

2. Sleeping Arrangements.

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Abstract

Sleeping arrangements changed in the Age of Revolutions, as beds became lighter in structure, less enclosed, and, supposedly, more hygienic, and were covered in washable bedding. The spaces of sleep altered too, as beds moved upstairs and into specialized rooms and co-sleeping declined. New notions of privacy are often identified as the cause of these shifts in behavior, where the middle classes sought to demarcate the private from the public. Meanwhile, a rethinking, even a pathologization, of bodily intimacy as a moral, sexual, and social contaminant, and source of ill-health and disease, led elite social groups to impose distance between unrelated and related individuals during sleep and to police the dormant bodies of other social and racialized groups.

Keywords

Beds; Bodies; Intimacy; Space

Introduction

The history of where we sleep, on what we sleep, and with whom we sleep says much about who we are. Indeed, sleeping arrangements offer a visceral way to comprehend the past, a profound marker of social, economic, and cultural difference (McGill and Frazier 2023).

They indicate power and privilege, freedom and bondage, status and hierarchy, wealth and health, and age and gender, as well as differences among provinces, colonies, and metropole, and the urban or the rural. When and where we go to bed and who shares a bed, also offer

insights into emotional and psychological states, understandings of bodies and relationships, and individual and collective attempts to construct identities. During the “Age of Revolutions, many factors impacted sleeping habits, spaces, and material culture: the expansion of consumer goods; the introduction of new technologies and ways of conceptualizing and experiencing the world; and efforts to order and control racialized, gendered, and classed dormant bodies. This chapter offers an overview of these shifts and their meaning for people’s everyday lives.

To survey sleeping arrangements, it is necessary to explore the interaction of objects, spaces, and bodies through bedsteads, bedding, objects, and their locations in dwellings, as well as their interrelation and symbolism. All have multiple uses and possess meanings that change over time (Brunt and Steger 2008: 19, 20; Glaskin and Chenhall 2013: 3–6, 10; Reiss 2017; Steger and Brunt 2003: 1–2, 10). In addition to sleep, birth, death, and life took place in beds; their functions were reshaped when people prayed; when they took ill and were nursed; when mothers recovered from childbirth with their babies; and when lovers entwined, friends talked, or spouses fought (Gowing 2014; Pennell 2014; Handley 2016; McShane and Bailey 2016). Beds not only constituted the respectable and moral household, literally and figuratively; as objects of immense financial and emotional value, they also reproduced dominant sexual and conjugal paradigms (Barclay 2022; McShane and Bailey, 2016; Hinds 2010: 276–7, 300). Moreover, in the nineteenth century, they were increasingly conceived as “laboratories” of the modern self and scientific rationalism, and as sites for regenerating the family and governing society (Crook 2008: 16, 17, 19, 21; Hinds 2010; Perrot 2018: 16–18).

This narrative of change in sleeping conditions is generally explained as part of a rise of privacy. In the early eighteenth century, although monarchs slept in a private room, they still performed public rituals and duties in the state bedrooms of royal palaces (Perrot 2018: 16–23). By the mid-eighteenth century, such formality was in decline, and a constellation of

smaller rooms was constructed around the state bedroom to enable intimacy, for example, in French palaces (Miller and Young 2016: 177–8). As the public sphere was conceptualized in the Atlantic and European worlds, domestic architecture introduced specialized room functions, effecting a clearer differentiation between public and private domestic architectural space. With this shift, white people defined themselves and their civilized status through notions of privacy (Brown 2009: 354; Crook 2008: 15–16, 19, 29; Moroney 2019: 127; Reiss 2017: 24–7). The bedroom was a primary site of this personal or familial withdrawal from more public spaces. Communal and co-sleeping thus declined, so the story goes, with family members separated from each other and their servants in specialized bedrooms that were divested of social activities (Fagan and Durrani 2019: 5–6). As the century wore on, white colonizers and imperialists judged racialized people through this construction of privacy to deem them inferior. They further deployed a rhetoric of privacy in various public health initiatives to manage subordinate dormant bodies. In so doing, privacy was emotionalized, medicalized, and psychologized (Crook 2008; Montjin 2008; Moroney 2019: 129; Perrot 2018: 86–95). This march of privacy is seen as the forerunner of a wave of individualism in the twentieth-century Western world, which accelerated a move to distance, separation, and solitary sleeping habits (Moroney 2019: 136; Vollmer 2008).

This familiar story needs to be modified where sleeping arrangements are concerned. Recent work  complicates the notion of privacy (Cohen 2013; Humfrey 2022; Vincent 2015: 23–4, 33–4, 39), and scholarship focusing on sleeping habits shows that “sleep-privacy” was more complex and negotiated in practice and did not map straightforwardly onto the spatial and material cultural shifts in sleeping arrangements (Baldwin 2011: 38, 131–2; Handley 2016: 179; Holmes 2017; Perrot 2018: 24, 27). This chapter argues instead that sleeping arrangements were shaped by changing views about bodily intimacy that reimagined understandings of appropriate relationships, proximity, and distance. Physical intimacy and

touch were reconfigured as more problematic than in previous eras, potentially sexualized, and a contaminant (Morris 2021: 808–9; Jamieson 2011). The enclosed space of the bed was a domain and space over which control and oversight were perceived to be challenging to achieve. Thus, physical contact became ever more suspect and subject to regulations that imposed distance on bodies deemed most dangerous due to age, class, gender, or race.

The Objects and Spaces of Sleep

Bedtimes were in flux in this period. Early modern people retired to bed around 9 or 10 p.m. (Hamling and Richardson 2017: 218). The introduction of new technologies that lit public streets deeper into the night, and greater opportunities for public sociability in the evenings in cities and provincial towns, made it more feasible and fashionable to be outside of the home at later hours. Bedtimes thus got later, as “nocturnalization” reshaped public life and new types of domestic lighting illuminated homes for longer (Ekirch 2001: 383; Handley 2016: 150–8; Koslofsky 2011; Reiss 2017: 8–12; Schivelbusch 1995: 157–85). Around 1820, Caroline Forth wrote to her mother from Doncaster, England, informing her that “Mrs Haugh’s Birthday was celebrated last Monday, we had a concert in the morning, and a ball at night, and I assure you we spent a very delightful day, and did not go to bed till between two and three the next morning” (Forth 1809). Disrupted sleep patterns led to napping and specialized furniture to accommodate it. Chairs with wings, for instance, were designed so that weary gentlemen could doze during visits or lengthy card games and dining (Handley 2016: 170–1). For those who elected to shift their sleeping habits to navigate these newly available times of the night, the experience might be pleasant. Their servants, however, had no choice, forced to stay awake regardless of their usual working hours. Still more had to adapt their bedtimes to the demands of industrialization, factory working, service industries, or plantation owners’ demands (Reiss 2017: 119–138). William Nelson, previously enslaved in Missouri, recalled of his childhood in the mid-nineteenth century, that the enslaved were so

tired on finishing work that they went to bed early in order to rise at 4 a.m. the next morning (Federal Writers 1941: 76). Enslaved people's sleep was also deliberately disrupted by overseers blowing the night horn, an irregular roll-call sounded during the night to check the curfew was in place (Reiss 2017: 124, 127). In these instances, bedtimes marked out social, economic, and cultural capital or lack thereof.

The location of sleeping arrangements was similarly diverse, driven by hierarchies, and varied over time and place. In the mid-eighteenth century, multiple bedsteads might still be found in several chambers. This included those in which other household activities were performed, such as kitchens and storage rooms, as well as those rooms that were open to visitors for sociability or, in some cases, business (Hamling and Richardson 2017: 29; Handley 2016: 112). Like their seventeenth-century counterparts, the wealthier still went to bed in chambers in which several beds were housed, although dedicated space for sleeping was increasingly correlated with higher social status. The poor had access to far less space and their choice in the placement of bedsteads was limited. House servants and the enslaved would sleep throughout dwellings as their masters and mistresses dictated, while agricultural servants slept in outdoor areas related to their work. In the second half of the eighteenth century, nonetheless, room function generally grew more specialized with chambers devoted to sleeping. Where houses were large enough, bedsteads moved upstairs, a culmination of a process that had begun in the late sixteenth century (Hamling and Richardson 2017: 29–36; Handley 2016: 12–13, 109, 112–3; Priestley and Corfield 1982: 103, 107). This spatial shift shaped people's behavior. For those retiring upstairs to bed, the stairs took on a transitional aspect, marking out the move from day to night, waking to sleeping (Hamling and Richardson 2017: 224). For others, staircases became sites of domination and fear as husbands or employers excluded wives, dependents, or employees from sleeping spaces,

often physically pushing them downstairs to seek refuge in other parts of the dwelling (Begiato 2018).

The room with the “best” bed was usually the chamber above the parlor, which was not designated the bedroom till the second half of the eighteenth century (Handley 2016: 16, 114). Like its ground floor counterpart, its decorations were more expensive than other parts of dwellings, with paneled walls initially and then wallpaper in the second half of the century. Whereas the walls of early modern chambers containing the primary bedstead were decorated with moralizing and scriptural texts, to remind sleepers of their spiritual duties, such tropes were miniaturized and moved to ceramic wall-hangings or textiles by the mid-nineteenth century. In both cases, respectable people were expected to reflect on their moral state as they began their nighttime rituals. That said, masters and mistresses did not always have their bedstead above the parlor. Eleanor and her husband William Smith, a Northumberland clergyman, slept in a press bed in the “kitchen chamber” in 1788, the first-floor room above the kitchen, alongside their infant in its cradle. We know because two young men climbed up to spy on Eleanor during William’s absence when she shared the bed with her lover (Smith v. Smith 1789). Furthermore, people continued to go to bed in functional rooms upstairs, such as garret chambers or cocklofts (Handley 2016: 114).

Upper floor rooms with bedsteads in towns and cities overlooked the street, and thus sensory connections to the outside and noisy activities continued through the evening and night. This auditory dimension of sleeping arrangements was probably not considered unproblematic in the early modern period (Hamling and Richardson 2017: 37–9). With greater illumination due to improved artificial lighting, however, the desire to close off and separate inside from outside grew, as did the use of curtains and shutters to shut out auditory and light disruption (Schivelbusch 1995: 181, 185). By the 1840s, as architectural and planning publications demonstrate, newly built homes in the transatlantic world grew larger

and accommodated designated bedrooms (Moroney 2019: 120; Vollmer, Schulze and Chebra 2005: 4). Servants were given separate sleeping quarters, and on large rural plantations in America slave quarters were built (Katz-Hyman and Rice 2010: 54–7; Stobart 2022: 253–4; Vlach 1995). Nonetheless, both servants and the enslaved might continue to sleep next to their employers or owners, or in passageways, their sleeping arrangements subjugated to household authority (Handley 2016: 117, 119).

The bedsteads on which people slept were similarly diverse. Across many parts of Europe and North America the number of bedsteads per household expanded (Benes 1989: 146–7; Handley 2016: 121; Perrot 2018: 31). In the early part of the period, they included substantial wooden four-poster and tester beds, also known as high or standing beds, made from walnut and mahogany, the latter the product of transatlantic slavery. These were often the costliest bedsteads in the household. This might vary from around thirty percent to half of the household worth, depending on household size, and in many cases were the marital bed (Weatherill 1988: 160). Bed-ropes, cords or slats provided the bed's (mattress) base and contributed to comfort levels (Handley 2016: 121). Status-driven people set up such beds in climates that were inimical to their use. John Macleod, a Jamaican planter, possessed six large bedsteads with beds and matching hangings in 1775, even though Europeans in the Caribbean were transforming their houses to deal with the heat by building galleried piazzas to circulate cooling air, and sleeping in hammocks (Nelson 2016: 68, 154). People not only sought comfort when they selected their bedsteads. Traditionally, the most expensive beds possessed a symbolic as well as a real conjugal function, conveyed in their decorative carving of heraldic devices, associated with lineage, or motifs signifying love. Evidently, bedsteads offered opportunities for self-presentation, and perhaps the privileged slept better in their literally elevated positions replete with the knowledge of their power and status (Johnson 2010: 150).

Different types of bedsteads proliferated across the century, becoming smaller and less formal. If early modern bedsteads showcased textile hangings, almost fabric boxes when the curtains were closed, the later eighteenth century witnessed a trend towards the carved frame for those wealthy enough to purchase from new (Miller and Young 2016: 181). Some people retired to temporary and mobile beds, lighter than joined bedsteads and less likely to be fixed to walls, such as turn-up beds, along with collapsible press and field beds, which commentators recommended to meet the changing familial and sociable needs of homes (Lewis 1986: 161; Handley 2016: 113, 167). When Dean Mahomet, a Bengali Indian who joined the East India Company Army in 1769, published letters describing his travels through the states of north India under British rule in the 1770s, he recounted a traveling bed he used. In Fulwherea, he slept in the store tent, next to his British officer's marquee, in "a palankeen, a kind of travelling canopy bed, resembling a camp bed." This was not modest: "The upper part was arched over with curved bamboo, and embellished with rich furniture, the top was hung with beautiful tassels and adorned with gay trappings; and the sides, head, and foot were decorated with valuable silver ornaments. In short, it was elegantly finished, and worth, at least six hundred rupees; for which reason, such vehicles are seldom kept but by people of condition" (Fisher 1997: Letter 

[Place figure 2.1 here]

In poorer homes, people sought rest in beds that were made of inferior materials or were simpler in form, with sacking bottoms rather than cords (Handley 2016: 121). In 1840 the French physician Louis-René Villermé visited textile workers' homes and bemoaned seeing an entire family sleeping on a pallet topped with hay (Perrot 2018: 86). Those in smaller dwellings slept in box beds which were built into the sides of rooms, or freestanding beds placed in small windowless "niches," both of which saved space and provided daytime storage (Barclay 2022: 266, 269; Handley 2016: 113; Montjin 2008: 81; Perrot 2018: 24–5),

see Figure 2.1. In the 1790s, Thomas Wright recalled sleeping with his grandmother's maid in a "close or ceiled bed" during his childhood in the late 1730s. When the maid's sweetheart visited, she would leave him with a candle on the shelf and a bible. Thomas would read till two in the morning. Her irresponsibility would have been punished had it come to his grandmother's attention, given that one of the essential activities of retiring to bed was to ensure all candles were extinguished in order to prevent house fires (Wright 1864).

As Wright's experience hints, sleeping arrangements were deeply unequal. Access to bedsteads was determined by age, status, and, in slave economies, by race. Thus, infants slept in cradles that were small enough to be nestled alongside their parents' bed within its curtains. Cradles were generally constructed of wicker or might be an old box. They often had rockers to soothe babies to sleep and a hood which, along with blankets, protected infants from the cold (Calvert 1992: 27–9). Portable, they could be moved to other locations in the house, as infant sleeping arrangements had to be mobile for many families. Social status also shaped one's sleeping conditions. Servants, carers, and visitors slept on trundle or truckle beds. These were of lesser quality, mounted on castors, and designed to be pulled out from under the more substantial, elevated bed during the night, and then stored away during the day (Handley 2016: 127–8).

Once married, men would expect patriarchal privilege where beds were concerned. As youths establishing themselves, however, they might experience unfavorable sleeping arrangements. A young apothecary in 1787 lodged in an unheated garret in London, and slept "on a sliding board upon a bit of a bed; he had two blankets, and a rug, like what they throw over the horses" (Styles 2006: 76). Having no bed was a standard marker of poverty (McShane and Bailey 2016; Ekirch 2001: 361). When William Bromley of Shrewsbury, Shropshire wrote to the overseer of the poor seeking financial support, in 1817, he explained, "I have been these six weeks past without imploy and during that time we have been forced to

pledge Every Nessary artical we have but what we now stand in Even the sheets of our bed to support us” (Bromley 1817). Mary Dewhurst similarly pleaded to the Select Vestry of Billington, Lancashire: “I am under the necessity to solicit your aid at this time for I am in great distress having no bed to lie on but obliged to lie on the bare ground this gentlemen is a bad case” (Dewhurst n.d.).

Enslaved people’s sleeping arrangements were a manifestation of their status as chattels, most horrifically realized in their forced movement from Africa. On their two-to-three-month middle passage, they were stowed below deck at night on restricted platforms, bound at wrist and ankle in pairs, in conditions so crowded they were forced to lie in a “spoon” position (Nelson 2017: 26–8). On plantations, enslaved people who worked indoors often slept on the floor beside their owners. Catherine Slim recalled her enslaved childhood in 1850s Rockingham, Virginia, when she slept in a “waggoner’s bed,” which was “like a big bed-comfort, stuffed with wool,” which she rolled up and pushed under her mistresses’ bed during the day (Federal Writers 1941: 80). In the Caribbean, enslaved people slept on the piazzas of planters’ homes, which offered some degree of air circulation but also exposed them to their owners’ surveillance (Nelson 2016: 191). Those enslaved who labored outside slept on earth floors or rudimentary pallets in slave cabins and designated quarters (Federal Writers 1941: 100; Katz-Hyman and Rice 2010: 54–7). Slaveholders not only forced enslaved people to sleep in uncomfortable and harsh environments, they limited their sleeping hours, not least to break their will. As Frederick Douglass stated in his autobiography in 1855, “The night ... is shortened at both ends. The slaves work often as long as they can see, and ... at the first gray streak of morning, they are summoned to the field by the driver’s horn” (Reiss 2017: 126). Immune to the benefits of privacy where their slaves were concerned, slaveholders denied them physical separation, which enabled them to sexually assault their slaves (Reiss 2017: 122, 124–34).

The more privileged enjoyed bedsteads that were made comfortable through the beds [mattresses], sheets, blankets, and quilts that were piled upon them to offer warmth, reassurance, and aesthetic pleasure. Of course, the quality, variety, and appearance of these textiles depended on wealth, age, gender, class, and race. Mattresses stuffed with feathers, heaped upon others stuffed with cheaper materials, offered the most luxurious repose (Ekirch 2001: 352; Handley 2016: 124–5). Inexpensive stuffings that could be spoiled by bodily fluids, like flock, straw, or seaweed, were used temporarily for children or women in childbed (Handley 2016: 125). People with little means or autonomy slept on cheap fillings like rags. These were sometimes available to them due to their labor, such as the cotton or corn husk stuffed bags that enslaved people lay their exhausted bodies upon (Federal Writers 1941: 80). In Jamaica, enslaved people slept on a bed of plantain leaf mats (Nelson 2016: 112). Thomas Thistlewood displayed his status as a slave-owner in Jamaica when he purchased his first slave in 1756 and recorded two days later that he “gave Lincoln a mat to sleep on and cut up ten yards of Brown Oznabrig to make him Cloaths” (Burnard 2009: 197). Blankets even came to embody notions of colonial pride. The homemade rose blanket became an “American icon” in an era when the homespun was celebrated (Ulrich 2001: 333–7).

Sheets were made from linen, with cotton used later in the century. People used woolen blankets to protect them from cold in heated and unheated rooms, though their numbers increased according to their owners’ financial means rather than the demands of temperature (Handley 2016: 130; Perrot 2018: 25). Wrought (hand-worked) quilts and bed textiles were ubiquitous in the earlier part of the period and possessed both economic and emotional value, sewn in some instances by women in the household, and often slept under by the most privileged. Indeed, costly textiles embodied wealth and taste. Mary Robinson demonstrated her natal family’s former wealth by recounting in her memoir that as a child in the 1760s: “The bed in which I slept was of the richest crimson damask: the dresses which we

wore were of the finest cambric” (Robinson 1801: 16). Like the other sleeping-related textiles, bedcovers were subject to changing trends and availability of materials such as calico, chintz, and cotton (Handley 2016: 131, 133; Mitchell 2009: 6, 10–12). Cotton counterpanes began to supersede quilts made from linen and wool; more fashionable and able to be regularly washed (Styles 2006: 74). In Britain, bedcovers of red, blue, and green were popular throughout this period, the latter often decorated with landscape designs, while “sad” colors declined in popularity (Handley 2016: 138). White cotton counterpanes were in vogue from the late eighteenth century, connoting cleanliness and purity.

[Place Figure 2.2 here]

People followed similar trends in the colors and fabrics of bed curtains which they matched to bed covers if they could; rooms were often named by the predominant bed color (Mitchell 2009: 16). Accounts of lodging rooms in London indicate that blue and green bed curtains hung in rented rooms in the 1750s, largely replaced by cotton hangings in the 1790s (Styles 2006: 73–4). Colors held meaning that was thought to influence bedtime experience. In Britain and France, blue was associated with purity and temperance, green with restfulness, yellow with procreation, and red with courage and nobility (Handley 2016: 138–40, Mitchell 2009: 21, 23). Those able to make consumer choices increasingly spurned purple, “sad,” and grey colors (Mitchell 2009: 18). Bedhangings were also used on four-poster and tester beds for warmth and enclosure. When drawn, bed hangings closed off more elite sleepers from others in the same room, just as box beds continued to do for many of modest means deep into the nineteenth century (McShane and Bailey 2016). In hotter parts of the world, bed curtains offered protection against insects rather than enclosure. Charles D’Oyly’s aquatint of a European gentleman dressing in an 1813 publication *The Costume and Customs of Modern India*, shows him wearing a striped nightgown, attended by three South Asian male servants, in front of a bed hung with gauze curtains; an insight into the hybridity

of material culture and domestic arrangements in colonial European and South Asian encounters (de Silva 2011: 322), see Figure 2.2.

Complete beds and their associated objects and sleeping paraphernalia accrued emotional weight owing to the various rituals that took place in them (Steger and Brunt 2003: 12). Bed rugs marking marriage, childbed and lying-in bedhangings, for example, were gifted and shared to embody care, protection, and lineage (Brown 2009: 88; Ulrich 2001: 221–8). Sheets, which touched loved one’s bodies, were also objects of feeling, preserved in grief or embroidered with spouses’ initials, or sewn with letters that indicated their use, with servants sleeping in sheets stitched “S” for second best (Handley 2018; Handley 2016: 130). Stored in chests and presses in the same bedchambers, they demonstrated financial and emotional investment (Hamling and Richardson 2017: 43). Other emotionally significant objects surrounding bedsteads included family portraits, devotional books and statues, or objects of remembrance (Perrot 2018: 93–5). Critically, this sensory and emotional nexus soothed people, since sleep was perceived as a physical, spiritual, and psychological danger zone (Brunt and Steger 2008: 24–5; Ekirch 2001: 353, 359; Glaskin and Chenhall 2013: 23). Manifold threats manifested during nighttime, including fire, cold, insects, criminal and supernatural harm, even death. Along with acts that closed off the dwelling (dampening fires, extinguishing candles, locking the home, retiring to bed with a weapon to hand, and seeking spiritual protection), people used the material culture of sleeping arrangements to bolster themselves against vulnerability. The physical, sensory, and emotional comfort of these artefacts facilitated sleep (Hamling and Richardson 2017: 220–3; Handley 2016: 7, 10, 109, 130–1, 147).

A number of bedtime rituals also assisted the transition to sleep, for example, kisses before bed, nighttime letter writing, or prayer. In 1823 Georgiana Taylor wrote to her cousin Sophia about “little Peter” who was being fostered temporarily with his grandparents in

England while his parents started a new life in America. She explained he could not bear to go to bed “without kissing [the foster family members] when he has been naughty, and will cry ready to break his heart when sent to bed, untill [*sic*] he has been into the parlour to kiss and make friends with anyone he has fallen out with” (Taylor 1823: 1035). Many also chose this time to write letters to absent loved ones and would note that they were retiring to bed at the close of their letter, presumably a way to foster intimacy. Such an emotional point of connection linked separated loved ones and eased the writer and the eventual recipient to sleep. And, of course, for many faiths, devotional rituals and prayers were part of retiring to bed, a punctuation stop before sleep.

Although sleeping arrangements differed for multiple reasons, security was one common thread. Security elicits a cluster of emotions, incorporating fear, vulnerability, and anxiety and their mitigating practices of faith, comfort, and ritual. A good bedtime conjured such feelings. The very elderly William Hutton evoked this in the poem “A Day” (1802), which he wrote to answer a question about how he spent his time. The closing lines and the day itself end:

Now garden, converse, book, or pen,
Tea, supper, music, please till ten;
When the bell rings, to “bring a light,”
I rise and burrow for the night.
Of blessings can I wish for more? (Hutton 1816: 252)

Perhaps one of the most significant means to achieve security was through co-located sleep (in the same chamber), and pair- and co-sleeping, which could evoke feelings of safety (Ekirch 2001: 353). Leah Harvey’s maid commented that she slept with her mistress during her husband’s absence in the 1780s because “Leah never durst sleep alone” (Aslin 1785). As

the next section shows, co-sleeping did not recede as the spaces of sleeping became bound up with ideologies of privacy.

Co-located Sleep and Co-sleeping

By the mid-eighteenth century, co-located sleep and co-sleeping had shifted from household- to family-based. Previously, unrelated household members, such as apprentices, and non-family visitors shared rooms and, very often, beds as well (Hamling and Richardson 2017: 26–8, 43). By the age of revolutions such sleeping in the same bed declined. In the 1760s, two female mantua makers who shared a modest dwelling in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, each slept in one of the home's two first-floor rooms in their own beds (Herman 2006: 52). Throughout the period investigated, however, co-located sleep among family members remained common. Co-sleeping in the same bed was also permitted when it conformed with general rules of decency; usually segregated sexes unless young children (Handley 2016: 114, 176). Eighteenth-century people of diverse ages social groups might be bedfellows, including masters or mistresses with a servant, although wealthier nineteenth-century employers provided servants with separate sleeping spaces. This meant employers' sleep was less disrupted by the different daily routines that servants were obliged to follow in carrying out their duties.

Shaping eighteenth-century co-sleeping was the perception that physical intimacy between some same-sex individuals, related and unrelated, was unproblematic. In a worldview in which sleep was a phase characterized by defenselessness and where nighttime was threatening, proximate bodies offered security rather than inherent risk. As such, for those with a degree of agency, physical intimacy displayed trust, offering companionship and comfort. For some months after his wife died in 1761, for instance, the shopkeeper Thomas Turner regularly slept alongside his male friend, presumably finding solace in this contact

(Handley 2016: 178). Bodily intimacy might also be viewed as an expression of friendly affection in the new opportunities for social sleeping that emerged with polite sociability in the eighteenth century and the extension of social activities into the night (Handley 2013; Reiss 2017: 26–7). Thus, same-sex friends shared beds when visiting each other or travelling (Handley 2016: 177–8). When the linen draper Edward Payne was away on business in the 1770s, he would try and arrange for his wife’s friend and companion, Miss Ann Soames, to sleep with his wife (Soames 1776: 9, 52). Such co-sleeping arrangements were reassuring since they generally occurred in at least one of the parties’ non-home environments when anxiety might be increased. Visits to family members, or changes to household routines also led to co-sleeping. In 1810, Jonathan Gray, a York solicitor, wrote to his wife who was away to report that on Sunday night their four-year-old son William “had determined to sleep with Mary at [his grand]father’s]. As he fell asleep at prayers & was carried to bed, he awoke in Aunt Lucy’s bed; & cried for ½ an hour: wanted to have a candle lighted & to walk away from the house. One time was overtaken half way down stairs” (Gray 1810). Presumably William’s unfamiliar sleeping arrangements unsettled him, illustrating that while co-sleeping might reassure, the familiar material cultures and habits of sleeping arrangements were important too.

Pair-sleeping was the most conventional form of communal sleeping in the period. Outside of courtly and aristocratic homes, loving spouses were expected to share a bed, aside from when it was repurposed for other activities such as nursing. Even when spouses had separate chambers, due to greater wealth, additional space, or other responsibilities, they would share a bed for emotional and sexual intimacy. Early in the period examined, the very fact that a couple had the bed to themselves indicated elevated status (Hamling and Richardson 2017: 43). It was in these “best” beds, therefore, that couples had an enclosed, “private” space, whether through drawn curtains on a tester bed in the early part of the

century, or in the more streamlined, less heavily dressed beds in a designated bedroom at the end of our period.

[Place Figure 2.3 here]

In conflictual marriages, pair-sleeping ended, manifesting marital breakdown and lack of love, as was often asserted in separation or divorce cases. Catherine Warburton sought to separate from her husband on the grounds of cruelty in 1800. She deposed that he lay in a separate bed for five weeks to punish her for not transferring some of her property to him, an embodied rejection of their union (Warburton 1800). Other husbands deliberately disrupted their wives' bedtimes, sleep, and access to beds by insisting on specific bedtimes, pulling wives out of bed by their feet, or ejecting them to sleep elsewhere (Begiato 2018; Holmes 2017: 5, 52–6; see Figure 2.3). In this sense, co-sleeping could become an act of authority rather than an expression of companionship. It was also one of the ways in which emotions were enacted through sleeping arrangements and was a physical expression of the “state of relations” for a night or longer periods (Musharbash 2013: 52, 56).

Through much of Europe and the transatlantic world in this period, parents and young children routinely co-slept at home, typically with nursing infants, as well as during periods of children's illness (Calvert 1992: 68–9; Stearns 1996: 357; Vollmer 2005: 4, 10). In 1789, the servant of Amelia Barttelot and Samuel Hawker, lieutenant in the Light Dragoons, would tuck the bed clothes around the couple at bedtime; in the morning she would come to take their child away (Barttelot 1793). Many more parents would co-sleep with older children when they were traveling, depending upon availability of space in lodgings or the homes they visited. Middling and elite children also slept alongside the family's female servants. Co-sleeping was driven by large family sizes and the demands that household government, childcare, and other caring duties placed upon mistresses. In 1822, Elizabeth Shaw wrote to

her husband with news about a maid: “Our new girl came last night. I cannot say much about her yet – I have slept so long in the nursery that I feel a great reluctance to leave it so long as you are out. I like the Baby better as a bedfellow than I think I should like any of them else. They are so restless but as the Baby is to be got out of bed with several times in the night (to keep him comfortable it gives me cold & I let a girl do that...)” (Shaw 1822). Clearly, co-sleeping could be challenging with several small children and a baby to feed.

The colonial elite also gave their children to foster carers who co-slept with their charges. Eliza Davidson, who lived in Madras in the mid-1780s, sent her four-year-old son Alex to live with her cousin, Mrs Chitty, in London. Mrs Chitty kept Alex’s mother up-to-date; her reports of sharing his bed intended to demonstrate her affection and care. Chitty referred to him as “my dear little bed fellow” and following a separation explained, “I feel myself perfectly happy in the prospect of sharing my Boys [sic] Bed” (Finn 2019: 13). When such children attended boarding schools, they might also share beds until the second half of the nineteenth century (Crook 2008: 28–9).

By the nineteenth century, however, room specialization meant that more affluent children were relocated in their own bedrooms or nurseries (Perrot 2018: 51). Older children in relatively modest households also moved away from parents, even when space was circumscribed (Perrot 2018: 51). It was not unusual, however, for siblings of the same sex to be bedfellows, as children, and later as adults. In 1813, Elizabeth Shaw reported to her husband, “Your mother was here on Sunday and today she is come to take up her abode with me. Sister & I will sleep in front room bed – she prefers the back room – you see I shall have a bedfellow for a little while” (Shaw 1813). The latter reassured John Shaw on his long absences away from home. The American essayist Henry David Thoreau slept with his older brother John on a trundle bed at the foot of their parents’ bed in their childhood in the 1820s, and they continued to co-sleep when they camped outside as young men, using these

opportunities to nurture their emotional bond (Reiss 2017: 62–5).

For the poor, large families and small dwelling spaces meant sleeping in the same chamber was unavoidable (Ekirch 2001: 361). Thus, regardless of changing ideas about bodily intimacy, in poorer homes across Europe, co-sleeping parents and children remained common across the period (Montjin 2008: 76). A mid-nineteenth century Parisian tailor and his wife, who rented a tiny room on the fifth floor of a larger complex, shared their bed with their two-year-old son while an older boy slept in a trundle bed at their bed's end (Perrot 2018: 94). When space was extremely limited and family members numerous, grandparents would also co-sleep with grandchildren (Holmes 2017: 97). In his tour of workers' homes in Mulhouse, France, in 1840, the physician, Louis-René Villermé, for example, recorded that people were “crammed into bedrooms, or small, unhealthy rooms, located near their place of work” (Perrot 2018: 93–5). Coroners' reports from Victorian Britain reveal similar practices. In 1844, 27-year-old Rachel Ship married the 26-year-old farm laborer, John Pyett, in Debenham, Suffolk. They moved into Rachel's grandfather's home and shared a bedroom with him for several years (Holmes 2017: 22–3).

It is possible that these sleeping arrangements borne out of necessity rather than choice still provided the comfort that co-sleeping could bring in the earlier period for the more affluent. Nonetheless, as Villermé's language, and the coroner's denunciation of the Holden's sleeping conditions indicates, co-sleeping became a social, health, and moral concern for middle-class observers.

Bodily Intimacy and the Policing of Proximity

Bodily intimacy was increasingly reconfigured as suspicious by a range of commentators. Formerly, bodily proximity was understood to be problematic when it was hierarchically skewed. Maids generally made and cleaned beds, and numerous early modern court cases

show that masters sexually abused and raped their servants as they went about these tasks (Gruening 2003 61–3; Handley 2016: 118). Slaveholders also used shared sleeping spaces to sexually exploit the enslaved. But as intimacy was reconfigured in the nineteenth century, it was the potential for bodies' proximity to be a moral and social contaminant, sexually deviant, as well as unhealthy, that took precedence and shaped attitudes and practices. This remodeling of physical intimacy played out in sleeping arrangements, which, in turn, influenced sleeping habits in the second part of the period (Perrot 2018: 501; Reiss 2017: 27–9). This was especially so when nocturnalization made the nighttime less frightening and physical proximity for the purposes of security and comfort less essential. For all this, it should be noted that certain groups ignored rising unease about bodily proximity if it did not suit their interests. Plantation owners in the antebellum South, for instance, constructed slave dwellings where high numbers of the enslaved slept in small spaces, ignoring the relations between those forced to sleep together (Brown 2009: 350).

In the first half of the nineteenth century, social investigators and those concerned with the condition of the poor set out to reform social conditions and improve public health, amassing data about working-class living conditions in order to propose solutions. Filth was increasingly identified as the cause of epidemic fever, and bodily proximity within dirty, cramped spaces was considered a locus of disease, as well as immorality (Brown 2008). Thus, classed beds and dormant bodies formed a central focus of public health and social investigators' reports and publications (*First Report* 1844: 47; Kay 1832: 113). In the first place, beds were sources of disease because enclosed beds were considered to prevent air circulation, meaning bedfellows breathed others' exhalations (Crook 2008: 18; Hinds 2010: 281; Perrot 2018: 24–5). Overcrowding was a further concern, demonstrated through calculations of the average number of persons per bed (*First Report* 1844: Appendix Borough of Preston 45).

The broader rhetoric of filth meant that bodily contact was increasingly suspect. Accounts not only focused on the filth of sleeping arrangements, but also on indiscriminately mingled dormant bodies themselves (Crook 2008; Hinds 2010: 208–11; *First Report* 1844). Concerned public officials and medical authorities used a deeply emotive language about bodily proximity and sleeping arrangements, describing a writhing mass of undifferentiated bodies as disgusting. White Europeans also used racialized language to convey the extent of the degradation that they encountered. In his *Treatise on Fever* (1830), Thomas Southwood Smith commented that “the room of a fever patient in a small and heated apartment in London . . . is perfectly analogous to a stagnant pool in Ethiopia” (Brown 2008). Similarly, connecting the industrial metropole to supposedly “uncivilized” regions, Villermé framed his horror for the white working classes he scrutinized in his travels through the textile industrial regions of France. In Lille, he likened those he saw in beds, “people of both sexes, of very different ages, most without shirts, and repulsively dirty,” to Africans (Perrot 2018: 87). Such “sticky” rhetoric elicited disgust more generally about sleeping bodies in close proximity. It extended beyond official government reports (Ahmed 2004). Nineteenth-century travelers described sharing beds with strangers or using beds sullied by previous sleepers in similar terms. The northern US partisan Frederick Law Olmstead complained of his travels in the South in the 1850s: “Nine times out of ten, at least, after such a promise, I slept in a room with others, in a bed which stank, supplied with but one sheet, if with any” (Brown 2009: 354).

Such disgust shaped anti-slavery rhetoric too. The English actress Frances Kemble’s husband owned rice and cotton plantations, which she visited between 1838–1839. She used very similar language to those social investigators who entered white working-class dwellings, lamenting the “filthy, pestilential-looking blanket” that she saw in slave quarters. For her this was evidence of enslaved people’s exploitation and suffering, dismissing white

southerners' argument that black people were suited to slavery because of their inferior bodies. Indeed, for those who campaigned against slavery, it was the planters' bodily intimacy with those they enslaved that demonstrated their moral inferiority. Kemble described slave owners "[h]anging their infants at the breasts of Negresses . . . having one or more little pet blacks sleeping like puppy dogs in their very bedchamber, [and] almost every planter . . . admitting one or several of his female slaves to the still closer intimacy of his bed" (Brown 2009: 349–50).

However well meaning, the white, middle-class drive to reconstitute intimate bodily practices was a form of domestic imperialism that penetrated dwellings across Europe and North America (Brown 2009: 235). Inadequate or compromised sleeping arrangements were part of a wider rhetoric of dehumanization, demonstrating that the white race was under threat (Brown 2008). Thomas Southwood Smith declared that overcrowded and mixed sex sleeping arrangements in dwellings of the London poor were "unhumanizing" because they "weaken and destroy the feelings and affections which are distinctive of the human being, and which raise him above the level of the brute." In a description that evoked later nineteenth-century social Darwinism, he warned that these conditions led to racial degradation, with "human faces retrograding, sinking down to the level of these brute tribes" (*First Report* 1844: Minutes, 82–3). In colonizing and imperial states, the physical proximity of racialized others was deployed to prove their inferiority and need for control. In this way, the separation of bodies and a rethinking of intimacy facilitated white people's construction of themselves as superior, civilized, and fitted for mastery. Physical distance became a marker of white civilization, and racialized bodies were othered and identified as "primitive" through descriptions of sleeping arrangements judged to be repugnant (Reiss 2017: 12, 30–1). This had long colonial roots in encounters with Native Americans in the seventeenth century (Brown 2009: 73). With plantation slavery, enslaved people's exhaustion and inhospitable

sleeping arrangements provided “scientific” evidence to justify slavery and black inferiority. In the 1850s, Samuel Cartwright proffered a theory that black adults instinctively covered their faces while sleeping, thereby obstructing their capacity to breathe freely. As a result, he claimed, their brains were deprived of oxygen and they were rendered childlike, in need of “government in every thing; food, clothing, exercise, sleep”. Such spurious racialized sleep theories “proved” that enslaved people were dependent on white people to rule them (Reiss 2017: 124–34).

Bodily proximity was not only dirty, degrading, and unhealthy, it was deviant. Driven by the combined cultural forces of Evangelicalism, domesticity, and privacy, sleeping arrangements were scrutinized as sources of moral contamination. Moral concerns were also expressed about the mixing of people in sleep who were related as well as unrelated, and the lack of segregation of sexes and generations (Crook 2008: 19–21, Perrot 2018: 50–1). In 1840 Villermé recorded that he saw in the rue des Étaques in Lille, “Fathers, mothers, children, adults, the elderly, all crammed in, on top of one another. I can’t go on . . . The reader will try to fill in the picture, but I warn him that if he wants it to be a faithful one, his imagination must not retreat before any of the disgusting mysteries that accumulate on these filthy sheets” (Perrot 2018: 86-7). The “mysteries” were incest and distancing bodies from each other was the solution. Others were even more forthright. When referring to instances of co-sleeping in London of family members, the physician and Utilitarian Thomas Southwood Smith testified in 1844: “That incestuous intercourse takes place under these circumstances there is too much reason to believe” (*First Report* 1844: Minutes 82).

These changing understandings of bodily contact radically reshaped sleeping arrangements. Over the nineteenth century, more people retired to new types of bed determined to be healthier. Bedsteads became smaller and less elevated; they tended to be “naked” or unenclosed and lacked bed hangings; and they were made of new materials

including metal coil springs in the 1820s, and later iron frames. All these developments were designed to improve both hygiene and morals (Fagan and Durrani 2019: 7; Hinds 2010: 278–80; Montjin 2008: 80; Perrot 2018: 31–5). Cribs also replaced cradles; larger and immobile, they were intended to be made of washable materials like metal. Located at the side of a mother’s bed to facilitate breast-feeding during the night, the infant was to be immediately returned to its own sleeping space thereafter. While this aimed to prevent adults overlaying babies, cribs were also designed to constrain infants as well as soothe them to sleep (Calvert 1992: 132–6; Perrot 2018: 95; Stearns 1996: 358). Cribs were, after all, aimed to accommodate children up to the age of four. Raised on tall legs to be the same height as the parental bed, with high barred sides, they offered fewer opportunities for leaving bed than did trundle beds, which were open and low to the floor (Calvert 1992: 134). Their openness made them part of an overall move to make sleep visible.

Architectural designs for homes also shifted to accommodate theories of dangerous bodily proximity (Moroney 2019: 123). Henry Austin, a superintending inspector for the General Board of Health in England, proposed a plan for healthier working-class housing recommending: “All the rooms should be small; it is surely better that different branches of a family should sleep separately in small rooms than in one large one, or that one man should occupy a room little larger than a closet, provided ventilation is secured, than share with others a much larger space” (*First Report* 1844: 421). During the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London, working-class flats were erected. A writer in *The Builder* praised them because “the sleeping apartments, being three in number, provide for that separation which, with a family, is so essential to morality and decency” (Crook 2009: 28).

Thus, family members of all ranks were directed to sleep at a distance from each other. Christian morals dictating the sexual segregation of servants was longstanding, and distinction of rank had often been recommended in sleeping spaces (Handley 2016: 117). But

from the early nineteenth century, the bodily proximity of children with each other and adults especially raised concerns in elite homes as well as working-class ones (Reiss 2017: 141–50). The segregation of sexes and ages was more explicitly associated with issues around deviant forms of sexuality. Carers of lower social status came to be viewed as potential pollutants of young children, leading to poor habits, inferior morals, and vulgarity (Calvert 1992: 122–3, 140). Other children also became sites of bodily danger. The American physician William Dewees declared in an 1832 treatise that “children should sleep in separate beds; and these should be large for it is injurious to have them cramped together when they sleep, as well as indelicate to crowd opposite sexes together” (Calvert 1992: 135). The presence of maids or other children was considered not only to interrupt sleep but to pass on the bad habit of masturbation (Calvert 1992: 140–2; Reiss 2017: 150–3). In 1853 one American commentator argued that children should have separate sleeping rooms “both for health, and to prevent their imbibing any wrong thing from other children” (Vollmer et al 2005: 5). It was these fears of bodily proximity and intimacy, rather than privacy, that underpinned moves to move elite children to specialized nurseries with dedicated carers.

Conclusion

This period witnessed significant shifts in people’s sleeping arrangements, the material culture surrounding sleep, the sites in which it was practiced, and bedtimes; these shifts occurred in conjunction with new architectural and consumer fashions, the “nocturnalization” of social activities, and changing requirements of work. If ideologies of privacy shaped the rhetoric of sleeping habits, it was changing notions of bodily proximity that led to pressure for lone sleeping and effected a greater physical separation among family members during sleeping hours. The attempts to police the proximity of working-class bodies through sleeping arrangements were not straightforward, however. Planciusblok, a working-class housing project, built in Amsterdam in the 1850s, provided a separate bedroom in the

accommodation. Tenants repurposed it as a parlor, a symbol of status that they preferred over the “privacy” of a distinct bedroom. In the Netherlands, people held onto their box beds despite hygienists’ attempts to eradicate them, because they offered more space and enabled a room to be used for self-representation (Montjin 2008: 81, 86). Physical distance in sleep was not easy to accomplish, either. Surely few families could afford the supposedly “cheap” mid-nineteenth century homes designed by Gervase Wheeler, a British architect who designed homes in America, which included two bedrooms on the second floor and four further sleeping rooms in the attic (Moroney 2019: 123). Fears of physical intimacy also led to impossible paradoxes. In boarding schools, by the 1850s, a tension arose between distancing children to avoid illicit sexuality, while ensuring that they were not completely unsupervised in individuated beds and thus susceptible to masturbation (Crook 2008: 30–1; Reiss 2017: 152–3).

Finally, sleep privacy always had different meanings for different people. Working-class people themselves expressed a desire for sleeping arrangements that were more physically separated. A French man bemoaned his family’s overcrowded home at the start of the 1840s, in which his bedridden and dying grandmother was unable to withdraw from the busy family life around her:

I think wealthy people are lucky to have homes with more than one room, where the one you eat in is distinct from the one you sleep in. Each family should have its own bedroom, and consequently its own privacy. At least they can be ill without anyone bothering them. Whereas in the only room in the poorer households everything’s a spectacle, and all the spectacles blend together; everyone’s misery unfolds before everyone else’s eyes, with nothing to be done about it. So it comes to pass that beside my dying grandmother, my little nephews are loudly shouting their joy at being alive,

deafening her with their noise. Life carries on that way, indifferent to the agony of an old paralyzed woman (Perrot 2018: 25).

Here the “privacy” of the bedroom was neither the morally safe space of the early nineteenth century, nor the site enabling individual development of the later nineteenth century. It was a space offering physical and psychological respite and dignity. As this poignant example indicates, sleeping arrangements were fundamental to everyone’s experience, offering historians ways to comprehend the differential material worlds of people in the past. Tracking the arrangements of sleeping bodies in the fulness of their environments reveal much about the ways individuals and societies conceived of themselves and their place in the world.

Captions:

Figure 2.1. *Interior with a farmer's family*, Christiaan Josi, 1821, © Getty Images.

Figure 2.2. *A Gentleman Dressing, Attended by His Head Bearer and Other Servants*, Charles D'Oyly. Photo by © Historical PictureArchive/CORBIS/Corbis via Getty Images.

Figure 2.3. *Tameing A Shrew*, c. 1815: Petruchio’s patent family bedstead, gags, & thumbscrews, Photo by Buyenlarge © Getty Images.