

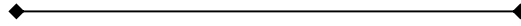
## DR. JOHN B. WHITAKER ON FACTORY WORKER HEALTH (1871)

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### Questions:

- 1) What psychological and physical problems did Whitaker observe among industrial workers?
- 2) What do their accounts suggest about the industrial revolution in America?

*Industrialization profoundly affected American workers. As technology enabled manufacturers to cut costs, employers relied on semi-skilled and unskilled workers who were easily replaceable. Laborers endured long hours and boring, dangerous work. Having formerly produced handcrafted goods, many skilled artisans found mechanized work demoralizing. In this passage, a Massachusetts physician evaluates the health of factory laborers.*



1. Accidents and casualties were very numerous, partly owing to the exposed machinery and partly owing to carelessness....It is really painful to go round among the operatives and find the hands and fingers mutilated, in consequence of accidents.
2. Unnatural or monotonous working positions...in some cases [make the worker] round-shouldered, in other cases producing curvature of the spine and bow-legs.
3. Exhaustion from overwork. In consequence of the long hours of labor, the great speed the machinery is run at, the large numbers of looms the weavers tend, and the general over-tasking, so much exhaustion is produced, in most cases, that immediately after taking supper, the tired operatives drop to sleep in their chairs....
4. Work by artificial light. It is injurious to the eyes. The affections consist principally in conjunctivitis, opacity of cornea, granulations of the lids, &c.
5. The inhalation of foreign articles....I have been called to cases where I suspected this to be the cause of trouble in the stomach. After giving an emetic, they have in some cases vomited little balls of cotton....
10. Predisposition to pelvic diseases...among the female factory operatives produces difficulty in parturition. The necessity for instrumental delivery has very much increased within a few years, owing to the females working in the mills while they are pregnant and in consequence of deformed pelvis....
11. Predisposition to sexual abuse. There is no doubt that this is very much increased, the passions being excited by contact and loose conversation....They are, also, as a general thing, ignorant-at least to the extent that they do not know how to control their passions nor to realize the consequences....
12. Predisposition to depression of spirits....Factory life predisposes very much to depression of spirits.