

## ABSTRACT

**THESIS:** Exploring Stigma Management and Sense Making in Thank You Plant Medicine

Narratives

**STUDENT:** Monica Labelle

**DEGREE:** Master of Arts

**COLLEGE:** CCIM

**DATE:** July 2021

**PAGES:** 107

Utilizing psychoactive substances as alternative methods for physical, psychological, and spiritual healing has been a common practice for centuries. While most psychoactive substances hold negative connotations and illegal status across the globe, communities advocating for the use of these medicines still find ways to thrive. Today, however, a handful of US cities are beginning to adopt progressive drug policies, and psychoactive substances are becoming more openly consumed and discussed. Despite evolving drug policy, individuals who both use and advocate for the use of psychoactive plant medicines continue to face stigma regarding their beliefs and practices. A powerful way that users/advocates work to address stigma is by sharing their plant medicine stories. This paper explored the stigma management strategies present in plant medicine narratives amplified by the Thank You Plant Medicine campaign. Through a qualitative content analysis, two major themes emerged from the narratives that encompassed the users/advocates *Respect for the Sacred* nature of plant medicine and their *Journey Towards Healing* with plant medicine practices. Additionally, the Thank You Plant Medicine narratives

revealed the following stigma management sub-strategies from Meisenbach's (2010) strategy typology: *display the stigmatized attribute, isolate themselves, hide the stigmatized attribute, avoid stigmatizing situations, transcendence, and logical denial*. The theoretical implications regarding stigma management communication and narrative theory as well as the practical implications of evolving drug policy, drug education, and commercialization are discussed.