Cultural Practices as Contexts for Development

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Number 67, Spring 1995
JONGEY-BANIS PUBLISHERS
San Francisco
The practice of determining who sleeps by whom in a family household is a symbolic action that simultaneously expresses and realizes some of the deepest moral ideals of a cultural community.

Who Sleeps by Whom Revisited: A Method for Extracting the Moral Goods Implicit in Practice

Richard A. Shweder, Lene Arnett Jensen, William M. Goldstein

The focus of this chapter is on the analysis of sleeping arrangements among high-caste families in the Hindu temple town of Bhubaneswar in Orissa, India, and among middle-class families from the Anglo-American culture region of Hyde Park, Chicago. Our central claim is that the universal practice of determining “who sleeps by whom” in a family household is a symbolic action, or nonverbal vehicle of meaning, that both expresses and realizes some of the deepest moral ideals of a cultural community. One aim of the chapter is to discuss methods for extracting the preferences, values, or moral “goods” implicit in the practice of arranging where family members sleep at night. A second aim is to make a substantive contribution to cultural psychology by tracing some interconnections between cultural practices, morality, ethno-psychological knowledge, and personality development.

We begin, however, with a discussion of a recent commentary by the renowned pediatrician E. Berry Brazelton on the topic of parent-child co-sleeping arrangements (Brazelton, 1990). Brazelton’s didactic, self-conscious rumination

We gratefully acknowledge the support received for this research from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Successful Middle Development (MIF). We are deeply thankful to Muni-monish Mohapatra for his many contributions over the years to our research in Orissa, India, and thankful as well to Joan Miller, Rita Mahauty, Swajana Palla, and and Shweder for their assistance in connection with the gathering and early analysis of some of the material on sleeping arrangements in Orissa.
ponders the question, Who ought to sleep by whom in the human family? His candid reflections, although brief, are deep and revealing. They provide students of cultural psychology and Anglo-American cultural studies with a glimpse of the way ethnopsychiatric “windows,” local moral sensibilities, culture-specific character traits, and historically evolved family practices reinforce each other—and perhaps even make each other up.

**Brazelton’s Conflict**

Brazelton poses a fascinating and complex moral question: Should children be allowed (encouraged, required) routinely to sleep in the same bed with their parent(s)? For most middle-class readers who have grown up in the Anglo-American culture region, the answer to that question will seem obvious: children should be taught to sleep alone.

In the past, this was the answer Brazelton would have given to parents. More recently, however, he has had some conversations with pediatricians in Japan, where children typically co-sleep with their parents until they are adolescents. Now he feels “conflicted.” On the one hand, Brazelton believes it is important to promote autonomy and independence in infants and young children by having them sleep alone. He also worries about the temptations and dangers of sexual abuse, and he cannot shake from his mind the picture of the sexual fantasy life of young children (desiring the mother, hating the father, desiring genital mutilation) as portrayed by psychoanalytic theorists. He even acknowledges his own inhibitions and his inability to sleep in the same bed with a small child, which he concedes are “due to deeply ingrained taboos and questions” from his past (p. 7).

On the other hand, Brazelton is well aware of all those apparently undamaged Japanese who have grown up co-sleeping with their parents. These days, he also finds himself faced with increasing numbers of American clients—for example, divorced or unwed parents—who feel a “need” to sleep in the same bed with their child. He concludes his remarks by asking, “Should we reevaluate our stance toward children’s sleep?” Brazelton’s remarks appear in *Ab Initio: An International Newsletter for Professionals Working with Infants and Their Families*. In such an international context, his nearly inclusive reference to “our stance” is fascinating. It suggests one of the following: (1) that Dr. Brazelton did not ponder fully what it would mean to address such a question to a truly international audience, whose stance on this topic could not be taken for granted, (2) that the actual readership of the “international newsletter” is restricted to professionals from Europe and the United States, or (3) that one measure of being acknowledged as an international “professional” in the infancy field is the adoption of an Anglo-American stance on questions about parent-child co-sleeping.

In any case, before adopting any stance toward co-sleeping arrangements, we might find it helpful to look into the semantics (the form) and pragmatics (the function and distribution) of sleeping arrangements on a worldwide scale. For “our stance,” if it refers to the stance of the Anglo-American world, is rather unusual in the international context of family-life practices.

**Co-Sleeping Here and There: The American Middle Class and Beyond**

Although there have been few systematic studies of co-sleeping between children and their parents in the United States, there does exist a characteristic white middle-class practice concerning who sleeps by whom in the family. Lui (1981), in a pediatric study of 119 children (age six and under) from middle-class, two-parent white families in Cleveland, Ohio, found that only 3 percent of the children regularly slept in their parents’ bedroom during the first year of life, and only 1 percent did so after their first birthday. Similar results from an urban sample in California can be found in Rosenfeld and others (1982) and Weisner, Bausano, and Kornfeld (1983). Among members of the white middle class, routinized parent-child co-sleeping appears to be exceedingly rare. (Studies of occasional or intermittent parent-child co-sleeping in the white middle class report somewhat higher percentages: Lui, 1981; Mandansky and Edelbrock, 1990.)

Routine parent-child co-sleeping appears to be more common in other U.S. groups. Lui (1981) reports that in Cleveland 55 percent of African-American children less than one year of age co-sleep with a parent every night and all night and that 25 percent of African-American children one to five years of age do so (also see Lui, 1981; Mandansky and Edelbrock, 1990). Abbigi (1992), working in a white, predominantly blue-collar community in Appalachian Kentucky, found that 71 percent of children between two months and two years of age and 47 percent of children between two years and four years of age co-sleep with a parent. (Abbigi does not explicitly state her definition of co-sleeping, although it appears to entail sleeping in a parent’s bed or bedroom every night and all night.) Demonstrating that consulting and resource limitations are insufficient explanations for these co-sleeping arrangements, Abbigi argues that many blue-collar Appalachian families prefer for parents and their younger children to co-sleep. This preference is articulated in terms of the moral view that the capacity to nurse and nurture are God-given blessings. Co-sleeping is pictured as a palpable satisfaction and as an experience of profound “closeness” that enhances the long-term social bonds between parents and their offspring.

The limited research evidence suggests, then, that the sleeping practices of the white middle class have not been uniformly adopted by all groups in the United States. Nevertheless, it also seems reasonable to conclude what most members of the white middle class already know: there exists in white middle-class communities a family-life practice in which, after darkness falls, the bedroom of adults is a private space guarded with taboos against children of
all ages and is presumed to be "off limits" (except in the case of occasional medical problems and other emergencies). Children are expected to make it through the night alone.

Of course, anthropologists (see Barion and Whiting, 1961; Caudill and Phalen, 1966; LeVine, 1990; Lecof and Brittenham, 1979; McKenna and others, 1993, Whiting 1964, 1981) have long known that the ritualized isolation and solitude imposed on young children every night in the middle-class Anglo-American culture region are not practiced in most other regions of the world. In Whiting's 1964 survey of "customary" sleeping arrangements in 134 societies, infants and mothers were found to co-sleep most of the time. Commenting on the ethnographic record, Whiting (1981, p. 161) notes that "since in many cultures sleeping arrangements are a private affair, specific ethnographic reports are often lacking and judgments are often made inerratically. . . ." Nevertheless, of the scores of (mostly non-Western, mostly nonindustrial) communities around the world studied by anthropologists on which information is available (Barry and Foxon, 1971), there is no single community in which infants customarily sleep alone.

Indeed, the historically evolved behavioral script calling for nighttime separation of children from parents that is enacted on a nightly basis in middle-class American families is often perceived by adults in Africa, Asia, and Central America as a form of "child neglect" (see, for example, Morelli, Rogoff, Oppenheimer, and Goldsmith, 1982). Brazilians themselves reiterate the Japanese think of Americans as "merciless" for forcing children to be off on their own and isolated in a dark room throughout the night. Adults in Orissa, India, express similar moral concerns about the practice, which they view as indicative of parental irresponsibility.

Advice Columns and the Moral Perceptions of the Anglo-American Middle Class. Of course, most middle-class Anglo-Americans do not view their own sleeping practices as abusive and immoral. Quite the contrary, they are convinced that their arrangements are sound, are healthy, and promote the moral good. They are disturbed by the practice of parents and children bed-living together at night and nervous about its consequences. They are prone to the view that parents-child co-sleeping is pathologically and perhaps even criminal or sinful. Here are two examples of the kinds of queries and responses about parent-child co-sleeping that show up in "expert" advice columns in mainstream middle-class American newspapers such as the Chicago Tribune.

Dear Anna Eastley: I have three children, ages 2, 3 and 5. Here's my problem: All three end up in my bedroom during the night. Usually I know they are there but I sleep right through it. ... I'm newly divorced and there is no man in my bed, so the kids aren't disturbing anyone. . . . My mother tells me I must make the kids sleep in their own rooms. She says sometimes children who want to sleep with their parents need to be taken to a psychologist because their behavior indicates deeper problems. What do you say? Is it that big a deal when they are so young?

Dear Abby: I recently spent my first weekend at the house of my fiancé's parents. "Harold" warned me not to be shocked that his 14-year-old younger brother, "Nicky," sleeps in the same bed with their 20-year-old mother. Needless to say, I was appalled. I have always known that Harold's parents have had a troubled marriage and haven't shared a bedroom since 1960. Harold mentioned about a month ago that his younger brother has been sleeping with his mother, but that the therapist to speak to him if he sleeps in his own bedroom. Harold has tried talking to his mother about this but she is very inconsiderate and softens into depression. . . . Someone has to consider the interests of Nicky. I am honestly afraid that this sleeping arrangement could psychologically harm him. Would you please guide me on this issue?

Dear Really Worried: You are not to be commended for caring enough to take a stand, because no immediate family member has been willing to become this boy's advocate. Clearly, Nicky is being emotionally blackmailed, and his mother's behavior is inappropriate. You should report her to the Children's Services Unit in Texas to call in . . . [Aug. 28, 1992]

After reading about such incidents, a typical middle-class Anglo-American reader is likely to feel full of anxious concerns about issues of sexuality, excessive dependency, and the exploitation of children. Many middle-class Anglo-Americans will be prepared to accept without much reflection the presupposition that the quality of a marriage can be gauged by whether or not a wife and husband sleep together, which is implicit in Dear Abby's remarks. Many readers will be offended by the perceived infringements on Nicky's autonomy. They will stigmatize the mother and harbor doubts about her mental health and/or sexual morality. That is a normative and a culturally acceptable response for middle-class Anglo-American readers.

However, it is not a normative or culturally proper response for readers from Japan. Even Dear Abby might be surprised to learn that Japanese parents feel morally obliged to provide their children with a parental sleeping partner; that husbands and wives are willing to separate from each other in order to do so; that approximately 50 percent of eleven- to fifteen-year-old urban Japanese boys and girls sleep in the same room as their mother or father or both; that Japanese fathers are just as likely to co-sleep with their daughters as with their sons; that only 14 percent of eleven- to fifteen-year-olds sleep alone (they sleep with siblings when not co-sleeping with parents); and that no Japanese observer of such practices worries about psychopathology or phones for help (Caudill and Phalen, 1966).
case is instructive as a lesson in the way cultural practices and individual
psychological functioning are intertwined. The classic and most
detailed anthropological study of sleeping arrangements is Candill and Plath's 1966
research report entitled "Who Sleeps by Whom? Parent-Child Involvement in
Urban Japanese Families." In their survey of 323 families from the cities of
Kyoto, Tokyo, and Matsusato, Candill and Plath found that, over a lifetime,
a typical Japanese person during the first sixty years of this century seldom
drew sleep alone.

It is important to note that the Japanese sleeping practices documented
in 1966-1962 were not driven primarily by lack of available space. Candill
and Plath found that three-member households consisting of two parents and
an infant did not disperse for sleep even when space was available. For house-
holds with more than three persons, variations in available sleeping space
accounted for no more than 22 percent of the variance in utilized sleeping
space. They concluded that the "Japanese prefer to sleep in clusters of two or
three persons and prefer not to sleep alone.

Candill and Plath suggested that co-sleeping is a source of satisfaction for
Japanese children and adults, that Japanese sleeping arrangements "emphasize
the interdependence more than the separateness of individuals," and that co-
sleeping diminishes the tension and separations between genders and
generations. They even speculate that, given the way culture and psyche make each
other up, the practice of sleeping alone is emotionally threatening to the Japan-
ese sense of self and may be a cause of suicide and other psychopathologies.

Co-Sleeping and the Idea of Cultural Practices:
Limitations in the Literature

The anthropological and pediatric literature on sleeping practices is not with-
out limitations. The cross-cultural data tend to portray sleeping arrangements
in terms of the nuclear triad of mother (m), father (f), and infant or young
child (c), without detailed attention to the gender of the child or to the co-
sleeping practices of other children. The literature also tends to represent each
community with a single "customary" sleeping arrangement, such as
m/f (mother and child co-sleep, father sleeps separately) or m/f (mother,
father, and child all sleep together), though the concept of culture required
the investigator to characterize the traditions of a culture in terms of a single
fixed sleeping pattern.

This is not the most satisfactory way to conceptualize a "culture" or to
study the form and function of sleeping practices. The documentation of pat-
terns of behavior—especially behaviors that are traditional, invested with a
moral force, and passed on from generation to generation—is an important
first step in the study of culture. However, the study of culture is not reducible
to the study of behavior patterns per se. A culture is a way of life built up by a
series of morally enforceable conceptual schemes that are expressed and instan-
tiated in practice. To provide a cultural account, then, one must establish a correspondence between behavior patterns and the preferences, values, moral
goods, and causal beliefs exhibited in those behaviors. The entire cultural
perspective that values, meanings, concepts, ideas, and causal beliefs are
analytically external to and theoretically separable from the behaviors them-
selves. That is why, in the study of sleeping practices discussed below, we con-
sider each recorded instance of who sleeps by whom as a "choice" from a
logical matrix of possibilities. The "choice" is constrained by a "natural gram-
mar" (an ordered set of cultural preferences, values, and moral goods) that is
expressed and realized through the sleeping patterns.

In the remainder of this chapter, we shall employ the following symbols
for the designation of kinship statuses: l = father, m = mother, s = son, d =
daughter, c = child, number = age in years, f = separate sleeping locations.

Within any common sleeping location, the ordering of symbols indicates the
ordering of bodies. For example, d7 s1 m8 indicates three co-sleeping
children, with the three-year-old son sleeping between the seven-year-old daughter
and the eight-year-old son.

We know from our own experience in India, that even when there
are well-defined cultural values expressed and realized through the practice of
who sleeps by whom, there is no "locked-in" single, fixed sleeping pattern. For
example, the nuclear relatives of different families might sleep as follows: 1 d7
f m d3 s4, or m d1 d7 d8; or d7 m d11 d8 s4 s6. One can, of course,
engage in the kind of oversimplification characteristic of much of the previous
research on sleeping arrangements by reducing this type of data to summary
information about a prototypical nuclear triad mother, father, child. How-
ever, even at that relatively more general level for describing kinship statuses
one still discovers that there is no single, fixed sleeping pattern that charac-
terizes the Ov'iya community. In our record of single-night sleeping arrange-
ments in 100 households, m/f, m/c, and m/f/c patterns occur with about
equal frequency (27 percent, 29 percent, 25 percent of cases, respectively),
and even some instances of only one can be observed (17 percent of cases). Of the
other two possible patterns, m/f and f/c, are rare.

Nevertheless, as we shall see below, the many sleeping arrangements
that do occur in the Ov'iya community can be coherently understood within the
terms of an ordered series of moral goods that dictate and constrain the "gram-
natical" variations in behavior that are exhibited. Just as a grammar of a lan-
guage constrains but does not determine the particular linguistic expression
uttered on any occasion, the moral goods of a cultural constraint but do not
determine the sleeping arrangements in any particular household.

In other words, the reality and unity of Ov'iya sleeping practices do not
reside at the level of description where we characterize a particular arrange-
ment of bodies on the ground. The reality and unity of the practices reside at
the level of description where we characterize the preferences, values, and
moral goods realized and expressed by particular arrangements of bodies on
the ground. There is no particular reason to assume that a single ordered set of
reflective participant in the life of a family can avoid. Although Brazelton's question should not be evaded, we think it is best to put off answering it for a while. There is no point in engaging in a full-blown moral debate about who should sleep by whom until some firm empirical and conceptual foundations for the debate have been put in place.

With regard to the empirical foundations that need to be put in place, both those who condemn and those who justify parent-child co-sleeping arrangements make many assumptions about objective means-end connections. Yet systematic evidence is almost never presented (and may not exist) on whether co-sleeping in childhood per se in fact deepens long-term familial cohesion, whether sleeping alone since infancy per se in fact promotes independence and autonomy in adulthood, or whether witnessing the primal scene per se in fact is a cause of neuroses in adulthood. (For discrepant opinions of the dangers of viewing the primal scene, see Dahl, 1982, and Rosenfeld and others, 1980.)

It is conceivable that particular sleeping practices per se have no predictable long-term effects on individual psychological functioning and character formation. Sleeping practices may serve mainly as daily ritual enactments of the fundamental values of a group and/or as a measure used by insiders for determining who should be accepted as "normal" and "cooperative" members of that society.

It is conceivable that, even if sleeping arrangements per se have no long-term effect on individual psychological functioning and character formation, sleeping arrangements may have long-term effects that are predictable once the local meaning of the practice has been taken into account. In other words, the effects of a sleeping practice may be largely mediated by the local meaning conferred on the practice by a group. Perhaps it is being conditioned with a culturally deviant behavior in the bedroom (enforced isolation in a Japanese family, enforced co-sleeping in an Anglo-American family) that puts a child at risk.

It is also conceivable that any long-term effects of a particular sleeping arrangement on the emotional life of a particular individual are entirely idiosyncratic and involve a complex interaction between details of the practice and aspects of personal temperament (see Kast, 1990, for a relevant clinical case from India). Unfortunately, given the state of the research evidence, no one really knows whether any of these conceivable alternatives are true. From an empirical point of view, international moral advisors on sleeping arrangements are simply extrapolating their local cultural intuitions while skating on thin evidential ice.

From a conceptual point of view, the foundations for addressing the question, Who ought to sleep by whom in the family? are no more secure than those who condemn and those who justify parent-child co-sleeping arrangements make many strong and limiting assumptions about moral goods. Yet rarely are these moral considerations informed by a systematic examination of the range of moral values that are exhibited in the sleeping practices of different cultures around the world. Rarely is the problem of who should sleep by whom...
conceptualized as a problem in choosing between alternative, and perhaps conflicting, moral goods. While the research to be reported below will not provide an answer to Hazenous's question about who ought to sleep by whom, it may supply some conceptual and empirical fuel for the moral debate already begun.

Who Sleeps by Whom in Orissa and Hyde Park?

**Method and Data.** Three types of data are discussed in the sections that follow: (1) the results of a "sleeping arrangement task" in which informants in Orissa, India, and Hyde Park, Illinois, located members of a hypothetical seven-person family into sleeping spaces under various hypothetical resource constraints; (2) the results of a "preference conflict task" in which informants in Orissa, India, and Hyde Park, Illinois, ranked various culturally deviant arrangements of members of the hypothetical seven-person family in terms of the relative seriousness of the breach; (3) spot reports about who slept by whom on a single night in 100 households in the Hindu temple town of Bhubaneswar in Orissa, India.

Extracting Moral Goods: The Logical Matrix of the Sleeping Arrangement Task. In our view, sleeping arrangements are a joint product of cultural preferences (for example, the particular moral goods promoted by a people) and local resource constraints (for example, the amount of space available). Given our conceptualization of sleeping arrangements as symbolic actions, our main concern is to extract similarities and differences in cultural preferences, values, or goods as they are revealed in practice, while taking account of similarities or differences that are driven primarily by limited space.

Orissa and American informants were presented with a sleeping arrangement task. For this task, a hypothetical family was constructed consisting of seven members: 1, m, s15, s11, s8, d14, and d3. Nineteen Orissa adults (eleven women and eight men) and nineteen American adults (nine women and ten men) were asked to arrange members of the family into separate sleeping spaces under different hypothetical resource constraints. You have one room. How would you arrange the seven family members? You have two rooms. And so forth through seven rooms. At each resource level, the informant was free to declare that no sorting was possible or desirable. Informants were also asked to select their most preferred resource level: How many separate sleeping rooms would be ideal for this seven-person family?

An important first step in the cultural analysis of the proposed solutions to the sleeping arrangement task is the tabulation of all the logically possible ways to sort the members of a seven-person family into one to seven discrete sleeping spaces. In total, there are 877 logically possible ways to do this. Of course, there is only one way to sort seven persons into one room, and only one way to sort seven persons into seven rooms. But there are 6 logical ways to sort seven persons into two rooms, 360 ways for three rooms, 910 ways for four rooms, 140 ways for five rooms, and 21 ways for six rooms. (See Table 2.1 for an example of the calculation of the logically possible ways to sort seven persons into three rooms.)

It is a crucial fact about the force of cultural constraints on the practice of who sleeps by whom that exceedingly few of the 877 logically possible solutions were selected by any Orissa or American informant. For example, no one ever proposed such a four-room solution as d1 s14 s15 s11 or m1 d14 s15 s8 s11. No one ever proposed such a two-room solution as m1 s14 s11 s15. Indeed, perhaps 95 percent of the possible solutions in the logical matrix were ruled out as immoral, unacceptable, or otherwise "ungrammatical" by informants in both cultures. We would predict that even with a very large sample of informants, very low frequencies (lower than 1 or so out of 877) would be selected with any frequency by informants in either culture. We would also predict that the small subset of solutions selected by Orissa Indians would not be coincidental with those selected by Americans.

Consider, for example, the Orissa and American solutions to the sleeping arrangement task under the two-room constraint. Seventeen of nineteen Orissa informants offered a solution. Despite the fact that there are 877 logically possible ways to sort the family into two rooms, 75 percent of those Orissa informants selected one of two solutions: s15 s11 s14 s15 s8 or s15 s11 s14 s15 s11. In stark contrast, only seven of nineteen American informants were able to offer a solution at all under the two-room constraint. Almost all of them converged on a sleeping arrangement that no Orissa chose—namely, 1 m d14 s15 s11 s8.

**Table 2.1. Distribution of Logically Possible Solutions and Actually Selected Solutions to the Sleeping Arrangement Task Under the Three-Room Constraint**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persons per Room</th>
<th>Orissa</th>
<th>Americans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3/4/5</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/3/5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/3/3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/1/1/1/1/1/1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most Frequent R1/R2 Splits:

- Orissa: 3/4/5
- Americans: 1/1/1/1/1/1/1
Preferences, Values, and Moral Goods of Two Cultures. There is a small set of cultural preferences that can help us explain the many unsolved mysteries of the logical matrix. At least one of these relevant moral preferences will be familiar to all students of family dynamics. That preference can be summarized under the principle of “insect avoidance”; within the family, sexualized unmarried males and females must not have sex with each other and should avoid all situations, such as co-sleeping, where there may be sexual temptations or even suspicion about sexual contact. It seems likely that insect avoidance is a universal moral preference, although allowances must be made for cultural variations in the scope of insect avoidance beyond the nuclear family and in the age of the people who must be separated.

Some of the other relevant moral preferences are more culture-specific. One such preference can be summarized under the principle of “female chastity anxiety”: in a culture such as India, where it is important in the context of marriage arrangements for unmarried women to be贞洁, young unmarried girls are constantly shamed. Thus they should not sleep alone at night. Another preference can be summarized under the principle of “religion for hierarchy” among sexually mature males, social superiority is expressed through deference and distance, which is incompatible with the intimacy, familiarity, and exposure to co-sleeping. Still another moral preference falls under the principle of “protection of the vulnerable”: highly valued members of the family, such as children who are needy and fragile and should not be left alone at night.

There is also a preference that can be summarized under the principle of “autonomy”: highly valued members of the family, such as children, should be able to be alone because they can learn to be self-reliant and independent and to care for themselves. A final moral preference falls under the principle of “the sacred couple”, when it comes to co-habiting adults, emotional intimacy, interpersonal commitment, and sexual privacy are required as they sleep together and alone.

Each of these principles is a constraint on who sleeps by whom at night, although their interpretation and application leave room for local cultural discretion. For example, under Uighur interpretations, the insect avoidance principle requires separate sleeping space for at least these pairs: U1/1 (m/f), (m/m), (f/f), (f/m). Under American interpretations, given the influence of certain ethnomethodological disciplines about the sexualized character of interactions between young children and adults, the moral preference for insect avoidance might require separate sleeping space for other pairs too: (m/f), (m/m = 10, f/m = 10), and (f/f).

For Uighurs, there are four moral preferences implicit in their choices on the sleeping arrangement task: insect avoidance, protection of the vulnerable, female chastity anxiety, and respect for hierarchy. Thus, for example, a logically possible sleeping arrangement such as that proposed by an American informant—m/f / d/f / d/f / s/f / s/f— is ruled out by Uighur informants because it is inconsistent with two important local moral preferences: female chastity anxiety (d/f cannot sleep alone) and protection of the vulnerable (d/f cannot sleep alone).

For middle-class Anglo-Americans, in contrast, there are three moral preferences, values, or goods that impinge on their choices on the sleeping arrangement task: insect avoidance, the sacred couple, and autonomy. Thus, for example, a logically possible sleeping arrangement such as the one proposed by an American informant—m/f / d/f / d/f / s/f / s/f— is ruled out by American informants because it is inconsistent with two important local moral preferences: the sacred couple (m/f should have exclusive co-sleeping space) and autonomy (each child should sleep alone).

Ordering of Moral Goods on the Preference Conflict Task. We are doubtful that the choices favoring a particular arrangement of sleeping locations in Uighur and American households are ever fully constrained by resource constraints. Even in a relatively confined culture, members of a family can divide themselves into separate sleeping areas (using, for example, mats, beds, sections of a floor). Nevertheless, from an analytic point of view, it is useful to imagine occasions when sleeping space is limited and members of a culture must make choices among their moral preferences. The preferences for each culture can be arranged in a precedence order, as we have done below.

This ordering was determined by presenting informants with the preference conflict task. In this task, four Uighur adults and sixteen American adults were asked to rank a set of sleeping patterns selected to exemplify breaches of the various moral preferences or goods in each culture. All the offensive arrangements had relevance to the same seven-person family used in the sleeping arrangement task. The preference conflict task was administered only after the groups’ moral preferences and goods had been extracted by means of the sleeping arrangement task. Table 2.2 lists the various offensive arrangements presented to informants in Bissa and Hyde Park. They are ordered from “most offensive” to “least offensive” based on the average or aggregate results from the preference conflict task in the two cultures.

It appears that Uighur moral preferences can be listed in order of importance as follows: insect avoidance, protection of the vulnerable, female chastity anxiety, respect for hierarchy. For example, as shown in Table 2.2, a breach such as d/f / d/f / d/f / s/f / s/f is judged by Uighurs to be more severe than a breach such as d/f / d/f / d/f / s/f / s/f (a strong violation of insect avoidance), which in turn is judged to be more severe than a breach such as s/f / s/f / m/f / d/f / d/f (a strong violation of female chastity anxiety), which in turn is judged to be more severe than a breach such as d/f / d/f / d/f / s/f / s/f (a strong violation of respect for hierarchy).

Given the context of middle-class American moral preferences and the structure of the seven-person family, it was not easy to select a nearly decisive set of breaches for the preference conflict task. We recognize that the particular set of offending arrangements presented to American informants (and shown in Table 2.2) is not ideal for determining the full ordering of American moral preferences. Nevertheless, it is our hypothesis that middle-class American moral preferences can be listed in order of importance as follows:
Table 2.2. Culturally Offensive Sleeping Arrangements Ranked by Informants in Order of Severity of Breach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Incest Avoidance</th>
<th>Sacred Couple</th>
<th>Autonomy</th>
<th>Incest Avoidance</th>
<th>Sacred Couple</th>
<th>Autonomy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Otrisa, India</td>
<td>f114/m d15 s15 s8/s15 d3</td>
<td>d14/s11 s8/s15 d3</td>
<td>s11 s8/s15 d3</td>
<td>f114/m d15 s15 s8/s15 d3</td>
<td>d14/s11 s8/s15 d3</td>
<td>s11 s8/s15 d3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyde Park, United States</td>
<td>f114/m 11 s15 s8/s15 d3</td>
<td>f114/m d14 s11 s8</td>
<td>s11 s8/s15 d3</td>
<td>f114/m 11 s15 s8/s15 d3</td>
<td>f114/m d14 s11 s8</td>
<td>s11 s8/s15 d3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All these arrangements are offensive or "suggested" to some degree by the relevant cultural rankings; score from least mentally offensive at the top to least mentally offensive at the bottom.

The results of our study make it apparent why in constructing an analysis of the practice, it is imperative to distinguish between cultural preferences and resource constraints. Under particular cultural preferences, the sleeping practices of two communities may look more similar than an analysis of cultural preferences would reveal. Thus, for example, Otrisa Hindus and Hyde Park Americans tend to converge in their solutions to the sleeping arrangement task under the three-room constraint, despite the fact that their choices are regulated by somewhat different moral preferences. Under the three-room resource constraint, both Americans and Otrisas tend to favor s15 m d14 d3 s11 s15 s8. This is shown in Table 2.1 (bottom half). As indicated in Table 2.1, this arrangement is only one of 10 possible logically possible ways to divide seven persons into three rooms, and it is only one of 10 possible logically possible ways to divide the persons into a two-two-three person-per-room arrangement. Yet that arrangement is preferred by a vast majority of American informants as well as by a plurality of the Otrisa informants.

This particular sleeping arrangement is consistent with the two most important middle-class American moral preferences: incest avoidance and the sacred couple. Under a three-room constraint, most American informants seem willing to compromise on the autonomy of the children. The arrangement is also consistent with the three most important Otrisa moral goods (incest avoidance, protection of the vulnerable, and female chastity). (While there is no sacred couple principle in force in Otrisa, the local culture does not prohibit exclusive parental co-sleeping, as long as culturally relevant principles are honored.) Under the three-room constraint, Otrisas seem willing to compromise on respect for hierarchy, although it might be argued that that principle applies only to the relationship of f1 and s15, in which case the willingness to accept co-sleeping for s15, s11, and s8 may not be a compromise after all.

Under the three-room resource constraint, Otrisas do generate some solutions that middle-class Americans reject, such as f114/m d15 s15 s11 s8/s15 d3 (see Table 2.1). Nevertheless, if one were to observe only the behavior of the two cultures at that one resource level, one might be misled into thinking that the two cultures were more or less the same. Only when one looks at behavior across a variety of resource constraints and cultural preferences, values, and moral goods is it clear that the implications of this finding are important enough to warrant restating: in the face of any particular resource constraint, two different moral preference systems may give rise to similar "on the ground" sleeping arrangements; therefore, the "on the ground" observation is insufficient as a method for determining cultural differences.

Actual Sleeping Arrangements in the Temple Town: 160 Spot Reports. How relevant is our account of Otrisa preferences to "on the ground" sleeping arrangements in the temple town? In order to answer this question, we tested the Otrisa and American packages of cultural preferences on a corpus of spot reports.

Interviews were conducted with 160 children (ages eight to twelve) and adults, who were asked to describe the sleeping locations of members of their family on the previous night. Of 160 spot reports received.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Incest Avoidance</th>
<th>Sacred Couple</th>
<th>Autonomy</th>
<th>Incest Avoidance</th>
<th>Sacred Couple</th>
<th>Autonomy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Otrisa, India</td>
<td>f114/m d15 s15 s8/s15 d3</td>
<td>d14/s11 s8/s15 d3</td>
<td>s11 s8/s15 d3</td>
<td>f114/m d15 s15 s8/s15 d3</td>
<td>d14/s11 s8/s15 d3</td>
<td>s11 s8/s15 d3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyde Park, United States</td>
<td>f114/m 11 s15 s8/s15 d3</td>
<td>f114/m d14 s11 s8</td>
<td>s11 s8/s15 d3</td>
<td>f114/m 11 s15 s8/s15 d3</td>
<td>f114/m d14 s11 s8</td>
<td>s11 s8/s15 d3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
as it is not feasible to enter the interior spaces of a Hindu family compound to observe who sleeps by whom. We will treat these spot reports as though they were a behavioral case record, although ultimately we have no way to assess the degree of memory distortion, idealization, or error in this verbal record.

Twelve cases of nighttime sleeping arrangements, randomly selected from the data set, are listed in Table 2.3. As should be obvious from this table, the family co-sleeping networks in the temple town rarely fit the standard middle-class Anglo-American pattern.

Several decisions had to be made about precisely how to apply the various moral preference principles to the 100 cases at hand. These decisions were resolved in the following ways: (1) the Oriya female chastity principle is applied only to unmarried sexualized females, and the principle is not violated whenever an unmarried sexualized female shares a room with another family member, no matter who that is; (2) the Oriya respect for hierarchy principle does not apply between sons but only between father and son; (3) the incest avoidance principle does not apply to co-sleeping of grandparents and grandchildren; (4) the principles of incest avoidance, female chastity anxiety, and respect for hierarchy are violated only if the child of relevance is thirteen years of age or older. Finally, in order to simplify our analysis, we treated all indistinguishably recognized separations of sleeping space (different mats on two sides of a courtyard, different beds on two sides of a partition, different rooms) as equivalent separations.

In 87 percent of the Oriya households, sleeping arrangements were consistent with all four Oriya preferences. The most important principle, incest avoidance, was violated in 8 of 100 households. An example of a violation of the incest avoidance principle can be found in Table 2.3 (line 3), where the mother and her fifteen-year-old son co-sleep, although in the presence of four other children (1/1 d 12 s 10 s 8 d 4 m 8 s 5). Based on the results of our sleeping arrangement task, members of the local Oriya community might well look askance at such a particular arrangement, although within the terms of Oriya ethnoexperience it may not be easy to set precise age boundaries on the upper limits for nonexclusive parent-child co-sleeping. The second most important principle, protection of the vulnerable, was never violated. The third most important principle, female chastity anxiety, was violated in two households. The principle of respect for hierarchy was violated in twelve households.

It is a useful exercise to apply the package of American moral preferences to the actual Oriya sleeping arrangements. The American sacred couple principle was violated in 78 percent of Oriya households. Indeed, actual sleeping arrangements in the temple town were consistent with all three American preferences in only 11 percent of the cases.

**Conclusion: The Meaning of Practice**

We began this chapter by examining two questions posed by the pediatrician T. Berry Brazelton: Should we reevaluate our stance toward children's sleep, and who ought to sleep by whom in the family? It has not been our aim to answer these questions. Instead, we have tried to point to some of the conceptual and empirical work that needs to be done before these questions can be seriously addressed. Who sleeps by whom is not merely a personal or private activity. It is a social practice, like burying the dead or eating meals with your family or honoring the practice of a monogamous marriage, which (for those engaged in the practice) is invested with moral and social meaning and with implications for a person's standing in a community. Those meanings and implications must be taken into account if the issue of who sleeps by whom is to be treated not so much as a mindless habit or tradition-laden routine but as a deliberate act of rational choice motivated by an analysis of probable psychological and social costs and benefits.

In this chapter, we have presented a method (the application of a logical matrix) for identifying some of the moral and social meanings implicit in the practice of who sleeps by whom. We have examined similarities and differences in the preferred moral goals (for example, incest avoidance, the sacred couple, protection of the vulnerable) of two culture regions (rural Hindu India and urban middle-class white America). Much work still remains to be done examining the effects, if any, of particular sleeping practices on the development of competence in various domains of psychological functioning (emotional, intellectual, interpersonal, cognitive) (see Larive, 1980). Likewise, much work still remains to be done examining the developmental advantages, if any, of growing up in a family that engages in culturally consistent sleeping practices (co-sleeping, if you are an Oriya child, sleeping alone if you are a middle

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Table 2.3. Spot Reports of Previous Night's Sleeping Arrangement in Twelve Oriya Households

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Space</th>
<th>Sleeping Arrangement</th>
<th>Persons per Space</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 d 7 d7 m</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 f d 1 d1 m</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 d 12 s 10 s 8 d 4 m 8 s 5</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1 s 6 h 6 s 12 1 h</td>
<td>2/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1 m d 10 d12 s 12 1 s 12 1 m</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1 m d 10 d12 s 12 1 s 12 1 m</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The twelve households were randomly chosen from 100 spot reports. 1 = father; m = mother; s = son; d = daughter; h = husband; f = father's father; a = age of child; i = separation of sleeping space; Italian is common sleeping space, the order of symbols is the order of sleeping positions.
class Anglo-American child. Nevertheless, on the basis of what we already know about the cultural meanings implicit in family-life practices, no informed discussion of parent-child co-sleeping can proceed unless those involved in the discussion first recognize that behavior per se is not what the action is about. The family order is part of the social order, which is part of the moral order—which is why (in Japan, in South Asia, even in the Anglo-American culture region) a cultural analysis of local preferences, values, and moral goods is a necessary first step in making sense of who sleeps by whom.

Notes

1. Uniga household businesses are either joint or nuclear. When they are joint, two or more adult brothers co-reside (with their parents, if the parents are still alive), and the brothers' wives and children all live together in a single patronal family house or compound. In our data, which were based on reports from children and adults, the co-sleeping network for a child almost never included that child's aunts, uncles, cousins, or fathers' father, although children did sometimes co-sleep with their father's brother. The father's father rarely co-sleep with a child and was most often absent, separated from his wife.

2. The first type of data was collected in 1990 (from Uniga informants) and in 1991 (from American informants). The second type of data was collected in 1995 from both Uniga and American informants. The third type of data was collected in Ortoc, India, in 1993. For a discussion of the moral basis and social life practices in Bharanaskar, see Mahapatra, 1993; Snodderly, 1991; Snodderly, Mahapatra, and Miller, 1992; Snodderly, Muns, Mahapatra, and Park, in press.

References


References


