

Measuring life in an age of numbers

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You are born and the whole house resonates with pure joy! The scales tip, showing so many kilograms... "that's great, a healthy baby"... because if the number is lower, it's seen as a cause for concern.

As you grow up, each year, on your birthday, you smile and answer with pride the question "How old are you now?" One, two, three, four, five! You eagerly blow out the candles each year, your grin broadening with each passing birthday because you are another year older, another number higher. The digits rise and it fills you with immense happiness.

You begin your educational journey, and figures quickly become your friends as you gradually grasp the multiplication tables, learn addition, navigate through subtraction, and later, tackle multiplication and division. The world of numbers seems wonderful and endlessly fascinating.

You continue through your school years, but suddenly, as you reach the year's end, you're handed a report card. Instantly, numbers transform - now they are formidable, holding weight only in those subjects where your marks are high, your performance stellar.

With each year, the ritual of blowing out more candles continues, but paradoxically, the bigger the number, the smaller your smile grows. The thought starts to weigh on you: "To get into my dream subject and university, I must score well. Only then can I secure a future that's financially stable." Slowly, you begin to unravel how, in these formative years, numbers start to sculpt your identity. "That's Eleni; she's an exceptional person. Her

grades are always high." This idea perpetuates a stereotype, insinuating that those who don't score high aren't as worthy or commendable.

Unknowingly, your self-worth and identity begin to merge with this impersonal, calculating nature of numerical evaluations. The direction of your life, whether heading towards further education or jumping straight into the workforce, seems dictated by numerical values.

And as the fabric of society weaves itself more tightly around data, your awareness sharpens on how crucial it is to interpret and assess these digits. In a world increasingly governed by data, the influence and might of numbers swell. They are omnipresent, determining the status and impact of academic publications, affecting careers and reputations in both 3-star and 4-star rated journals. You pause, a sudden realisation dawning upon you- am I too just a number?

Each year, as you step into your workplace, these numerical assessments reform into a topic of professional discussions. Feedback from students, intended to enhance course quality, subtly morphs into another form of scoring. Finding success in your career is often measured by high scores and prolific publishing, metrics that seem to overshadow other qualities.

It dawns on you, perhaps with a touch of melancholy, that you are valued, you are seen, almost exclusively through the lens of measurability. It provokes a question, often unspoken but deeply felt- do we truly only matter when we are measured?