

This week's question to consider:

Why has laziness become the descriptor for rest? Is laziness the vice it is purported to be?

Pro tip: There is no need to focus on laziness the way we do. There is rest, and there is doing, and both are valid aspects of the human experience.

"Lazy" is a word often imbued with feelings of guilt. It can trigger feelings of worthlessness and is often used self-deprecatingly.

As a motivator, it isn't very effective. So why do we use this word? And what do we really mean when we use this word? Let's talk about it.

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, to be lazy is to be "disinclined to activity or exertion", or "encouraging inactivity or indolence."

Well. That is certainly not a good thing, is it!

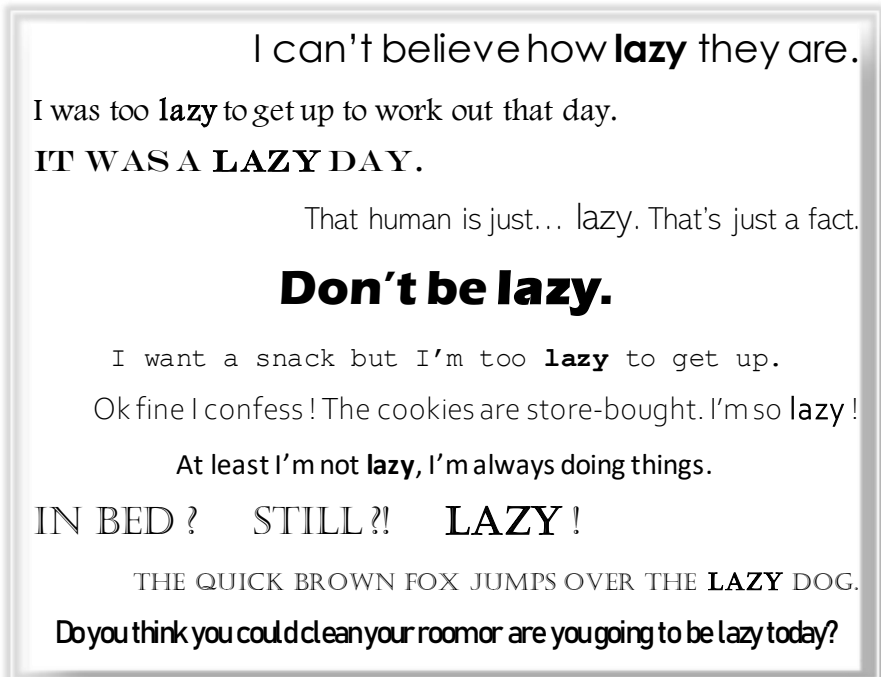
But wait. Is it? Isn't that... rest?

We live in a culture that prizes work, effort, and performance. This is, of course, a valid way of existing, but it cannot exist without its balancing side. This balance lies in mental health. We talk about that a lot in general terms, but what does it mean? How is it related to work?

Well, a subtle undertone exists around work in our society: *If it won't sell, it's not worth making. If I can't be at the top, why bother doing it at all?*

Happily, a shift is happening, which has perhaps been spurred on by the global pandemic and its innumerable consequences. People are beginning to wonder why they are working so hard and reconsidering the need to have to continue working as hard going forward.

Work is prized, laziness is abhorred. But are we using this term, "laziness" correctly?



Laziness is entwined with negative connotation. Conflating rest and laziness so that both mean an unwillingness to do something can be harmful.

Consider, for a moment, those who would like to do a thing (*e.g.*: work long hours to finish a project, join the dance troupe, wake up at 6am to work out, socialize with you, etc.) but, for a variety of reasons (*e.g.*: overwhelm, physicality, disability, capability, finances, etc.), they literally cannot.

And with this in mind, ask yourself:

Is it lazy to stay in on a beautiful sunshine filled day if your body is refusing to cooperate? Or is rest, necessary to opt out, and feeling badly about it offers unnecessary stress?

Is it lazy to skip a workout if your knee hurts? Or is it rest, necessary to allow time for it to heal?

Is it lazy to order a meal when you are a full-time working human who has no time to devote to learning to cook? Or is it rest, and has this outsourcing of tasks we cannot complete alone been the norm since the dawn of humanity? (I'll answer that last one, even though it's rhetorical: people have been outsourcing cooking since long before industrialization.)

How we think about rest affects how we talk to ourselves, and how we talk to and perceive others. How we talk to students about laziness also contributes to helping them form opinions about their own abilities and even their very character. The act of calling an action lazy when we don't have the full context can be a form of vilifying rest.

In my last column, I signed off with "rest is resistance", and beautiful people, I meant it. Part of the scope of human experience is taking in moments of rest. There is nothing lazy about wanting to live the full spectrum of the human experience, rather than a narrow version of it. I can't recall the source of the following summary phrase, but I love it:

You are a human being, not a human doing.

It's right there in the definition of what it is to be alive.

Recommended Reading:

Book by Dr. Devon Price (January 2021) | [Laziness Does Not Exist](#)

Normalizing the beauty of necessary downtime,

Your friendly neighbourhood Anti-Racism & Equity Coach
Therese Trofimencoff (*she/her/they*)