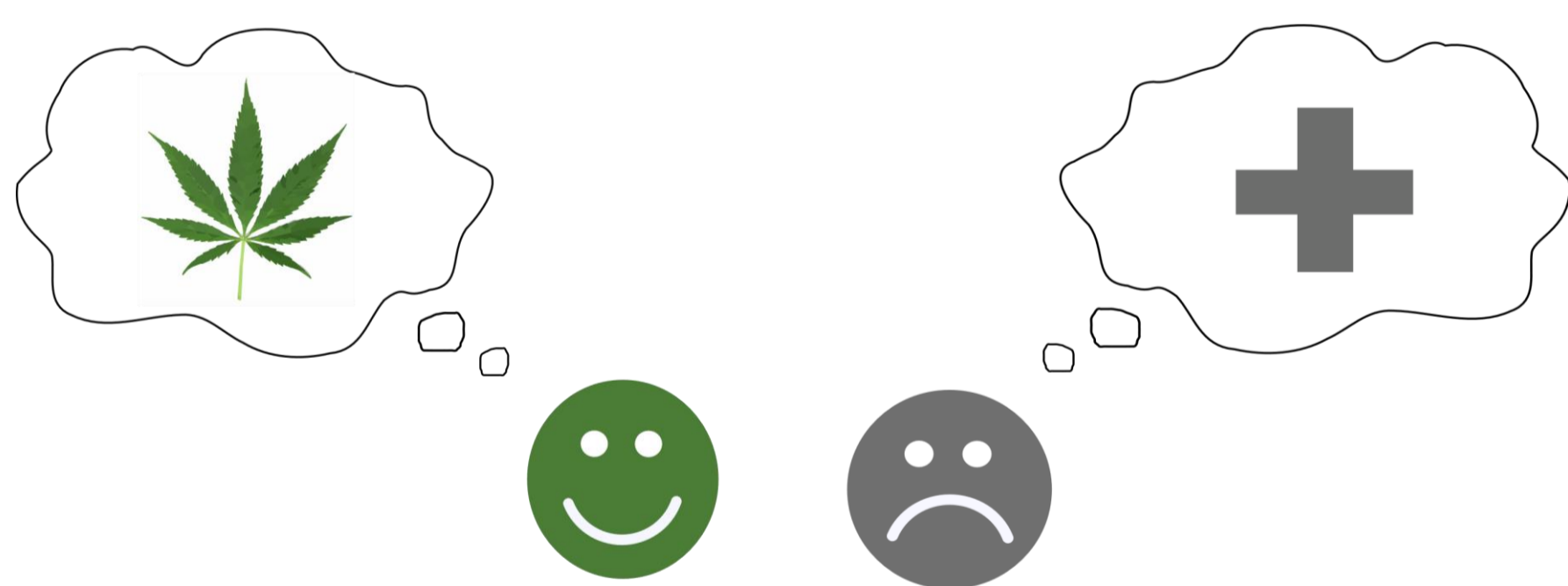




## Background

- Youth and young adults have consistently been ranked as the highest users of cannabis in Canada<sup>1</sup>.
- This is concerning considering the adolescent population may be especially vulnerable to the negative effects of cannabis<sup>2</sup>.
- In their framework for legalization, the Canadian Government Task Force on Cannabis Legalization and Regulation expressed that a principle goal was to 'keep cannabis out of the hands of children and youth'<sup>3</sup>.
- There has been a growing interest in whether cannabis legalization or decriminalization drives changes in beliefs and use of cannabis or if community norms drive changes in policy, cannabis use, and beliefs<sup>4</sup>.
- Research suggests there is no effect of cannabis legalization on frequency of use<sup>5</sup>, however few studies have examined its effects on perceptions of cannabis.
- In the current study we asked: **"Do cannabis policy changes in Canada impact youth opinions and perceptions of cannabis legalization?"**

## Method



- 301 (48% male, 50% female, 2% prefer not to say) Grade 8 students ( $M = 13.24$  years,  $SD = 0.46$ ) prior to cannabis legalization and 500 (50% male, 47% female, 3% prefer not to say) Grade 8 students ( $M = 13.04$  years,  $SD = 0.33$ ) following cannabis legalization were recruited from high schools in Vernon, BC.
- Participants were asked an open-ended question about their opinions of cannabis legalization and whether legalization would be good or bad on a 4-point scale ranging from *very good* to *very bad*. Data were analyzed using thematic coding with two raters,  $\chi^2$  contingency analysis, and a Wilcoxon Rank-Sum Test.
- The Government of Canada may legalize marijuana soon. This will make it legal for Canadian people to use marijuana. What do you think about this?**

## Results

- Six primary themes emerged in both the pre- and post-legalization responses to the open-ended question (Figure 1). Inter-rater reliabilities for themes in the pre-legalization ( $\kappa = .71$ ) and post-legalization ( $\kappa = .67$ ) cohorts were good.
- The frequency of themes was not significantly associated with cohort level,  $\chi^2 = 3.45$ ,  $df = 6$ ,  $p = .75$  (Figure 2).
- Ratings of cannabis legalization in the pre-legalization cohort ( $Mdn = 3.0$ ,  $IQR = 2.0$ ) did not differ significantly from the post-legalization cohort ( $Mdn = 3.0$ ,  $IQR = 1.0$ ),  $W = 78199$ ,  $p = .75$ ,  $r = -.01$  (Figure 3).

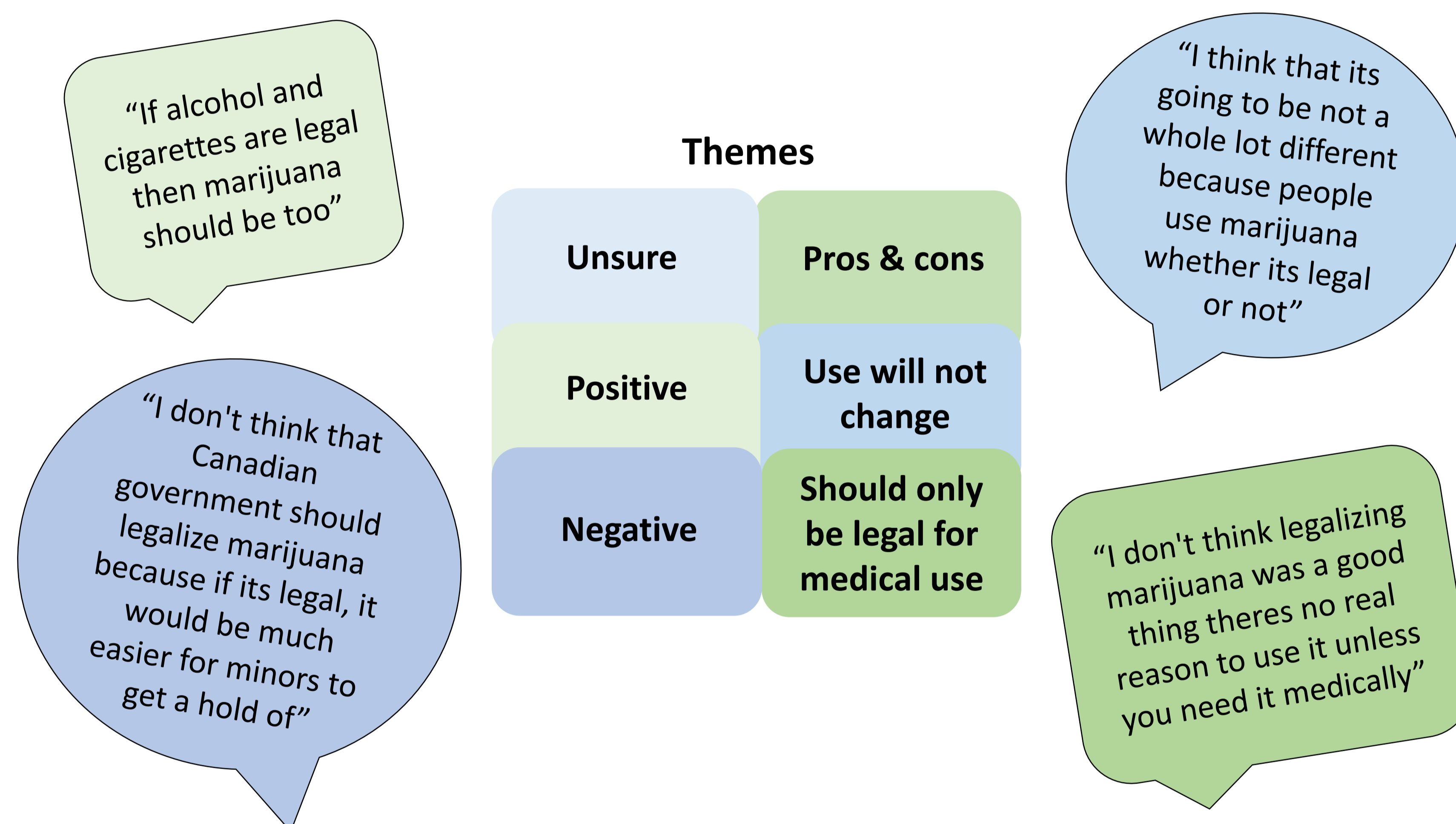


Figure 1. Common themes from an open-ended question regarding opinions of cannabis legalization. Sample quotes from some themes are listed.

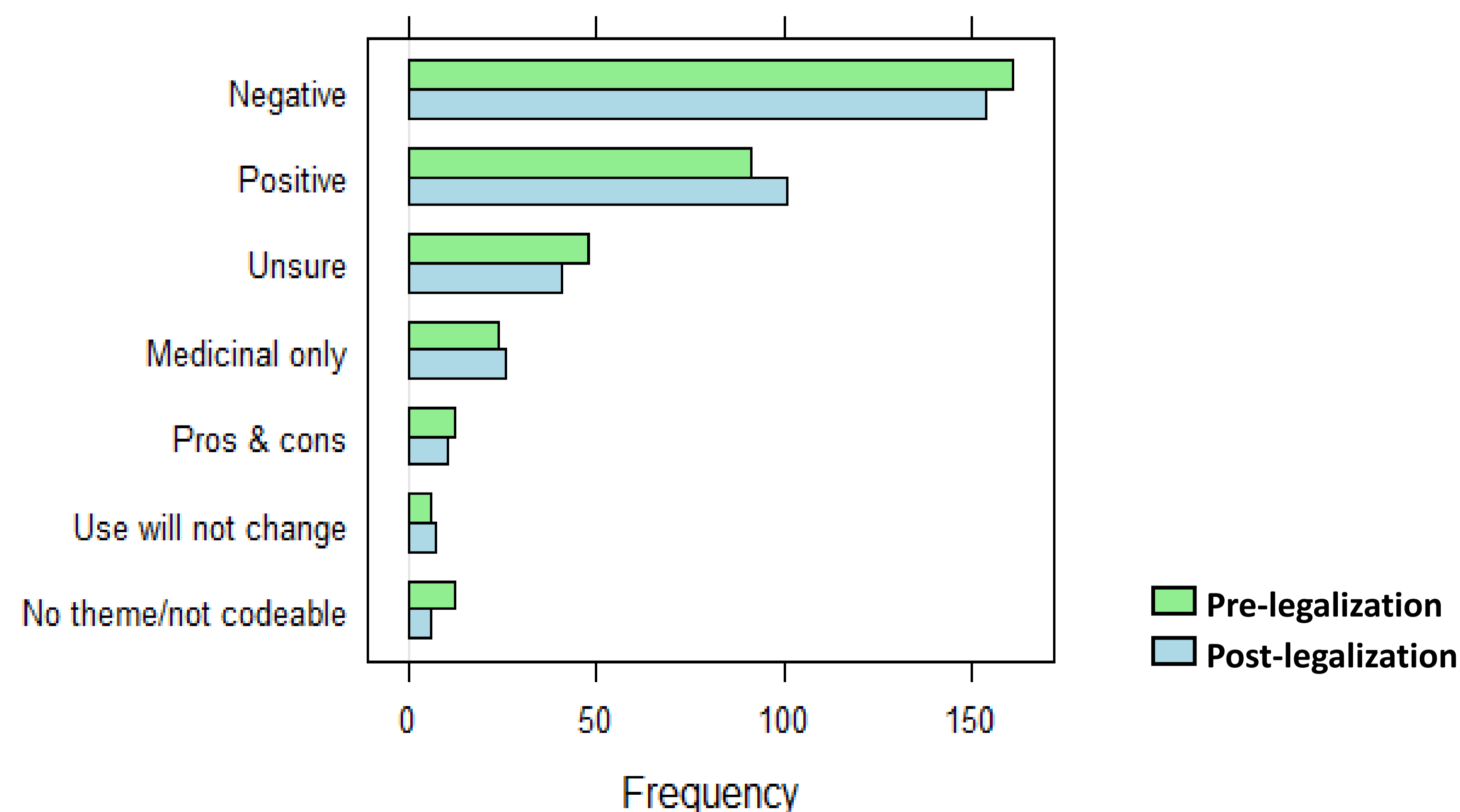


Figure 2. Theme frequencies from open-ended cannabis legalization question responses before and after legalization of cannabis.

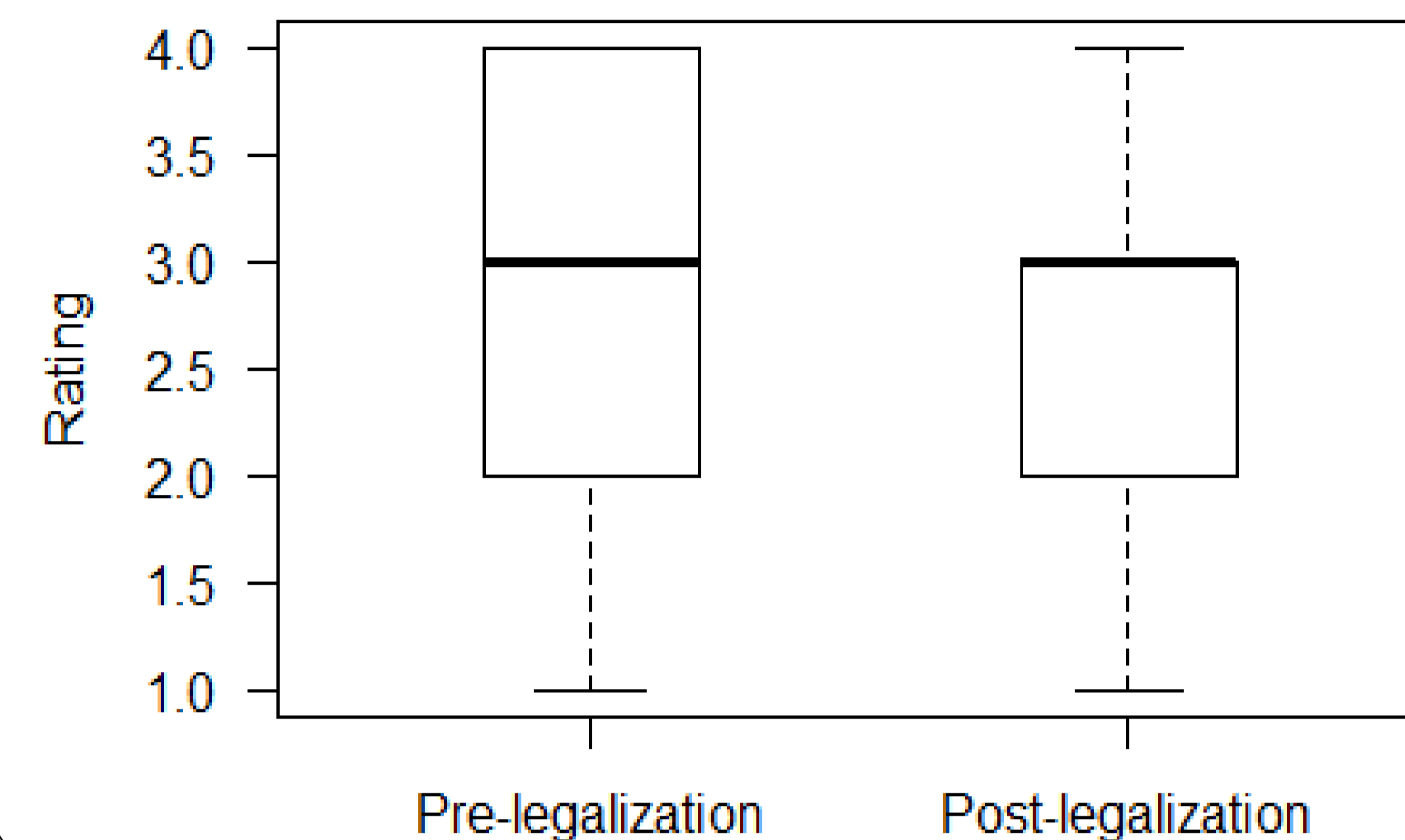


Figure 3. Ratings of whether cannabis legalization was good or bad on a 4-point scale (1 = very good to 4 = very bad) for Grade 8 students before and after legalization of cannabis.

## Discussion

- Both participants prior to and following legalization primarily viewed legalization of cannabis as negative or bad.
- There was no difference in frequency of themes or ratings of whether cannabis legalization is good or bad when comparing cohorts before and after cannabis legalization.
- Results suggest legalization might have no short-term effect on perceptions, however it may have long-term effects.**
- Results suggest that policy changes do not drive changes in perceptions. Rather it might be that norms and perceptions drive changes in policy.**
- Future research should investigate whether frequency of use might moderate the relationship between policy changes and youth perceptions.
- Longitudinal studies examining perceptions well-before and well-after legalization are required to elucidate this relationship.

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