



OUR LIVES IN METRICS

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My mornings begin with eggs, coffee and a feeling of shame creeping in when I think about how at the age of 21, I am only in my second year of university. I think about the people I come across on a daily basis, some my age who just graduated, and some one or two years younger but a year ahead. What I often seem to forget are all the qualitative aspects of the twenty one years I have been alive, and among these experiences are memories of obsessing over numbers like age and test marks and then worrying and obsessing over them again despite remembering how awful it felt.

For many of us, it begins at birth when parents engage in the common practice of lowering their children's age in their birth certificates so as to allow them to work a few more years after they've crossed the age of retirement. In school, we learn to be disparaging of the child who had to stay back in the same grade, not just because we automatically assume the child isn't intelligent, but because the child is sometimes considered too old to be in the class with the

other slightly younger kids. This then goes on all the way to university and workplaces. Just think for a moment about all the high school seniors who decide which university to apply to solely by looking at the QS Rankings and completely disregarding the many other factors which will affect their quality of life when they go to university. Adjusting to a new environment and a different system of education is stressful enough, but making the mistake of thinking a university occupying the first place in a list is the best place for you could cause you to make a preventable mistake that you would regret making for nearly half a decade.

But it isn't only during major transitions and events that numbers have an influence on how we feel about a situation. Metrics affect our lives in myriad ways on a daily basis. These can range from the hours we spend trying to do something productive to the number of hours wasted in traffic. However, in this process, we often forget about effectiveness, because if you're like me, you often spend hours rereading lines without absorbing any information. And being

stuck in traffic, doesn't mean you can't use the time efficiently either. But it's difficult to escape numbers.

From the music we enjoy to the sports we watch with devotion, metrics are ubiquitous. Think calories, grades, temperature, weight, likes, GDP, Billboard Hot 100, the 10,000 hours supposedly needed to perfect a skill – the list is never-ending. We are taught to believe in them, and often don't look deeper into what it means, its history, and the context. A day where the temperature is 40 degrees Celsius will be a different day for people out in the sun and those inside an air conditioned room. Moreover, metrics are often subjective, and sometimes don't show us the right picture. A TED-Ed video titled "How statistics can be misleading" explains the problems of blindly believing the numbers we see.

So great is our reliance on statistics and other numerical information that we forget some of the basic abilities we already have, such as our intuition. Ian Leslie's article named "The Data or The Hunch" explores this issue. The article talks about John Hammond, the man who discovered legends such as Bob

Dylan and Billie Holiday because he had faith in what he felt; he didn't need data. It concludes that despite the many faults humans make when taking decisions, human judgment is still valuable in our current data-driven worlds.

We can't measure our feelings of sadness and happiness the way we measure our sugar levels and temperature. Fanny Farmer's revolutionary system of measurement works because they are for ingredients, not humans. But in this race we keep participating in, we forget that unlike ingredients, we are not inanimate. It is important to realise that thinking about these numbers are never beneficial for anyone. You can't quantify your experiences nor can you measure the value of your life through numbers and percentages. Every human experience is unique, but numbers strip away all that which makes them different and valuable. So the next time you feel a little less because of some numbers, it might be worthwhile to remember that a life can't be defined by metrics.

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