

Thesis Proposal for DS1 Capstone

# MushroomCaps(tone): Design Medley

Jacob J Kennedy

---



## Topic: Mushroom Hunting/Foraging

Mycological Culture is both relevant and rapidly expanding making it a great place to start the narrowing process. Having been exposed to the hobby, it was not too difficult to find a researchable question. The research question acts as a navigator for idea directions and is an integral part to the thesis.

How can design elements be integrated into the cultural aspects surrounding mushroom hunting as both a hobby and income source? [6]

## Research Type and Definition

The classification of this thesis falls under a mixture of both descriptive and casual research. Descriptive research dives into characteristics of the topics within the research question and encompasses things such as impact potential and creating a vivid understanding of the subjects. Casual research includes surveying and data collection relating to causalities such as how something can be effected before and after a rebranding. [6]

The research design is also crucial to a strong thesis. Action research is a congruent research design for this Mushroom Hunting/Foraging topic. Action research involves researcher action to implement an innovation or restructuring. In this case, a set of design styles are being infused with the Mycological culture to both enhance the experience of hobbyists and create greater awareness of the subject. [6]

## Thesis Statement

The culture encompassing Mushroom Foraging is an untapped reserve for design work. The growing custom is both a recreational hobby and income source for some. This vast, expanding community has very little branding and generally low awareness. I would like to research and immerse myself in the culture of mycologists and mushroom hunters to enhance the brand and experience in which the impact may spark awareness and future growth of the craft.

## Historical Context and Demographics

The Mycology community has officially been around since the 1960's when ecologist Robert Whittaker proposed a 5 Kingdom classification system as a successor to the 4 Kingdom approach. [1] However, fungi have been around since prehistory and still hold as one of the most mysterious organisms observed by humans. In fact, only 5% of an estimated 1.5 million species have been described. [1] Many scientists have been charting Kingdom fungi, which is home to all mushroom species, with cladistics. Cladograms are much like genealogical trees that illustrate ancestral relationships between what has been classified thus far. [1] This was interesting because it has potential to create visual effect of how large this group of organisms truly is. Mushrooms are only the mere tip of the iceberg when examining Kingdom Fungi, and will also be the main focus for the project. They are cultivated both for study, medicinal purposes, and edibility. Of the named mushrooms, only 20% have toxic properties and are advised not to be consumed. Not all toxic mushrooms will yield fatalities, only 1% have been found to stop respiratory or nervous functions. Species containing toxic chemicals will often cause upset stomach or unpleasant tastes. The

remaining 79% can be consumed and digested, however only a select few are coveted for their amicable flavors. [5] Popular culture has also greatly brought relevance to edible mushroom species that harness psilocybin chemicals eaten for psychedelic effects. Mushroom cultivation has been going on since the 1700's, but has recently gained must attention from hobbyists around the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Chefs and home cooks familiarized themselves with the culinary delights of certain wild mushroom species such as Button mushrooms, Chanterelle mushrooms, Porcinis, Portabellas, Black Trumpet mushrooms, Oyster mushrooms, Puff Balls, Hen of the Woods, Shitake, Maitake, Truffles, and many more. [2 pgs 129-131] Woodsmen whose income source stemmed from logging or ecological studies found an untapped market in the sale of prized edible mushrooms. In the 1980's, mushroom cultivation started to become industrialized through specialized farming coupled with international attention from countries such as Japan and China which cut the wild mushroom market in half in the U.S. [1]

“Professional pickers aren't making as much money as they did during the heyday of wild harvesting, and there are fewer of them- only about 15% of the former picker population is still active- and those who are still picking are doing so for a number of reasons, not least because they like the lifestyle.” [1 pg 42]

Present day, mushroom hunting has exploded into a popular hobby in a great array of regions and amassing a wide net of age groups. An extremely thorough amount of research has generated numerous books and identification guides. With careful attention to detail and common sense, practically anyone can become a hunter! The mushroom foraging lifestyle has also created communities of like-minded individuals who can discuss and learn more about the activity. Nationwide forays and conferences are held annually where enthusiasts can immerse themselves deeper in their craft and hear presentations from famous mycologists such as Rod Tulloss, Tom Volk, Gary Lincoff, or Renee Lebeuf to name a few. [1] Places rich with mushroom growth such as the Pacific Northwest or Maine's Acadia National Park is where festivals and celebrations are held to honor the glorious fungi. These festivals even offer a social aspect. Polypore Pitch is a popular mushroom related game where the participant toss tough, leather capped mushrooms into small baskets at staggered distances. [1] Similar to a county fair, there are also competitions on who can produce the largest specimen or rarest species. These events also serve as a marketplace for hobbyists looking to make some income from selling top tier mushrooms. Another thing to note is that these fungus fanatics are often average people with normal jobs.

“The foray hosted by the Boston Mycological Club was attended by 240 or so people; the usual crowd of middle-aged to ancient hobbyists wearing whistles and pulling wheelie luggage (but who would turn out to be bankers, filmmakers, literary agents, and pediatric surgeons), a scattering of hippies and outdoors enthusiasts.” [1 pg 65]

# Integration

The designer world affects everything it comes in contact with. Every advertisement, videogame, article of clothing, piece of furniture, or software used in everyday life is designed by a team or individual. Why not introduce some design elements with the thrill of Mushroom Hunting? The room for implementation is much like an untapped reservoir of potential ideas. There have been instances where design has been introduced to mycology. Miriam Rice, whom is highly respected in the mushroom community for her expertise in mushroom dyeing. [4] This is a process of extracting pigment from several mushroom species in which she used to add vibrant colors to textiles. She did write a book dedicated to the subject titled *Let's Try Mushrooms for Color*, where she describes the process, the spectrum of colors she produced and what mushrooms were used for extraction, along with what the dye can be used with. [4] The book inspired an exhibit located in the Mendocino County Museum. Aside from that, field guide illustrations, and artwork created under the influence of psilocybin, there could be more implemented. Some key areas of design include the User Experience (UX), Aesthetics, Awareness, Innovation, and Packaging.

-UX could flow well into mushroom hunting to promote safety pertaining to identification and poisoning protocols. Being deep in the woods can also potentially create issues with finding a route back to the origin. Perhaps an interactive application with 3-dimensional examples that could further identify the correct species from toxic look-a-likes would aid beginning foragers.

-The mushroom hunting community could use a design presence when it comes to branding as well. Fruitful seasons take place in the spring and summer months. Between the wet spring months and the sunny summers, there is room for some specialized apparel to be designed such as boots or hats. Since a heavy amount of time is spent in woodland areas, sleeves and pants may also be in demand for hunters traveling in itchy, bothersome terrain. The branding would not only enhance the culture, but also carries the impact of raising awareness of mushroom hunting as a hobby. An increase in foragers increases the chances of discovering new species and growing that Cladogram discussed earlier.

-Innovation design is something that would not only be helpful to the UX, but to the mushroom population. Even though there is proof that mushroom picking is not causing destruction to the fungi population, ([3]) there are still innovations to improve the picking process on both ends. For example, specialized mesh materials are used to replace collecting baskets to allow spores to free themselves as the hunt progresses. Custom crafted tongs can extract even the smallest mushrooms without compromising the mycelium part, which is the non-fruiting part of the mushroom that is

often buried under the soil. These innovations lead to more successful harvests and ensure they can grow back to produce a more impressive flush.

-Packaging is a widely-discussed area of design that has absolutely exploded recently. This brings to mind those who sell mushrooms for profit or trade with others. Effective packaging is directly correlated with strong marketing. A big complaint about packaging is the wastefulness of materials and pollution issues. [3] Having a large audience consisting of outdoors enthusiasts would require a green packaging approach. Some mushroom fibers are strong enough to act as their own materials which could be a unique and green option for packaging. [3]

## Conclusion

Attempting to marry 2 separate entities requires descriptive research and analysis of both ends to gain a good enough understanding to begin the prototyping stage. Extracting the right characteristics from the Mushroom Hunting/Foraging culture is important for focusing on the right demographic and making the most impactful decisions. Given that, selecting the strongest path to incorporate graphic design skills is equally important and relies on diligent planning and execution. With effective research of mycologists and mushroom hunters, I will utilize graphic design to enhance the brand and experience in which the impact may spark awareness and future growth of the craft.

## Citation

[1] Eugenia, Bone. *Mycophilia: Revelations from the Weird World of Mushrooms* (New York, NY: Rodale, 2011) Pgs 38-67

[2] Cynthia, Bertelsen. *Mushroom* (London, UK: Reaktion, 2013) Pgs 26-39,128-135

[3] Simon, Egli. “Mushroom Picking does not Impair Future Harvests –results of a long term study” (Switzerland: 2006) pgs 271-276

[4] Miriam, Rice. *Lets Try Mushrooms for Color* (Mendocino, CA: IMDI, 1993)

[5] Akhil, Sharma. “If You Are Normal, You Search for Mushrooms” (New York, NY: NYTimes, 2013) <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/06/travel/if-you-are-normal-you-search-for-mushrooms.html>

[6] Ranywayz, Random. “11 Things to Include in a Thesis Proposal” (Youtube 2017) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YNkws0x0W0o>

