

Assessing the value of Forest School in shaping people's awareness, behaviour and engagement with the world.

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Introduction:

This report is an examination of the Forest School and Woodcraft tradition within the UK. The focus of this paper is to unearth the central tenants of this movement and in doing so answering one simple question; what potential influence does participating in such organisations have upon a person’s engagement with the most pressing issues of our time? What I hope to find through this research is a correlation between participation in Forest School and Woodcraft activities and a raised sense of awareness, which prompts action, around issues like climate change, environmental degradation and community cohesion. Indeed, similar theories have been posited about how a greater level of “nature relatedness” in individuals can correlate to higher environmental concern and subsequent behaviour change (Nisbet et al, 2009).

I will focus upon the charity Forest School Camps (FSC from hereon in) which differs from other movements which share the namesake of Forest School. (Shields, 2010). This subject matter is close to my heart as I have camped with FSC since I was 9 years old, and the organisation recently celebrated its 70th birthday in 2017. The structure of the paper will be divided into four main sections. The initial section will detail the history of FSC traditions as well as its origin story, why it was founded and where it is located in the wider socio-educational historical context. In the second chapter, the central components of an FSC camp will be outlined in detail. A short survey will be conducted of participants on FSC in attempt to gauge the validity of the hypothesis presented. The results will be analysed and presented in the penultimate chapter. The final section will offer an evaluation of the movement and the data gathered, with a focus on how the movement can help to form a resilient, educated and connected population that is able to navigate the rapidly changing political and natural landscape.

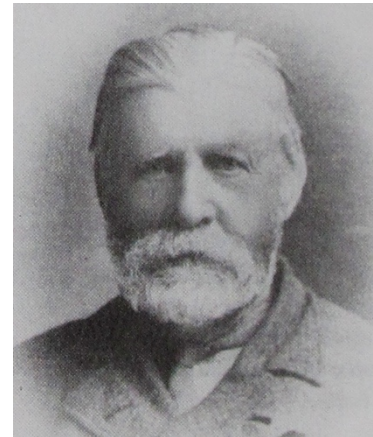
Section 1: The History of Forest School Camps and the Forest School movement

1.1 A tale of two Ernest’s

“A child at the Forest School is not forced to learn anything unwillingly, but being free to explore the environment, and finding himself in the company of friendly and well-informed elders he begins his true education by asking endless questions”¹

¹ (Forest School Prospectus circa. 1931, quoted in Shepard and Jefford, 2011)

The birth story of FSC emerged from the culmination of radical ideas, practices and the visionary people who implemented them. While it shares some similarities with the wider Forest School tradition, it is distinct and has its own lineage. Running from 1929-40 and then subsequently reemerging after the Second World War in a form similar to its current incarnation, Forest School Camps was “...an unusual educational experiment that was both ahead of its time and of its time” (Shepard and Jefford, 2011: 1). The architect behind what would eventually become FSC today was a man by the name of Ernest Westlake, the son of a Quaker family, a geology student and in later life an avid naturalist as well as a keen educator (Shepard and Jefford, 2011). After spending considerable time across Southern England, France and Tasmania pursuing his geological interests (Delair, 1985), Westlake’s passions took a distinct turn. The impact of the First World War upon Westlake was immense, so much so that he was “transformed...into a proselytising and radical educationalist” (Shepard and Jefford, 2011: 2) because of it. Indeed, he was so moved by the horrors of the Great War that he began to ask fundamental questions that endure to this day; why civilisations collapse and why humans fail to achieve “permanent progress” (Westlake, quoted in Shields, 2007: 3). The answer that his methodically sharp scientific mind came up with was simple but nonetheless enduring and apt, he saw the main barrier to progress as, “man’s neglect to educate his children upon his ancestral lines followed by the rest of nature” (Westlake, quoted in Shields, 2007: 3).



Ernest Westlake, aged 66
(Westlake, 1970: 17)

Education became his main vocation, but it was far removed traditional practices of the day. He established the Order for Woodcraft Chivalry (OWC) in 1916, which was an educational organisation aimed at imparting traditional woodcraft knowledge on to young people. Whilst he began the process of establishing a school in the early 20th century through purchasing 40 acres of land in New Forest, he passed away before he could see it come to fruition (Shepard and Jefford, 2011). However, Aubrey Westlake took up his father’s mantle and set up the Forest School in 1929.

Another key figure, also by the name of Ernest, was instrumental in both influencing Westlake and in the implementation of the first ever camp for the OWC. (Shepard and Jefford, 2011). Ernest Thompson Seton was a multifaceted artist, engaging in both painting and writing about the natural world. As both a contemporary and influencer of Westlake, they both, “believed in the educational value of woodcraft- a first-hand contact with wild nature” (Shepard and Jefford, 2011: 2). Seton outlived Westlake and strived to implement their shared ideals about how essential nature connection was to a child’s development. Seton took a particular interest in Native American culture and was chiefly concerned with “...what they had to offer young people- especially those who lived in cities” (Shepard and Jefford, 2011: 3). This compulsion to imbue elements of Native American and Woodcraft culture on to those who had least exposure to it, namely city dwellers, remains an enduring feature of FSC. The importance of Native American culture cannot be underestimated however it does incur some problematic practices. Whilst Westlake and Seton greatly admired and indeed relied on much Native American knowledge to inform their woodcraft practise, they fell afoul to reinforcing certain colonial stereotypes. One such example is the book written by Seton

entitled *Two Little Savages: A Book of American Woodcraft for Boys*, this story that encouraged many youngsters to explore nature does employ problematic language, categorising the Native Americans as “savages”. This poses an issue for the current organisation, who have acknowledged the inherent power dynamics that facilitated this transfer of knowledge.

The first ever OWC camp, led by Seton was designed to be “...co-educational, non-political, non- denominational organisation that practised woodcraft both as a form of education and as a way of life within a caring community” (Shepard and Jefford, 2011: 3). These crucial foundations laid the initial framework for what would become a typical FSC camp, the details of which will be outlined in the second section.

1.2 Trials and tribulations

“The Forest School does not set itself to prepare every child for some academic examination. The curriculum is therefore broad, elastic, combining routine with freedom”²

The first ever camps were not only an opportunity to explore novel educational techniques but moreover to challenge the campers to achieve within the natural environment. This was embodied by the “*Tests and Trails*” that campers had to complete in order to progress to the next age group. Developed, “In place of formal examinations for promotion from class to class, the children complete ‘woodcraft’ test and trails” (Forest School prospectus quoted in Shepard and Jefford, 2011: 14). These tests, ranging from spending a night alone out on a vigil to being able to move totally silently, all contributed to building the social, creative and woodcraft skills of the children.

One such ‘trial’ that stands out is from the others and is undertaken by the oldest age group, the pathfinders, who must “...survey the Lodge Territory with a view to discovering such facts concerning neglected persons, things or causes as they think it within their power to set right” (Forest School prospectus quoted in Shepard and Jefford, 2011: 45). This empowering task of encouraging the eldest campers to discover a problem within the community they inhabit reinforces a sense of connection not only to fellow campers but also the wider environment. Other tests and trails are focused on more practical sensory and interpersonal skills; “the trial of quick sight, the trail of keen smell, the trail of sharp hearing, the trial of the questioning mind” (Forest School prospectus quoted in Shepard and Jefford, 2011: 45). A reconnection to our most basic instincts was and still is paramount to FSC, as it raises awareness of the immediate surrounding we inhabit. Does this awareness possess the power to be extrapolated and applied to the biggest issues we face? This question will be addressed in the third section, with data from current campers to attest to or disprove this proposition.

1.3 Theoretical grounding of FSC: an answer to our most pressing questions?

“Each one of us is as old as the entire biological kingdom, and our bloodstreams are tributaries of the great sea of its total memory”³

² Forest School prospectus quoted in Shepard and Jefford, 2011: 14

What theoretical and philosophical underpinning does an organisation like FSC rest upon? In short, they are akin to the theory outlined by the eccentric Doctor Bodkin in JG Ballard's harrowing novel *The Drowned World*. This apocalyptic literary adventure envisions a world in the not too distant future where solar flares and climate change have heated the planet to such an extent that only the two poles are habitable for humans. While the hyperbolic landscape of 200ft. trees over run with giant reptilians might not be exactly what we are headed for, it does echo some of the most catastrophic predictions about warming above 2°C. which pose an existential threat to human existence (Spratt & Dunlop, 2019). How does this relate in any way, shape or form to a woodcraft school conceived in the early 20th century?

Just as Doctor Bodkin posited that "...as we move further back through geophysical time so we re-enter the amniotic corridor...recollecting in our collective unconscious minds the landscapes of each epoch, each with a distinct geological terrain" (Ballard: 1962: 45), so too did Westlake believe in the dormant potential power that lies within humans. While in the swamps of Ballard's imagination it was the existence of prehistoric creatures and intense heat that triggered a collective reawakening, Westlake saw the Forest School and Woodcraft education in nature as a way to active a child's inherent potential. Indeed, it was the reconnection to nature, through an autonomous and dynamic education that held true power in Westlake's mind. He was particularly influenced by the ideas of Stanley Hall, an American psychologist, who coined the biological theory of "recapitulation". No doubt also an influencer of Ballard's fictional Doctor Bodkin, Hall's theory spoke to Westlake even though it lacked any real scientific clout. The theory of "recapitulation" posits that, "In its growth to maturity the child recapitulates the great stages of social development in the history of the race" (Hall, 1904). Westlake took from this that:

*"Lack of this recapitulation gives the clue to what is amiss with modern life. This recapitulatory first-hand contact with nature; this simple open-air life; the life of the wilderness, the forest, the hills and the sea, which together with his social life was the chief factor in the formation of early man, is what we know as Woodcraft"*⁴

The scientific proof of such a theory is dubious at best, but it nonetheless spoke to Westlake on a deeply personal level. Indeed as he, "...recalled his own youth, climbing trees, digging caves, searching for flints, carving with stone and wood, and yes, there he saw exactly what Hall was talking about" (van der Eyken and Turner, 1969: 130). This shaky scientific theory was solidified, in Westlake's mind, by the writings of the sociologist Patrick Geddes around the perils of mass academic education. This may sound like a Luddites rallying cry to modern readers, however Geddes' premonition that, "...the sons and daughters of tradesmen, craftsmen and factory workers, losing touch with the crafts of the land and being forced to bend the knee to the academic conventions and book learning of the few." (van der Eyken

³ An extract from JG Ballard's 1962 novel *The Drowned World*, pg. 45

⁴ (Westlake quoted in van der Eyken and Turner, 1969)

and Turner, 1969: 131) still holds relevance. Instead of learning skills that would be seldom useful to many inner-city youth's emerging from the shadow of the Industrial Revolution, what Geddes envisioned as an alternative education system was based on the three H's, (Heart, Hand and Head) as opposed to the three R's (van der Eyken and Turner, 1969: 131). These ideas synthesised with Westlake's practical Woodcraft knowledge and laid the ideological foundations of the organisation. The echoes of both Hall and Geddes are evident in an early prospectus of the school stated that, "The child of the Forest School learns to understand that the Avon valley, which spreads out as a picture before his eyes, is an epitome of the whole of the civilised universe" (Shepard and Jefford, 2011: 6). This holistic conception of education with nature exploration, play and autonomy at its core remains the central tenants of a modern FSC camp, which will be detailed in the next section. The next section will also examine the practices that emerged from this model of education and what possible lessons they can teach us about resilience in the age of climate breakdown.

Section 2: Contemporary camps and guiding principles

2.1 A Typical FSC Camp

"Forest School Camps is an organisation that aims to 'live with independence and responsibility; concern and care for ourselves, other people and the environment'. Furthermore, 'the philosophy developed at camp is practised throughout the administrative organisation of FSC'". (FSC, 2019: 5)

In order to understand the potential impact of FSC upon the people engaged with such an organisation, the essence of a camp must first be described in some detail. Put simply, in the words of FSC, camp is designed to be, "an adventure in education" (FSC, 2019). It is of course more than a conventional summer camping holiday, it is a charitable organisation "...which creates opportunities for people from all backgrounds and of all abilities to live together in communities, away from towns and cities. We run camps under canvas throughout the year to give everyone the chance to unplug from their everyday lives and use the outdoors to create a sense of community, whilst connecting with the natural environment" (FSC, 2019: 3). It is run entirely by volunteers who give up time not only in the summer and Easter months to staff camps but also all year round to maintain equipment and keep the FSC community alive outside the field. This crucially differs from other profit driven derivatives of the Forest School approach which have been integrated into modern 'progressive' schooling (Leather, 2016). Indeed, Polly Shields clearly distinguishes the foundations of Westlake's Forest School and the movement it most widely associated with now:

"The historical contexts for the development of the two Forest Schools were very different. Westlake's school developed from a concern about the way industrialisation and capitalism were eroding the 'natural' ways of life, and a belief that narrow and authoritarian schooling could never develop children in the necessary 'evolutionary' way. The twenty-first century version of a Forest School is more concerned with children's confidence and self-esteem, and the way that children's lives are less 'free', are based increasingly indoors, and are more structured than at any time in history." (2009: 22)

This key diversion in the lineage of both permutations of the Forest School is vital in understanding the different roles they now occupy in society. While FSC is still very much grounded in a communal, nature-centric approach, the wider Forest School movement is more concerned with individual children's development. While this is still an admirable and wholly necessary endeavour, it lacks the broader, community focus of FSC which is central to this hypothesis.

Most camps are standing camps, which simply means they stay based on the same site for the duration of camp. Usually a few mobile camps also run, which give campers the opportunity to move around to different sites every day or two. Whilst there is a loose structure to what happens on camp and certain elements, daily routines and practices are maintained, each camp is always a unique experience with a totally different group of people that will never be replicated again.

2.1 Essential principles on camp

One guiding principle permeates throughout camp life and encapsulates the spirit of the organisation. It is simultaneously a question, statement and a call to communal living; 'The Good of the Lodge'. The 'Lodge' refers to the entirety of the camp, which is split into age groups ranging from 6-18 years old. The 'G of the L' as it is commonly abbreviated to captures what underpins camp, it is a mindset that values the community over the individual and encourages people to act in a way that benefits the entire community, not merely themselves. This principle is most firmly actualised through the cooking system on camp, where campers and staff from every age group enter into 'clans' for a day to cook three meals for the entire camp. The entire clan forgoes engaging with general camp activities to cook and wash up for the whole lodge of anywhere between 80-130 people. While this may appear to be a sacrifice, it is often the most enjoyable part of camp for many people. Diverse age groups and demographics learn to co-operate, communicate and serve the wider community, as well as learning outdoor cooking skills.

Regular camp life consists of daily activities, either within age groups or as a whole Lodge, where campers are invited but never forced to join in with activities. Rally happens once a day and is a meeting where the daily activities of the camp are outlined. The importance of sitting in a circle, whether it be the rally circle where everybody eats or around a campfire in the evenings, is an essential element of camp life derived from Native American culture. Signing is another fundamental element of camp, usually done in the evenings around a campfire but also at various other times in the day, with the aim of continually sharing the rich legacy of songs from one camp to the next. Within the FSC booklet, it details that, "Other activities during the camp may include swimming, woodcraft skills, exploring, night walks, country dancing, organized activities in trees and various FSC games. A two to four-day hike, which takes place during the camp, consolidates this knowledge" (FSC, 2019: 4). While this summarises what usually takes place on camp, it can never be considered a definite that all these activities will happen in equal measure on each camp, which itself makes the whole experience wonderfully irreplaceable.

The legacy of Westlake and Seton's keen interest in Native American rituals endures through many of the daily activities and rituals on camp, specifically the, "...belief is that we will only be in touch with nature if we 'sit and sleep on the earth'. This feeling for the wholeness of life on our planet is expressed in some of our rituals and the names we give things at camp" (FSC, 2019: 5). Thus, while some may see the circle as an arbitrary shape to organise camp life around, it is in fact essential to ensure everyone is equally seen and heard as well as representing the interconnected, circular dynamics of nature. These values are carried on to the end stages of camp, which always contain two key rituals. One is Merrymoot, where "...the whole camp comes together to entertain each other with a mixture of songs, sketches and improvisations. At Lodge Common Council, the campers gather around a formal fire to reflect on the camp, recognise things which have gone well and suggest changes in activities or emphasis for the following year" (FSC, 2019: 5). This final act of reflection is an essential part of camp, often sentimental and useful for campers and staff alike to digest the events of the camp.

Following in this lineage, another essential feature that defines much of the communication on camp and in particular in the Lodge Common Council ceremony is derived from the ideas within "The Way of Council" (Zimmerman and Coyle, 1996). This book derives its framework from communication mainly from Native American culture, although it also explores other sites around the world who deploy similar ideas around how we communicate with each other. The most important aspect retained by FSC is "The Four Intentions of Council", which are essentially guidelines on how to best communicate with others. The four principles are; "Speaking from the heart, listening from the heart, being lean of expression" and speaking from a place of "spontaneity" (Zimmerman and Coyle, 1996). These tenants, which are emphasised near the end of camp, are valuable for life outside of camp. Indeed, they represent a set of tools for reflection and communication, with the hope that ideas can be communicated as well as ingested easily and respectfully. While this may seem like a very basic set of principles, they often lost in everyday life but more importantly they are forgotten when communities attempt communicates fears around threats they face.

Section 3: How much does engagement with and involvement in FSC impact people's attitudes towards their natural environment, community bonds and other pressing global issues?

"While not overtly political in its inception, the woodcraft movement as epitomised by the OWC had knowledge gained from work with poor urban communities of the impact of industrialisation on ordinary people. As a result, it was concerned with improving society for everyone, especially the working class, the loss of whose traditional ways of life was felt to be a central cause of social dysfunction. It saw woodcraft as a way of achieving a better world; in this respect its aims were similar to those of the Labour movement." (Shields, 2010: 57)

With all the information presented, I want to pose the question; can the values and activities of camp translate into action beyond the field? Does being involved in something like FSC imbue, even subtly, some value or ways of seeing the world that can educate and subsequently motivate people to involve themselves in activism or community work? Several issues arise at this juncture, namely how can something that is explicitly an *escape* from

modern life be useful in everyday interactions in the modern world? The framework for implementing ideas that are developed on camp are far from clear, and therefore this brief study may well end with more questions. Additionally, the early focus of the OWC camps was aimed at working class folk (Shields, 2010) but the organisation in its current form now mainly, though by no means exclusively, operates with a majority middle class demographic. Efforts are continuing in how to expand the reach of FSC beyond its current demographic, whose financial model relies on campers who can afford to pay subsidising those who cannot. Indeed, the relative but not total homogeneity of campers and staff being white and middle-class leaves lots of room for further inclusion provision. This also raises questions about how the values learned on camp can be turned into genuine acts of solidarity to those most affected by multiple systems of oppression.

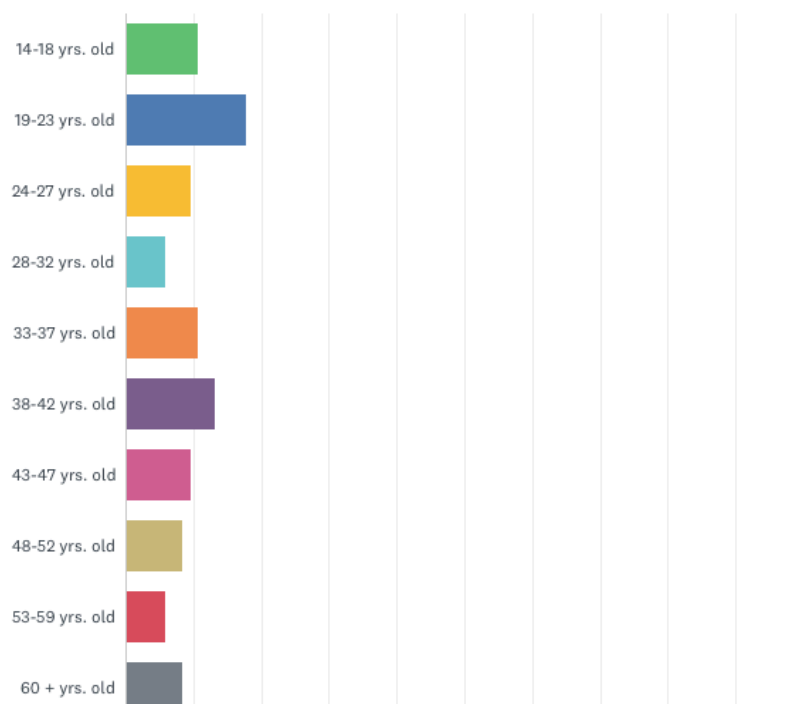
A brief, 10 question survey has been conducted in order to assess the value of FSC in shaping people's awareness, behaviour and engagement with the world. These results will be used to provide evidence to either prove or disprove the central hypothesis. The initial part of the next section will show the raw data gathered from the survey and then I will look for any relevant patterns that correlate increased awareness of issues with age range, time spent camping and frequency of engagement with camp.

3.2 Survey Results

Question 1

How old are you?

Answered: 84 Skipped: 0



How long have you been attending FSC Camps?

Answered: 84 Skipped: 0



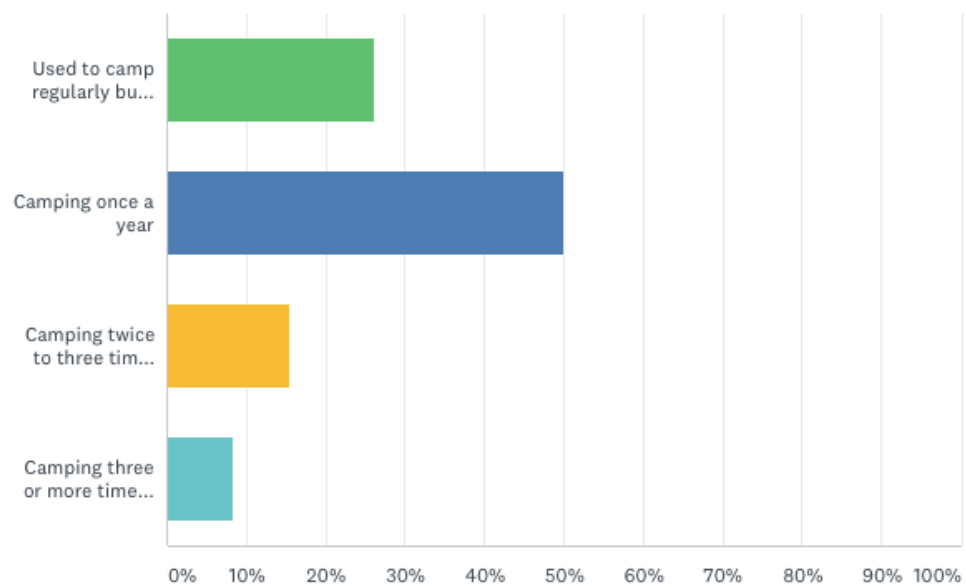
Question 3

Question 4

Question 3

How regularly do you camp?

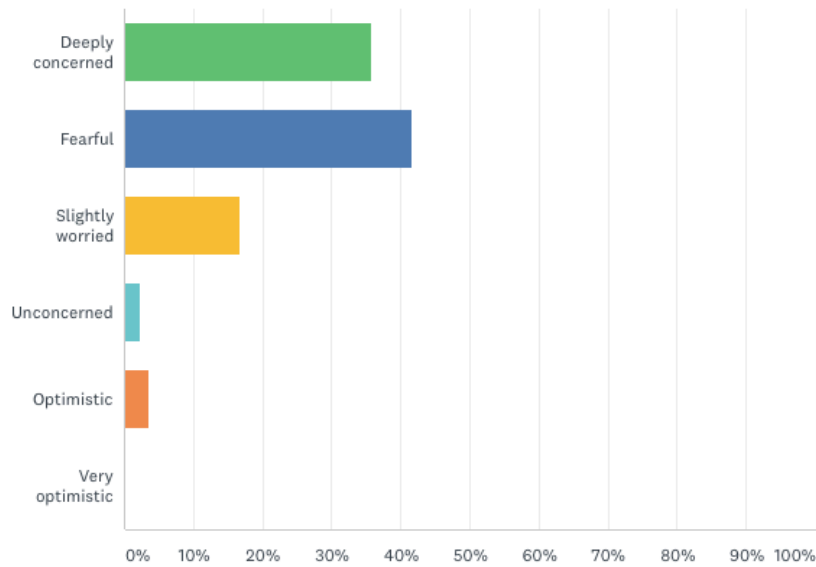
Answered: 84 Skipped: 0



Question 4:

How do you feel, in general, about the future of the world we will inhabit?

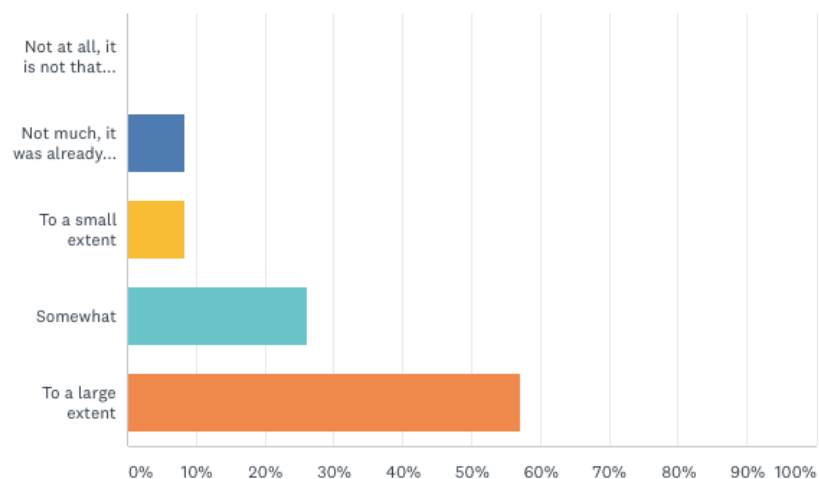
Answered: 84 Skipped: 0



Question 5

How has your involvement with FSC influenced your attitude towards the importance of having strong community bonds in your life?

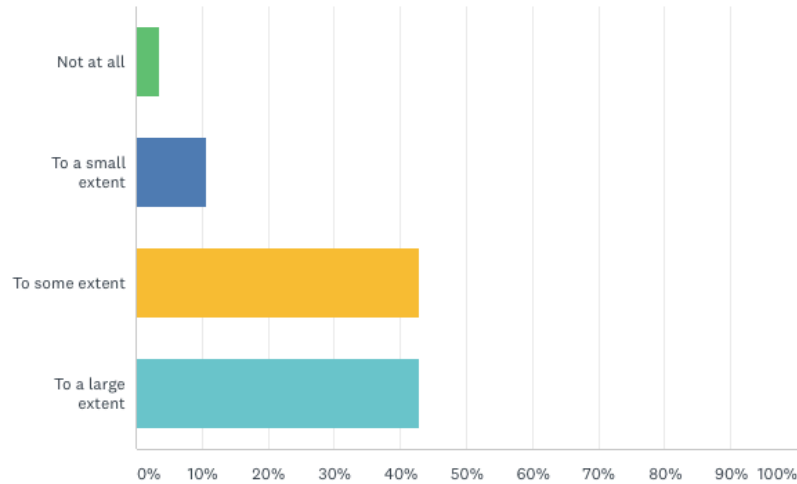
Answered: 84 Skipped: 0



Question 6

Has your involvement with FSC influenced your awareness of and concern for the natural environment? (Both your immediate surroundings and the environment more globally)

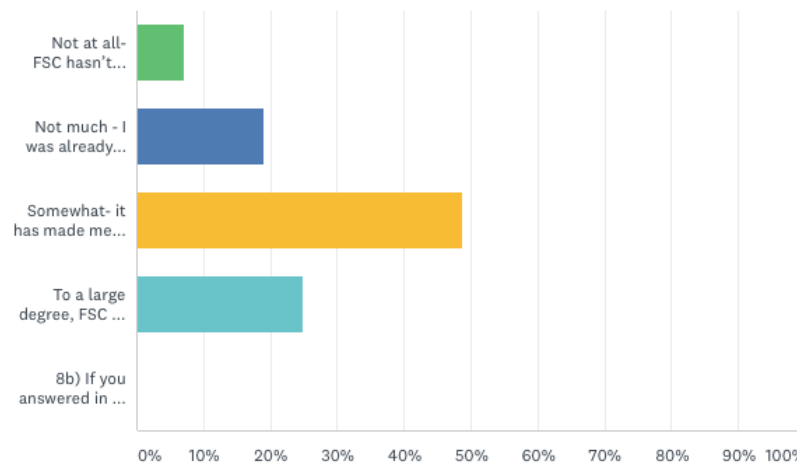
Answered: 84 Skipped: 0



Question 7

Has FSC influenced you, in some any way, to take part in activism or climate change, nature conservation, disability rights or any other community work?

Answered: 84 Skipped: 0

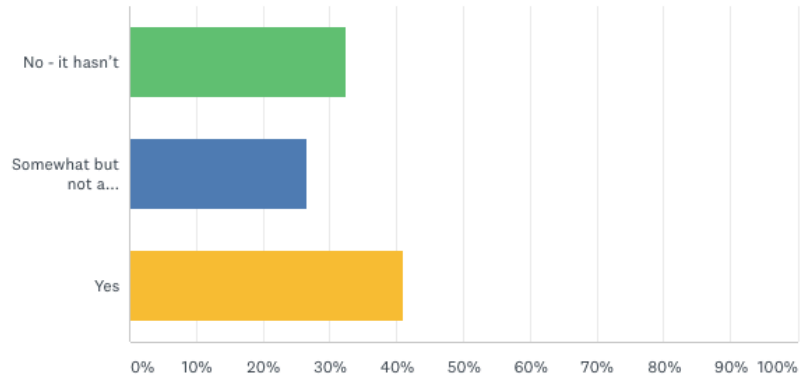


Question 8

Has your involvement with FSC influenced the kind of work and or study you have undertaken in your life or would like to in future?

Has your involvement with FSC influenced the kind of work and or study you have undertaken in your life or would like to in future?

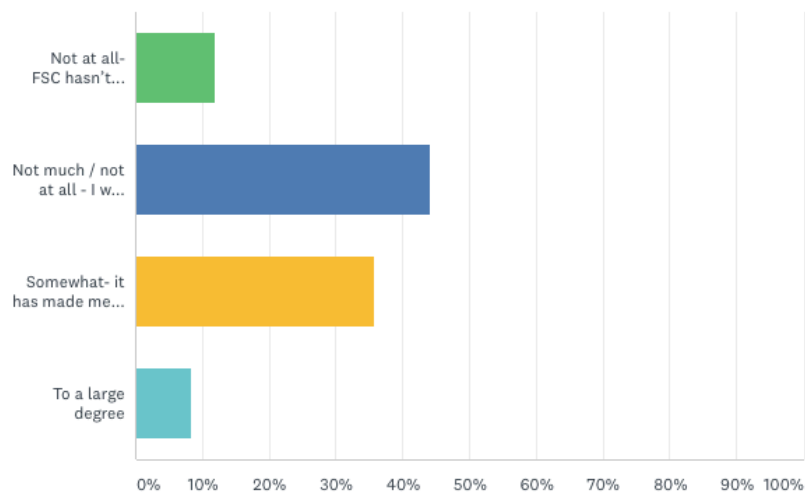
Answered: 83 Skipped: 1



Question 9

Has your involvement in FSC provided any education about racism, historical injustices or any other race related issues?

Answered: 84 Skipped: 0



The final question was a chance to leave any more comments or thoughts about how the organisation has impacted respondents and how it can improve, which will be mapped out

thematically in the forthcoming section. What this small and by no means perfect survey shows is that FSC has, in some capacity, greatly impacted *some* people's attitudes and behaviours. However, the specific trends within this data still need to be unearthed. How does age impact people's sense of optimism? Does camping more often result in more awareness of climate change and taking subsequent action? These are the key questions that need to be answered. Indeed, FSC itself acknowledges that it is, "...an organisation with partial responsibility for shaping the world-view of many young people" (Org4, 2019: 6), the survey results are in general, a testament to this statement.

3.3 Survey Analysis

Younger vs Older campers

While accepting that this survey is in no way totally representative of everyone on FSC, it does provide the opportunity to see how different age demographics results compare. When comparing the levels of optimism between younger and older campers, the results are striking. For 14-27-year olds, over 77% said they either felt deeply concerned or fearful of the world we will inhabit. For respondents over 60 years old, it was at 78%. Crucially though 5% of 48 to 60 plus year olds said they felt optimistic about the future world we will inhabit. This debunks the myth of an overly optimistic youth and suggests that the youngest age group in the survey have reservations about how we will cope as a planet in years to come. Indeed, it is the group that is older and been camping longer that holds out slightly more faith for the future of the planet. However, overall the top and bottom three age groups showed relatively similar answers to questions five and six.

One area that does show a significance divergence in answers is question seven. Within the group of campers aged 14-23, only 17% of them said FSC had a large impact in terms of activism and volunteering. With the 53-year olds and above this number was 42%. Perhaps this is also linked to the amount of time they have spent camping and the number of opportunities they have had to engage in activism and volunteering. Another area where results were markedly different between age groups was question 9, asking about how informed respondents felt about racial issues by FSC. 75% of older campers (53 years old and over) said it has had not much to no effect at all and they were already aware of these issues. 41% of campers aged 14-23 gave the same answer, with a further 17% saying it has had no impact. This trend is repeated across the survey, with the majority of respondents answering in the negative to this question. This result, alongside other areas for improvement will be outlined in the next section.

More camp, more impact?

The second possible trend that could emerge from the data is a correlation between amount of time spent camping and the total amount of impact FSC has on people. Indeed, a majority of the respondents have been attending camp for at least 15 years or more, with many of them starting as children and continuing into adulthood. This longevity and continuity of camp is an essential part of the impact camp can have. Engaging perennially with the values

of camp is certainly important for the degree to which campers feel FSC has impacted their lives.

Of those respondents who have attended for 20 or more years, over 70% claimed that FSC has had a large impact on how much they value strong community bonds. Only 42% of respondents who had been camping for 6-10 years said the same. This trend repeats itself from question 6 onwards, with people who have camped for longer saying FSC has had a larger impact on them than people who have been going for 6-10 years. The most striking answer of these is to question 8, where 57% of long-term campers (20 years or more) said FSC has influenced the kind of work or study they have or would like to undertake. Only 7% of the respondents who have camped for 6-10 years said the same. Thus, from this small data set, a trend emerges. The longer someone spends camping, the more likely they are to be impacted by the organisation. This is hardly surprising, as any activity done over an extended period of time will have a larger impact than one done for a shorter amount of time. What it does highlight though, is the need for early engagement with FSC values to ensure it has the greatest possible impact on people. A large amount of the organisation is made up of lifelong campers, who tend to encourage a positive feedback loop of reinforcing core values both on themselves and those around them.

Another variable was how frequently people camp, with 50% of all respondents saying it was once a year. Does going three or more times a year significantly change the answers to some questions? There was a marginal difference in some questions, with around 10% more of people who camp three times a year saying FSC has had a large impact on their activism or involvement than those who went once a year. A higher percentage of people who camp three or more times a year said FSC also had a large impact on their work or study than those who only go once a year. These differences are noticeable but not huge, unlike the comparison between overall length of time spent camping which appears to have a larger impact on people's views. Indeed, the overall amount of years spent engaged with FSC is more important than how frequently one camps in regard to the impact of the organisation upon people's attitudes and behaviours.

3.4 Comments

One drawback from such a survey framework is the inability to provide nuance and personal experience within a multi-choice setting. Therefore, to give respondents the opportunity to expand on standardised answers, comments were encouraged to supplement some questions as well as the final question, which gave people a chance to express their views. With over 80 respondents, including every remark would sadly not be feasible. The comments are organised thematically around areas where FSC has had a positive impact and where it can also improve.

Personal Growth and Mental Health:

“My FSC experience has supported a development of a core sense of self-worth, sense of agency and sense of connectedness. It has increased my resilience and contributed to my mental health. It has informed my approach to parenting and my personal values. I wouldn’t be the person I am without it and I am deeply grateful”

“Being out in nature solidly for a week’s each year shows me how vital it is for emotional, social and mental health and how hard it is to find it for many people”

“FSC has had a large positive impact on my mental health because I’m able to talk to people on camp about things I wouldn’t be able to at home.”

Awareness of and connection to nature:

“Conversations in Nature about Nature with people of all ages and with all levels of knowledge but all with the deep feeling that we belong in the wild and are at our most potent there.”

“FSC immerses you in a very real and practical discussion with our natural environment right from the off, both by connecting you physically with the 'outside world' and mentally through discussion and games.”

“The whole Ethos of the organisation surrounds all ideas of connectivity, both between humans and the natural environment. It’s evident of its success due to the pure enjoyment one gets from being thrown into the Rural arena, being forced to survive with nominal supplies for two weeks at a time. It’s not only a thrilling and humbling experience but allows one time to think and reflect, teaching one to coexist, love and respect the importance of our power natural world.”

“The opportunity to have a deep experience of nature gave me a strong emotional connection to the natural environment that has shaped my career choice - I have worked in an environmental career for over 20 years and can’t imagine not having a job that is connected with nature in some way.”

Engagement with Activism:

“Inspiring FSC friends communicating about environmental issues 'in the field'; teaching by being through their life choices; modelling commitment to tackling climate change and other environmental issues by campaigning and taking direct action.”

“I have spent the last 20 years around people who have a lot of knowledge about climate breakdown which means I have spent lots of time talking and thinking about it.”

"I think that it has always been very influential for me to be surrounded by people who value/are involved in activism. This means that decisive issues are often brought into conversation and everyone learns"

Volunteering, Work & Study:

"FSC was the reason I started working with disabled people in various capacities and has given me a new way of looking at the concept of being disabled"

"I have worked as a SEN teaching assistant, a rehabilitation support worker, a playworker and now a maths teacher specialising in helping people with SEND. (Instead of following my degree and going to work in high finance.)"

"FSC inspired me to have compassion and care about society, community and my surroundings. I now work for a charity"

"I would say that what I've learned through FSC is having a big impact on policy and I hope it will make many people's lives better"

"I'm planning on going into chemical engineering to design and plan more environmentally friendly energy sources, but I might have decided to study this even without FSC"

How FSC can improve:

"I find camp more about getting on with being a community and working together. We don't talk or action enough with regards to the environment."

"Increasing diversity is something that needs to be changed. Making sure it's open to everyone."

"Although a brilliant organisation it is not at all diverse and so is only enjoyed by a privileged group it would be nice to make camp more inclusive."

"I think FSC needs to ensure that it is inclusive especially with families and children who are struggling because of socio-economic situations. Plus, more LGBTQ positivity"

"Reach out to less well represented groups of kids who might not otherwise camp- best way to educate on climate and ethical issues."

This survey is a small testimony to impact FSC can have on people, however the organisation and the people who make it up are constantly interacting with other organisations, people and systems. One extremely fertile interaction is between campers on FSC and other

educational organisations, often more conventional institutions. Several respondents said they entered into a teaching profession in part or wholly because of FSC. This is because FSC offers an alternative lens through which to view education and learning. One respondent commented that, “Learning by doing, teaching by being is my mantra and fits very well with occupational therapy theory and learnt this on camp so no surprise that I was drawn to occupational therapy as a profession”. This somewhat symbiotic relationship between this camper, FSC as an organisation and occupational therapy reflects the complex interactions springing from every camper.

Whilst the majority of comments were positive, a reoccurring criticism arose. The lack of diversity on camp was the most cited area where FSC could improve. These conversations are begging to happen, but the real changes will take much longer. Indeed, the positive impacts of FSC can and should be shared with as many people as possible. The potential remedies for redressing this lack of diversity must be multi-faceted and strive for inclusion on all levels, be that race, class, gender or ability. Indeed, whilst this report has documented a positive relationship between campers and FSC, many of the campers are predominately white and relatively wealthy. If FSC continues to mainly cater for such a demographic, the values and subsequent behaviours documented in this report will remain limited in their remit and crucially will not reach other groups within society. Positive steps have been taken in this direction, with conversations on camp around the issue of race taking place and examining how to enrol more working-class children to camp. However, much more can and should be done. This will be one of the most important areas of FSC going forward, how the organisation can foster a genuinely inclusive environment for all.

Section 4: Feedback loops and mapping impact

4.1 FSC impacting wellbeing and overall mental health:

“All of us have had the experience of wandering through a lush garden or a timeless desert, walking by a river or an ocean, or climbing a mountain and finding ourselves simultaneously calmed and reinvigorated, engaged in mind, refreshed in body and spirit. The importance of these physiological states on individual and community health is fundamental and wide-ranging. In forty years of medical practice, I have found only two types of non-pharmaceutical “therapy” to be vitally important for patients with chronic neurological diseases: music and gardens.” (Oliver Sacks, 2019)

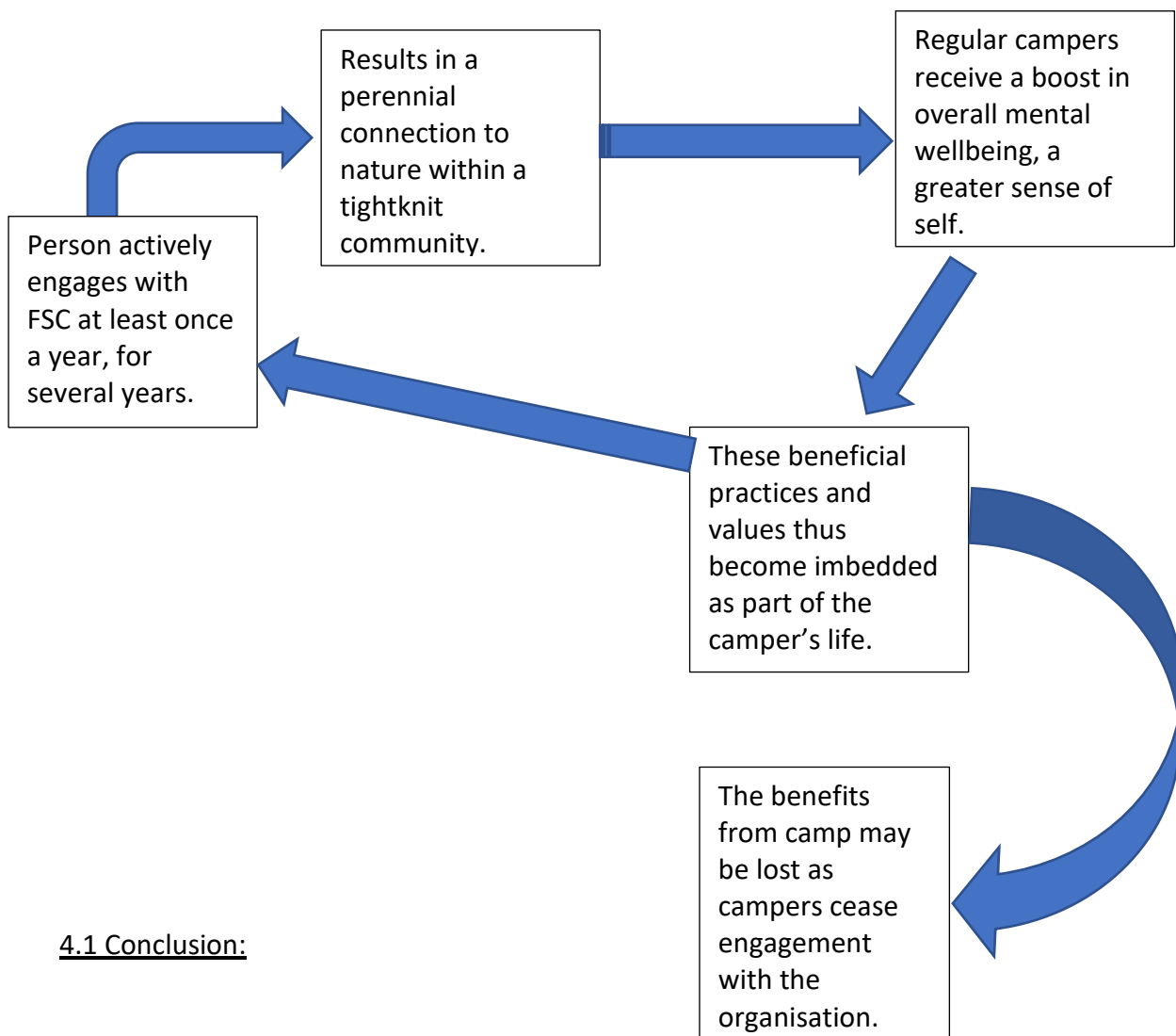
What the results of the survey clearly indicate is that while FSC can and must still improve in terms of diversity, it does seem to have an overall positive impact on many camper’s mental health and sense of wellbeing. This is perhaps, in part, down to a reconnection to nature and having a strong community with a varied age demographic. There is a wide-range of literature that acknowledges the health benefits, both mental and physical, of regularly spending time doing activities within nature. Barton and Pretty documented the short-term effects of exercise in green spaces, something which is a staple of FSC, and concluded that it “...improves both self-esteem and mood irrespective of duration, intensity, location, gender, age and health status” (2010: 3950). They thus went on to state that, “Exposure to nature via green exercise can be conceived of as a readily available therapy with no obvious side effects” (2010:

3951), which would then rationally lead to the conclusion that FSC has a level of therapeutic value to some campers.

Not only does being active in nature have a multitude of health benefits, so does the communal act of engaging in signing. Perhaps one of the most primal activities amongst all humans is the desire to come together and sing or make music as a collective, something that will feature heavily on an FSC camp. Signing or making music together can improve trust between strangers (Anshel & Kipper, 1998), increase spontaneous cooperation between children (Kirschner & Tomasello, 2010) and a myriad of other benefits in several aspects of life (Gaab et al., 2010). Therefore, as FSC incorporates both of these practices in its standard routine, it is no wonder that many people reported increased sense of well-being due to camp. What possible feedback loops are created when people camp? What gets reinforced through prolonged engagement with FSC?

The diagram below (Figure 1) is intended to show how the system of FSC can reinforce positive behaviours and practices, which the camper subsequently benefits from. This is not intended to be representative of every experience had on FSC, moreover it is an ideal vision of the positive effect camp can have upon someone.

Figure 1: FSC's potential impact on campers:



4.1 Conclusion:

This simple diagram merely illustrates the chain of events that can take place within a camper's life. It does not and cannot account for the multiple sites of influence that are exerted over a person when forming their opinions and behaviours. What is clear is that FSC can and does provide many people with a deeper connection to nature, themselves and a wide community of people. This is by no means universal with every person who engages with FSC, but it does seem to resonate with many people. If we accept the premise that, "Disconnection from the natural world may be contributing to the planets destruction" (Nisbet et al., 2009: 715), then FSC can be seen to combatting this at both an individual level in terms of a person's beliefs, but also through creating networks of educators, activists and artists who share what they learn with others.

This report has given a brief window into an organisation that has greatly impacted many people's lives, including my own. As such I recognise that this research paper does not come from a neutral, detached observer. Nonetheless, I believe that the contents of this report confirms what I have thought for some years now; FSC has the power to shape individuals in a certain direction. While FSC is always going to be one of many influences in someone's life, the experiences of camp are often profound and resonate deeply with people. Thus, these individuals can go onto form the basis for resilient communities, with the knowledge and concern for the most pressing issues of our time at the forefront of their minds. Of course, the organisation does need to expand its reach, become a more vocal teacher of race related issues and improve diversity on camp to be a truly effective agent of change. Nonetheless, it does have the power to connect people to nature, engage them in communal activities and challenge their perceptions about the world. This transformative power must be harnessed and used to influence future generations in a positive manner.

While the basic framework of the survey I created has provided a snapshot of the FSC system and its processes, it is by no means exhaustive. Indeed, due to the brevity of this paper, a much more comprehensive survey could be undertaken. This would have to not only probe a much larger sample size but also account for other potential factors of influence on a person. Indeed, these would have to be identified and subsequently compared against the influence of FSC to see how impactful each one truly is. This may even require separate surveys to be compared in a meta-data analysis, in order to determine which influences are most powerful and on whom they have the most effect. Furthermore, a more detailed survey would include more nuanced options where the respondents could give their own answer to every question if none of the suggested answers accurately fit their experience as opposed to a mere comment section. This may complicate the comparison of results but would also add a depth to the study that would otherwise go undetected otherwise.

At the beginning of this process I was examining whether a correlation between attending FSC and having an increased awareness of certain issues existed. This has no doubt been proved, alas as the famous saying goes 'correlation does not imply causation'. Regardless of the fact that many of the comments affirmed the thought that FSC has fundamentally shaped them in several ways, it is impossible to say that without it they would not have turned out in a similar way due to other factors. To prove a definitive causation a much more in-depth study would have to be undertaken. Indeed, this study represents the initial steps in discovering how being involved in certain communities can impact how we see the world. Only through

identifying as many variables as possible that could impact a person's worldview and mapping them against FSC possible impact could a causation truly be said to be proved.

In fact, the very nature of the organisation in question may render such an advanced study obsolete. The essence of FSC is most easily described with language but almost impossible to properly enumerate with data alone. Indeed, this sentiment is echoed in the final chapters of William Davies' book, *The Happiness Industry* (2015). While the majority of the book focused on how and why we as a society have become so enamoured with being 'happy', there also was a deep critical engagement with the methodology of behaviourism and its potential limitations. On the value of less data heavy surveys, Davies notes that, "Techniques such as surveys may have a valuable role to play in fostering mutual understanding across large and diverse societies. But again, there is too much misunderstanding as to what is going on when a survey takes place. Surveys can never be instruments which represent some set of quasi-natural, objective facts; rather they are useful and interesting ways of engaging with people, probing for their answers" (2016: 266). This report has been an example of Davies' suggestion that sometimes surveys with less emphasis on data and more on allowing people to express themselves can insight that large data sets may miss altogether. This is not to say larger sets of data would not be useful, they clearly would have some benefit, moreover that unless this is supplemented by actual testimony then the essence of FSC's influence can never become totally clear.

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