

The Data Don't Matter

Last week I read an article about how research shows screen time and social media are causing kids to be less active, more depressed, lonely, and unsatisfied.

Then I read an article about how research shows screen time and social media aren't actually hurting kids, but adults.

Both were sort of interesting I guess. But here's the thing: whenever I see "Research shows", or, "Study finds", I treat it as entertainment, not enlightenment.

It's easy to start reading these articles and looking into research on everything, and getting sucked down a "what if" negativity hole, crippled by questions of what the data say about your every decision and how it will affect you or your children.

The studies don't mean squat for you and your children.

My kids have some clear challenges and opportunities because of their digital immersion. None of those changed because someone did some research. My kids' unique screen time pros/cons existed before I read stats from a study, and they exist after.

The only study I really care about in an actionable way is the study of my own situation.

Reading about effects on others can be helpful in framing things, but I'm not an average data point, I'm an individual person who has to live an actual - not aggregated - life.

This is great news!

It means I don't have to read a bunch of competing studies and decide the 'right' side and choose the One True Course of action for humanity. I don't need to get baited into a binary debate. I can ignore all of that. I just have to decide my own relationship to screens (or diet, exercise, caffeine, work, or whatever else is being studied in a public panic).

If I lived my life by studies, I'd look more like a pathetic schizophrenic than a happy person.