

How Rest Is An Act Of Resistance For Black People

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Rest isn't unproductive. For the Black community, it's necessary for survival.

The benefits of rest are well-known: It's rejuvenating, calming and necessary for someone's mental and physical health.

The importance of rest is even more significant for Black people, according to [Tricia Hersey](#), an activist and the founder of [the Nap Ministry](#), a collective that describes itself as an organization that examines "the liberating power of naps."

Hersey created the popular concept known as "Rest is Resistance," a framework that is inspired by Black radical thought, liberation theology, Afrofuturism and more, [according to the Nap Ministry website](#). The concept aims to fight against systems of oppression through physical rest and aims to show Black people the power that rest holds.

Hersey recently released a book, "[Rest Is Resistance: A Manifesto](#)," that explores the topic and helps guide Black people to a life that is restorative, restful and disrupts the "oppressive grip of Grind Culture," [the website says](#).

While Hersey created the phrase and its framework, it's been widely adopted by Black thought leaders, mental health advocates and the general public. In recent years, it has helped Black people protect their energy against systems that were not built for Black folks.

What 'Rest Is Resistance' means to Black therapists

While rest is important for all people, the Rest is Resistance movement is particularly tied to the Black community because of the discrimination, racism and abuse that have plagued Black people for generations.

"For hundreds of years during enslavement, Black folks were used as labor and were only as valuable as our ability to work," said [Natasha Reynolds](#), a psychotherapist at [Bloom Psychology & Wellness in Toronto](#). "So, our humanity was stripped from us, and the generational legacies around needing to work to survive still exist today."

The Rest is Resistance movement helps Black people unlearn the relationship between labor and value and is an aid for healing from ongoing racial trauma, Reynolds said.

"For me, it's rejecting the idea that I have to be a workhorse to be worthy, and that my value is simply that I am," said [Tamika Lewis](#), the clinical director and founder of WOC Therapy in California. Lewis noted that this is a radical shift for Black women in particular because of the historic dehumanization and dismissive attitude toward Black women.

“As a result, we are constantly doubting ourselves,” Lewis said. She added that many of her Black women clients feel like they have to work at 150% while most other people can just follow the status quo.

“This is leaving us feeling exhausted, discouraged [and] we’re not able to be as intentional in the way we move through the world,” Lewis said.

According to Ebony Butler, a psychologist in Texas, the feeling that more work is required from Black people may also be related to the idea that many Black folks have or had limited access to resources throughout their lives — like attending a school with less funding than schools in white neighborhoods or not getting a mortgage because of discriminatory housing practices.

“One of the things the rest movement says is you can take a break ... it’s giving us permission to not be in survival mode all of the time,” Butler added.

So, Black people desperately need this kind of oppression-shattering rest.

“[This] can become radical in terms of being able to arm ourselves. Rest arms us with the ability to be our best selves and to live with more intention,” Lewis stated.

Rest doesn’t only mean napping or sleeping.

Sleeping tends to be most closely associated with rest, and while it certainly is a part of rest, it’s not the only aspect.

“Rest is prioritizing inactivity or a form of activity that allows you to feel restored as well as refreshed,” Reynolds said.

According to Butler, “whatever makes you feel fulfilled and gives you a better quality of life or a shot at a better quality of life, that’s what rest is.”

For example, Lewis said she enjoys being curious and creative, and when she allows herself to do so, she feels energized and rested. In the end, rest should make you feel good, and that can mean doing a range of activities that fill your soul.

Anything that rejuvenates you is a restful activity — including journaling, meditating, listening to music and going for a walk.

Reynolds said that according to Dr. Saundra Dalton-Smith, a celebrated physician and researcher, there are seven different kinds of rest that are all equally important and necessary for a fulfilling life. They are:

- Physical rest: taking a nap or getting a good night’s sleep
- Mental rest: scheduling work breaks throughout the day
- Sensory rest: taking a break from screens or putting on noise-canceling headphones
- Creative rest: viewing art or listening to music
- Emotional rest: going to therapy or talking to a trusted friend about your feelings
- Social rest: spending time with people who uplift you or avoiding those who deplete your energy
- Spiritual rest: meditation, prayer or journaling

So, rest can look different for everyone, and you'll find that you need specific kinds of rest on different days.

Rest doesn't have to cost money.

Many people think rest is an expensive luxury, but this could not be further from the truth.

"For some, it is a luxury to have rest or it is a privilege to be able to rest and release yourself from survival mode," but it does not have to be an expensive thing like online influencers and brands have you believe, Butler said.

"In the social media realm, people are painting rest as a vacation or a luxurious experience. And it doesn't have to be that — it can include that — [but] it can be simply going outside, getting some sunlight, putting your feet to the grass, putting your toes in the sand," Butler said.

"I would encourage people to think about all the ways that rest can show up for them in their lives that they have access to right now," Butler said. "What are the things they control or what are things they can take a break from that would enhance their quality of life right now?"

This could mean avoiding social media for an hour or watching a movie instead of catching up with someone who depletes your energy — both of these things cost nothing or very little money.

Rest is available to everyone, and all Black people deserve it.

There are many false ideas about rest — that it's lazy, unproductive or not for you — but those are completely wrong.

What's more, there's a baseline belief in Black and brown communities that rest is something that is just not an option, Lewis said. That's also wrong and an important belief to unlearn.

"We need to resist the belief that we're not allowed to just be. It is human to rest," Reynolds said. She added that it's normal to feel guilty or a little off when you first start to prioritize your rest, we're hardwired to always be on the go.

"Rest is productive and necessary and important and rest is not selfish. Rather, it's the opposite," Reynolds said. "When you feed into yourself, you create energy reservoirs for yourself to be able to actually pour into others around you more effectively and also meet your own future needs as well."