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Hush, Little Baby: The Obsession to Deny Sleep and Why it is Wrong

In her *Newsweek* article “*Our Sleep Problem and What to Do About It*”, Betsy Isaacson describes the phenomenon of people sleeping less in modern society by listing various methods of denying sleep and examining some possible reasons, then concludes by stressing the importance and efficiency of sleep, urging the readers to embrace rest.

Isaacson opens by revealing that our sleeping hours have declined ever since Thomas Edison invented the light bulb, and is still consistently doing so even a century after. She claims that “[w]e’re still waging a war on sleep, and we are, alas, still winning.” She first identifies modern technology as one of the perpetrators. Quoting from Charles Czeisler, she argues that the light used in monitors of portable electronic devices and computers interrupts our sleep, for they mess with hormones that control our body cycles. She also professes that these devices are withholding us from sleep by creating a world where stimulation never ceases.

Isaacson then provides a long list of new ways to reduce sleep that are appearing. Numerous products containing caffeine and other substances that were formerly used as medicine are debuting in the market. Even military technology to keep soldiers alert and modafinil, a drug designed to treat sleep disorders, are somehow getting distributed to civilians. Some practice the “Uberman” sleep schedule, in which one only sleeps twenty minutes every four hours.

Furthermore, today many authorities assert that we only need to sleep for five hours, instead of eight, to stay in an ideal condition. Isaacson, with support from writer Douglas Hadow, blames this anomaly on our society’s obsession for productivity. According to her, because our time asleep is used on neither producing nor consuming, it is considered, “the enemy of

efficiency: inescapable wasted blocks of time that can't be converted into anything of broader use to society." Such a perception of sleep, adds Isaacson, dates back to the Industrial Revolution. Nowadays, the excessive concern for productivity is worse with new technology that never truly lets workers get away from work. Although the exact numbers vary, the working hours of people around the world have been increasing throughout the years and have reached their highest. Moreover, Isaacson notes that the increase in part-time jobs means more people following abnormal sleep schedules, which lead to obesity and other problems in health. She asserts that those who are at most risk are the millennials: they work on most part time jobs, are most stressed out, and lack sleep due unbearable amount of tasks. Quoting Czeisler once more, Isaacson insists that this generation is at risk for sleep disorders and damage in health. Lack of sleep is related to the deterioration of the immune system and cognitive ability, along with many other diseases. For these reasons, Isaacson claims that our society will not be able to infinitely reduce sleep hours. She then introduces a solution that has already been found and is being used by some: cognitive enhancers. While they are more widely used than one can imagine and are, surprisingly, is the more sensible option compared to the other responses to the current demanding society, Isaacson expresses her concerns for their use. They may be harming our creativity in exchange for instant productivity, while also raising some ethical issues. The writer therefore concludes that the only actual solution is to change the way we work in a way that recognizes the importance of rest. Some countries already agree with her and are initiating laws that regulate work after office hours and promote rest. She reports cases of success in some companies that achieved actual increase in productivity after reducing work. To make her point about the importance of sleep, Isaacson began with observations on the current sleepless society exposing its absurdity and harm. She laments the society dominated by productivity that abuses people, and ends her essay by emphasizing that sleep is not a waste but a basic human need with obvious benefits.