

Define: “Worth It”

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Whether we like it or not, we intentionally ignore things all the time. We intentionally ignore the fact that Thanksgiving represents the slaughtering of Native Americans, we intentionally ignore the fact that we hurt people with our jokes and cruel rhetoric, and we intentionally ignore the fact that there are so many ways we could help other people or make the world a better place. Instead, we stay put in our comfortable homes, watching television and taking naps. I know I am guilty of my own ignorance. But, as students at our prospective boarding schools, we intentionally ignore one thing in particular: the fact that we overwork our bodies and our minds.

Almost every night, I complain either to myself or out loud that I am tired, that I am stressed, and that I am not eating well enough or not getting enough exercise. And I hear the same complaints from multiple other students around me all the time as well. Yet we continue to work ourselves to the point where we cannot function any longer, to the point where we take a “mental health day” in the Health Center or go on medical leave in order to have time set out for ourselves to take care of our bodies and our minds. Work, however, takes precedent, we say. It is our grade point average that matters, not whether we are happy or healthy, and it doesn’t matter if we Groton students only eat bagels from the bagel station for two weeks or get four hours of sleep every night. But right before we crash and burn, we must continue to smile and look “put together” because nobody can know how tired of everything we really are and how hard we worked to earn that ninety-one on that English paper.

It is obvious, too, that we know we ignore our health. When our eyes are shutting out of exhaustion, we simply drink more coffee in order to conjugate more Latin verbs. I do this, too. I stay awake far longer than my body is able to function, just so that I can practice more math problems or review more history facts. Soon I find myself crashing, though, and I realize that I need to pay more attention to how I feel. After all, will draining our bodies of hours of sleep truly help our stress and our grades? Why do we overwork ourselves?

At Groton, there is something I refer to as “effortless perfection.” It is the need to appear perfect without really trying, and I believe that almost all of the Groton community, if not all of it, plays into this idea of seeming “effortlessly perfect.” Girls wear makeup, but we feel as if we must wear makeup so that it doesn’t really show—so that people notice we look nice, but do not know that we try. And everyone works hard, but we can’t let people know we work hard. Because once people know you work hard, that 92% you earned on your Biology test no longer means that you’re smart, but that you “just work hard.” We don’t give credit to those who work hard or to those who “try too hard” to look nice in the mornings. But we do give credit to those who get good grades and to those who are effortlessly good-looking. So what must we do in order to be recognized and socially significant at school? Overwork ourselves constantly, without actually

admitting to ourselves or to others that we need to take a break and that both our bodies and our minds need to be taken care of.

As I spend more time thinking about intentional ignorance, especially with Thanksgiving coming up, I wonder whether it really is as “worth it” as we must think to intentionally ignore so many things in our life. Groton’s Thanksgiving break started two days ago. On the first day of break, I fell asleep from 11:45 pm until 2:45 pm the next day. Today, I took a three and a half hour nap after getting eleven hours of sleep. I don’t think I am alone in how exhausted I am. With more time this break both to sleep and think, I wonder whether it is truly more efficient for us all to hold ourselves to such high standards and whether it is healthy and rewarding for us to chug those cups of coffee despite the fact that our eyes are closing and our brains are fogging up from all the work we “need to do.” I am not suggesting we trade work for sleep, but I believe all things should be done in moderation, and I think we would all benefit from listening to our bodies’ basic needs. Put simply, our campus would be happier and healthier if we could all relax a little more, get a few more hours of sleep, take the time to sit down at meals and eat abundant amounts of good food with good company, and go for occasional runs. This is easier said than done, but as soon as we acknowledge the fact that we are all guilty of this act of intentional ignorance towards ourselves, and as soon as we think about what this does to our minds and bodies, we have the power to make the first step toward bettering ourselves and our community.