective norms from family members, peers, and health professionals, and developed sufficient perceived behavioral control through growing knowledge, self-efficacy, and access to health resources, they became increasingly capable of not only adopting but also sustaining health-promoting behaviors (Hagger, 2023). This convergence of attitudinal, normative, and control-based factors is precisely what distinguishes a health-oriented mindset from mere behavioral compliance, as the former reflects an internalized and durable commitment to wellness rather than a temporary response to external academic requirements.

The findings of this study collectively demonstrate that participation in the "One Month Journey to a Healthier You" project within the Health Psychology course produced meaningful and multidimensional outcomes across the thirty-seven (37) student participants. Physical transformational changes encompassing improvements in fitness, body image, and physical wellbeing were documented alongside significant health-shaping barriers including time constraints, academic stress, and self-discipline challenges, as well as the development of a deepened and increasingly internalized health-oriented mindset. These three themes together address the research objectives of the study by illustrating not only what changes occurred but also the conditions that facilitated or impeded those changes and the cognitive and identity-level transformations that accompanied them. The findings contribute to the growing body of scholarship on experiential and reflective pedagogies in health psychology education by demonstrating that student-generated narratives constitute a valuable and methodologically rigorous data source for capturing the nuanced realities of health behavior change. The results further affirm the explanatory utility of the Theory of Planned Behavior in accounting for the range of outcomes observed, from sustained behavioral transformation to unresolved struggle, and underscore the importance of designing educational interventions that actively support students perceived behavioral control and connect academic learning to lived experience. These findings provide the empirical foundation for the conclusions and recommendations presented in the succeeding chapter.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the experiences of thirty-seven (37) third-year Bachelor of Science in Psychology students during their "One Month Journey to a Healthier You" through a qualitative document analysis of their personal narratives submitted at the conclusion of the Health Psychology course project. The analysis yielded three major themes that together offer a comprehensive and nuanced account of how structured experiential learning within a health psychology curriculum can shape students' behaviors, perceptions, and identities in relation to personal wellness. These themes, namely physical transformational changes, health-shaping barriers and conflicts, and a health-oriented mindset, collectively illuminate the dynamic and multidimensional nature of health behavior change as experienced by young adults navigating the simultaneous demands of academic life and personal development.

The first major finding of the study was that participants experienced meaningful and tangible physical changes over the course of the one-month project. These changes encompassed improvements in physical fitness levels, including gains in endurance, strength, and body composition, as well as shifts toward a more positive perception of their bodies and noticeable enhancements in overall physical well-being such as increased energy, reduced physical discomfort, and improved daily functioning. Several participants documented measurable improvements in BMI and body weight, while others reported qualitative changes in how they felt during physical activity and how they related to their own bodies. These findings affirm that even a structured, time-limited health intervention embedded within an academic course can produce genuine physical outcomes, provided that students are motivated and supported to translate theoretical knowledge into personal practice. It is therefore recommended that health psychology educators continue to integrate experiential projects of this nature into the curriculum, and that institutions provide structural support such as accessible fitness facilities, nutrition guidance, and scheduling flexibility to enable students to pursue their wellness goals more effectively.

The second major finding revealed that despite their intentions and efforts, participants encountered substantial barriers that complicated and at times disrupted their health journeys. Time constraints arising from demanding academic schedules and long commutes, stress and emotional pressure that triggered unhealthy coping behaviors such as emotional eating and sleep disruption, and internal struggles with self-discipline and behavioral consistency were the most prominently documented obstacles. These findings underscore the reality that health behavior change does not occur in a vacuum and that the structural and psychological conditions of student life can significantly undermine even well-intentioned wellness efforts. The study therefore recommends that health psychology courses incorporate explicit instruction on stress management strategies, time planning for wellness activities, and techniques for building and sustaining behavioral self-regulation. Academic institutions are further encouraged to develop support systems that address the psychosocial determinants of student health, recognizing that academic success and personal well-being are deeply interconnected rather than competing priorities.

The third and perhaps most significant finding was that despite the barriers encountered, the participants developed a deeper and more sophisticated understanding of health behaviors and demonstrated a growing capacity to adapt healthier practices into their daily routines. This development reflected not merely the accumulation of health knowledge but a fundamental shift in self-perception, wherein students began to internalize a health-conscious identity that extended beyond the formal requirements of the project. Participants articulated evidence-informed rationales for their behavioral choices, demonstrated flexibility in sustaining wellness habits across varying circumstances, and expressed a commitment to continuing their health

journeys beyond the conclusion of the course. This finding highlights the transformative potential of reflective, narrative-based assignments in fostering lasting attitudinal and identity-level change among psychology students. It is recommended that future iterations of the project incorporate longer observation periods, peer support structures, and follow-up reflections to consolidate and sustain the health-oriented mindset that the one-month journey initially cultivated.

Taken together, the findings of this study affirm that the integration of personal health projects and reflective writing within the Health Psychology course serves as a meaningful catalyst for shaping health behaviors among future psychologists. The study contributes to the broader literature on experiential learning and health promotion in higher education by demonstrating that structured wellness projects grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior can simultaneously develop students' practical health competencies and deepen their psychological understanding of behavior change. While external and internal challenges remain real and consequential, the participants' documented capacity to recognize barriers, adapt strategies, and persist in their health journeys underscores the foundational importance of self-awareness, discipline, and sustained motivation in the pursuit of long-term well-being. These conclusions affirm the value of embedding health-promoting experiences within psychology education and invite further inquiry into how such pedagogical approaches can be refined and expanded to support the holistic development of students across diverse academic contexts.

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