

Masculinity, sleep deprivation lead to health, safety issues

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Economics and culture may have created a dangerously overworked and sleep-deprived segment of the American labor force, according to a Penn State researcher

From early American philosophers, such as Benjamin Franklin, to today's caffeine-fueled Internet entrepreneurs, Americans, especially men, have learned to equate sleeping with laziness, often at the expense of their health and safety, said Alan Derickson, professor of labor and employment relations and history

Pairing masculinity with avoiding sleep became even more pronounced as the nation entered the industrial age, Derickson writes in "Dangerously Sleepy" (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014). Many modern factories could not easily be shut down, requiring people to operate machinery 24 hours a day

"As methods of production became more capital intensive, it became an imperative to make sure that equipment did not sit idle," said Derickson. "There were industries—paper and steel—that couldn't shut down and needed people around the clock to run and maintain that equipment." Derickson writes that evidence of sleep-related health and safety problems in the workplace began to surface during the Industrial Revolution. As early as 1913, studies found a correlation between working long hours and the number of accidents

In addition to the possibility of injuries in accidents, studies continue to

tie [sleep deprivation](#) with other health conditions. Studies link cardiovascular diseases, chronic fatigue and increased susceptibility to other disorders with work-related sleep deprivation. "Besides living in a dysfunctional somnolent state, sleep-deprived workers are known or suspected to be at greater risk of several diseases," Derickson writes

Some industry leaders in the 20th century not only advocated skipping sleep, but created tools to help avoid sleep, according to Derickson. For example, Thomas Edison, who told the press he slept only about two hours a day, paved the way for the electric lighting that helped factories operate night and day

"That was a key to the creation of shift work and the reason why Edison has been called the father of the night shift," Derickson said. As America modernized, the attack on sleep did not ease and in fact continues today, he said. Entrepreneurs who have become Internet moguls, like Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg, are often praised for their marathon programming sessions

"The race for status and riches has continued to fascinate masses of spectators who have eagerly consumed television programs, movies, books and Internet offering featuring overworking, undersleeping entrepreneurs," Derickson writes

Other industries, including health care and transportation, have similar problems with sleep deprivation. However, sleep deprivation in these industries can affect the safety and health of more people than those workers avoiding sleep

As medical residents, for example, doctors train by regularly working long shifts. This can put patients at risk of not receiving the correct treatment. Long-haul truck drivers, who tout their ability to drive many hours as a badge of honor, may also jeopardize other motorists, the

researcher said

"Then, this doesn't become just an issue of the health of a doctor, or a truck driver," Derickson said. "This can affect the [health](#) and safety of everyone.

Using drugs and other means to regulate [sleep patterns](#) is unique to the human species, the researcher said. "Humans are the only species that deprives itself of sleep," said Derickson. "You don't see a cow taking sedatives to get extra sleep."

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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