Amateur Mycology Communities

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Mycology, the study of fungi, has grown to become one of the largest amateur scientific

communities where “amateurs” often possess more knowledge and experience with mushrooms

than professional scientists. Amateur mycology is important because it resists categorization into

purely scientific, traditional, or humanistic practices, making it poorly understood by the general

public. The work of the amateur gains power as they combine scientific, traditional, and

interpretive practices that many scientific communities fail to incorporate. Their familiarity with

and wisdom of the land contributes to their knowledge towards fungi, connectivity, and

community. Through my research with the New York Mycological Society, I explore the

expansive knowledge amateur mycologists possess and the ways in which this resistance to

categorization has highlighted the importance of community science.

Through interviews, participant observation, and literature reviews, it became evident

that mushrooms possess somvolunteer -run, the NYMS has contributed new discoveries to the field through amateur

contributions and knowledge of New York ecology. Their familiarity with the species present in

our environment grants them the ability to distinguish and identify most fungi. Citizen scientists

within the organization often conduct their own genetic testing at home to contribute to fungal

DNA databases.

Foraging communities also strengthened over the course of the pandemic. Many

participants recall first becoming introduced mMMMMMMMMMMMMMM֠MM

explore mycology and its ability to often grapple and deal with toxicities in unique ways. Many

people state that the pandemic hindered their ability to be involved with the NYMS, but

platforms like Zoom allowed them to maintain some sense of community through ID events and

lectures. Besides their intellectual contributions to the field, spending time with mycologists

highlighted the diverse nature of the group and the interdisciplinary approaches each of them

bring to the field. Each member had unique reasons to join the group. Mycology attracts a wide

range of members from computer scientists, hotel managers, accountant-̀̀̀̀̀̀̀

to expand our knowledge on fungi and the ways they can contribute to bigger-picture discussions

involving bioremediation and our ecological crisis.

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