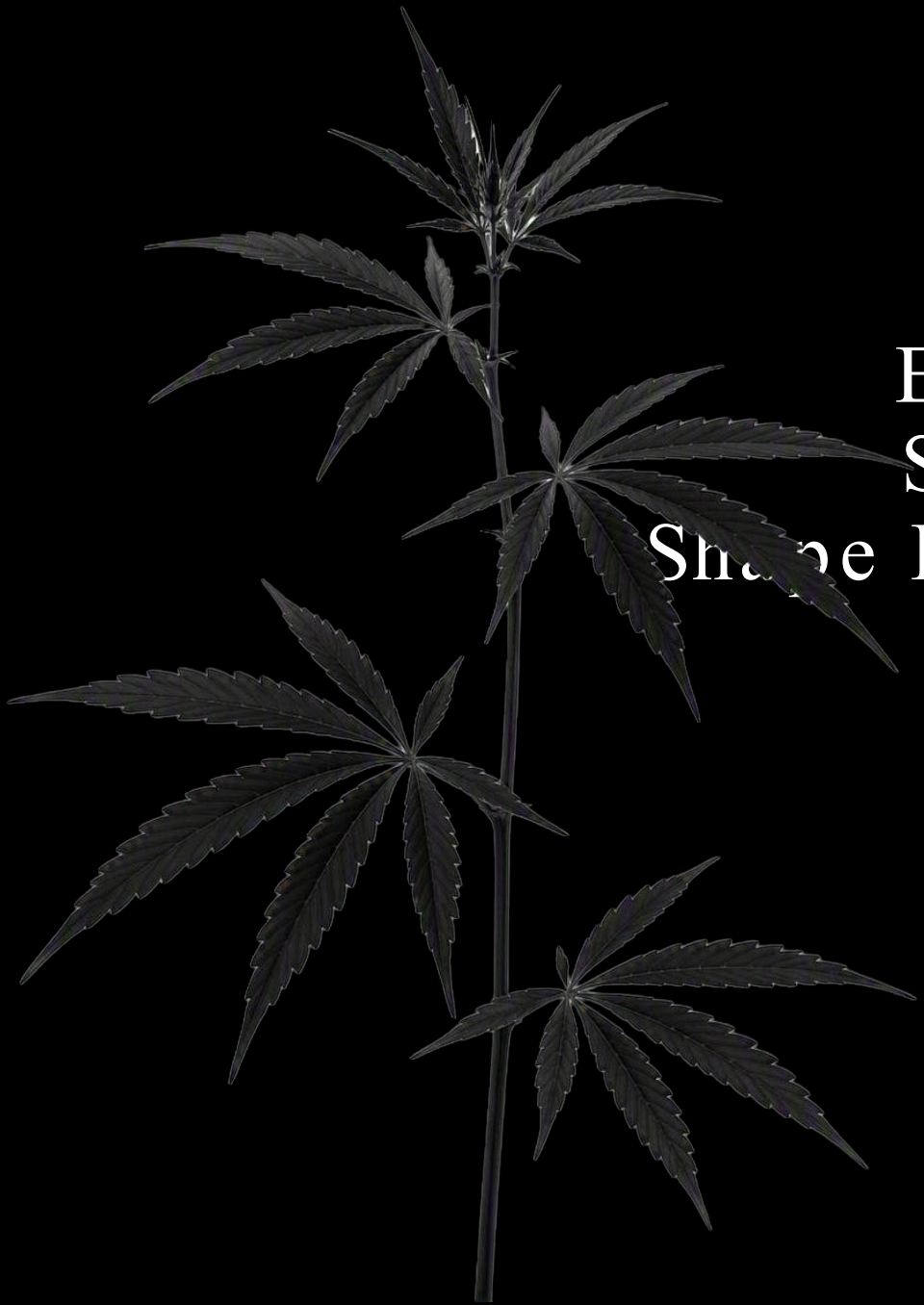




Experiencing Cannabinoid Hyperemesis Syndrome: How Narratives of Cannabis Shape Resistance to Diagnosis and Treatment

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NARRATIVE THEORY

Stories allow us to:

- Make sense of the past
- Assign meaning to people, places, and things
- Shape how we respond in specific situations

NARRATIVES AND CONTESTED ILLNESS

- Contested Illness: Illness whose causes, legitimacy, or treatment are disputed.
 - Involve uncertainty and ambiguity
 - Disputed recognition from medical professionals and the public.
- People draw on broader cultural narratives to make sense of illness, diagnosis, and treatment

NARRATIVE AND CONTESTED ILLNESS

CHS contested by patients

RESEARCH AIM

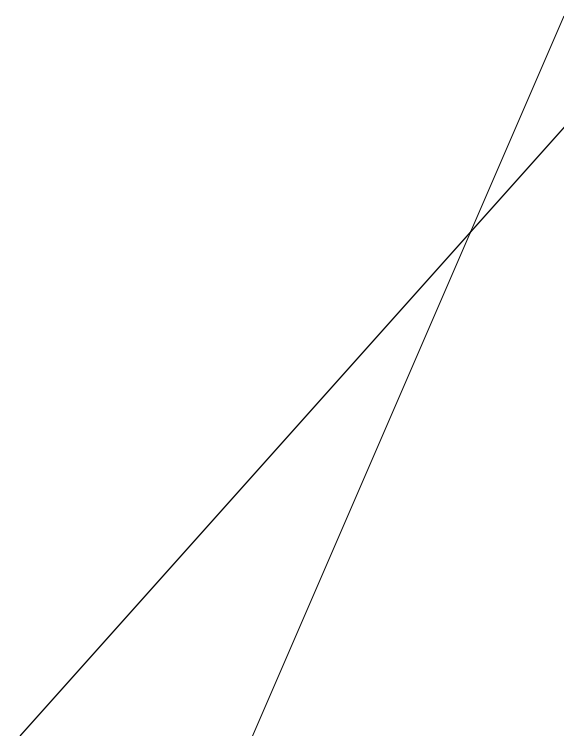
Understand how the symbolic meaning of cannabis shape people's responses to diagnosis and treatment of CHS

METHODS

- Semi-structured Interviews with 24 people who identified as having CHS
- Recruited from social media support groups
Reddit and Facebook
- All self-identified as heavy cannabis users
- Inclusion criteria: 18 years and older with CHS (formal diagnosis not required)
18 formally diagnosed

MEANING OF CANNABIS

“Wonder Drug”

Two thin, dark lines intersecting in the bottom right corner of the slide, forming an 'X' shape.

MEANING OF CANNABIS

Social Benefits: “A part of my personality.”

“It was a way to connect with other people.” –Jarvis

“Weed was a big part of who I was. And then when I had to quit weed, it was like, ‘Well, who am I? What am I without this activity?’ –Stacy

MEANING OF CANNABIS

Mental Health Benefits: “Feels like a warm hug.”

“It was just like it was a coping mechanism for my anxiety. ...It felt like a warm blanket around me when I would get high, and it was just comforting.” –Beth

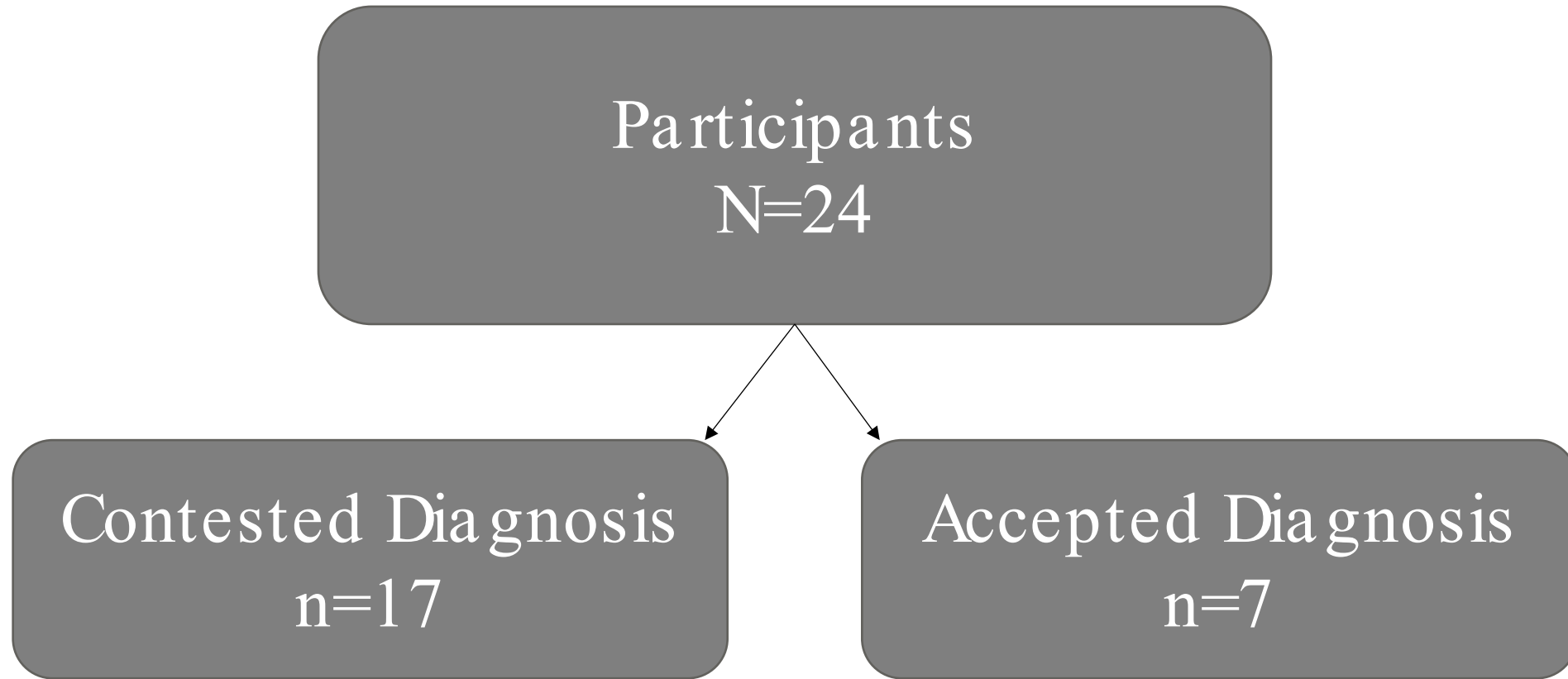
“I am diagnosed with generalized anxiety disorder, PTSD, the whole alphabet. Yeah. About three years ago, I decided to start smoking again particularly for my anxiety and sleep.”—Amy

MEANING OF CANNABIS

Physical Health: “Get’s me motivated to eat.”

“I don’t have an appetite. I don’t get hungry. I don’t think about food. Marijuana is the only thing that gives me the munchies, that gets me motivated to eat. ...It’s helped me a lot in my life, you know. I mean it helped me get [through] some really difficult times.” - Chris

CONTESTING CHS DIAGNOSIS



A series of white, overlapping geometric lines on a black background, forming a complex, abstract pattern on the left side of the slide.

CONTESTING DIAGNOSIS

“I pretty much dismissed it because I was like
I’ve smoked for 20 years. That can’t be it.
And, I had never heard of it before.” – Brian

“You’re crazy. It’s not the weed. You guys are
full of shit.” – Dallas

CANNABIS IS MEDICINE

“You know marijuana is for people with cancer when they get sick?” –Shannon

The ER doctor said, ‘It’s the marijuana.’ So, when I left I started hitting my vape because the reason I started smoking weed was to cope with my anxiety issues, my headaches, and my stomach issues. ...I knew there had to be something else going on.”—Nikki

MEDICAL CONSPIRACY

“What kind of doctor are you? You’re watching like something on the TV and diagnosing me from like an episode you watched on TV.” —Shannon

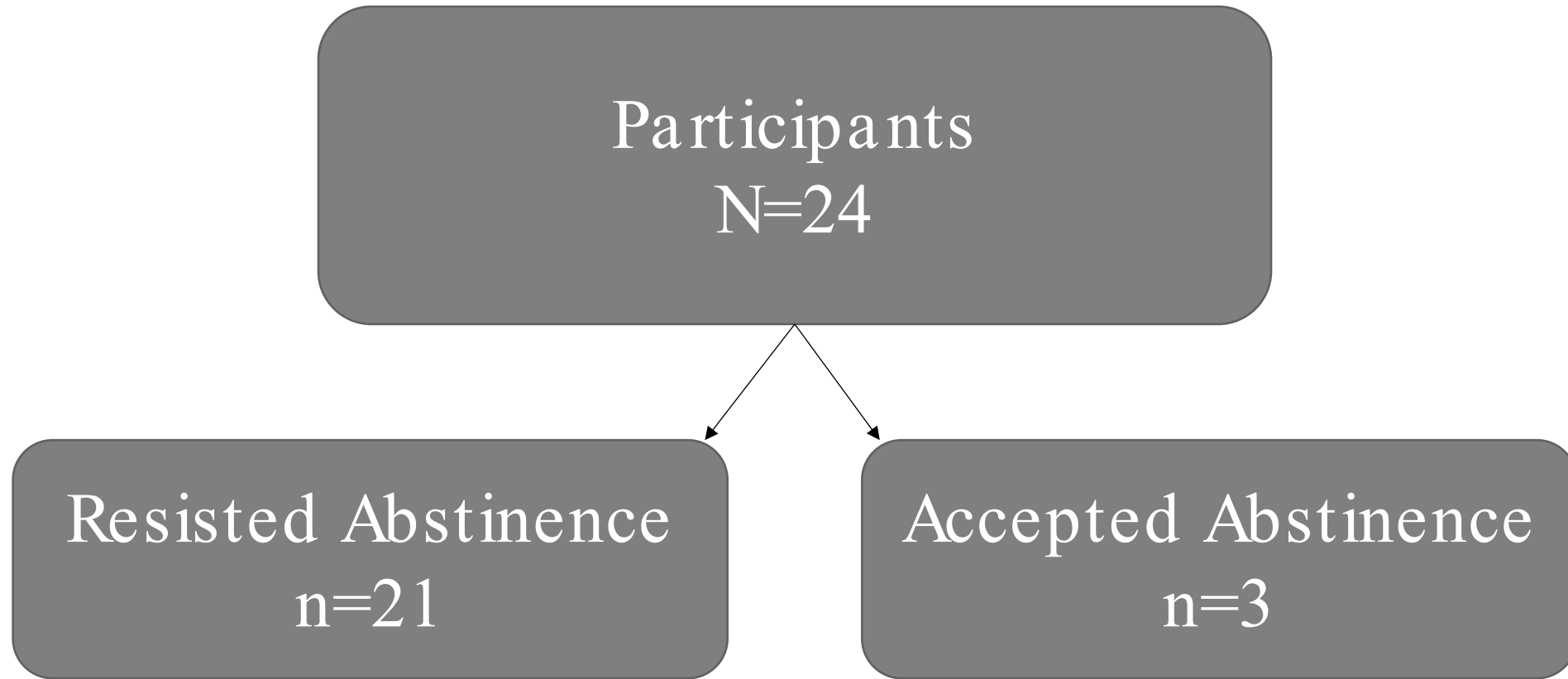
“[My doctor] told me about CHS and I was like no, this is just some conspiracy. ...I just thought is this something from the medical profession trying to take away or undermine how marijuana helps?”—Will

CONTRASTING SYMPTOMS

“There is no way this could be what it is because it doesn’t match what I’ve read online. When [my doctor] first suggested it. I was like, there’s no way that that’s what this is, because I don’t have all the symptoms like my symptoms didn’t completely line up.” – Courtney

“It doesn’t get better when I take hot showers, so that can’t be it”—Jarvis

RESISTING TREATMENT





MITIGATION STRATEGIES

“I’m planning on smoking weed to the day I die.”–
Dallas

“I really hope I can get back to it and just be
more sensible.” – Will

MITIGATION: REDUCE QUANTITY

“I would do low levels [of THC] during the week, maybe do higher levels during the weekend.”– Will

“At this current moment I’ve tried to find a balance where ...throughout the work week I don’t smoke, and then only on the weekends.” –Tucker

MITIGATION: CHANGE PRODUCT

“It’s not actually the weed, there’s certain pesticides that they use on current growing operations ...I did my best to seek out some organic weed that doesn't have pesticides on it.”—Dallas

“When I was having my episodes, I was smoking Sativa. I switched between Sativa and Indica, but now I’m like strictly Indica.”—Courtney

Anything that’s concentrated will ruin me ...if it’s a vape pen, if it’s a dab pen, if it’s any kind of anything other than flower. For some reason it’s always [dabs] that triggers CHS. —Tucker

CONCLUSION

The meaning attached to cannabis shaped people's experiences with diagnosis and treatment

Viewing cannabis as a “wonder drug” contributed to participants contesting diagnosis and resisting abstinence

IMPLICATIONS

- Be aware of how narratives of illness shape people's responses to diagnosis and treatment
- Improving awareness of CHS may aid in early diagnosis

THANK YOU

Copes, H., Webb, M., & Valles, J. (2025).
Contesting cannabinoid hyperemesis syndrome:
how narratives of cannabis shape diagnosis
contestation and treatment resistance. *Qualitative
Health Research*, 35(8), 876-886.

