Hinds, Hilary. "Late Victorian marital advice." *A Cultural History of Twin Beds*. London,: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. 157–170. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350045453.ch-011>>.

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Late Victorian marital advice

Marie Stopes's marital advice, as well her advocacy of birth control, secured her reputation as a trailblazer for a new attitude to sex in the years following the First World War. Emphasizing the importance of sex to marriage and the mutuality of its joys, combining frankness and romanticism, and optimistic in the promises made, her publications struck a chord with their readership. There was certainly much that was groundbreaking about Stopes's approach, but she was also highly invested in her own reputation as an innovator and iconoclast. 'I have some things to say about sex, which, so far as I am aware, have not yet been said', she wrote, suggesting that *Married Love* was 'based on a very large number of first-hand observations', and that some of these 'will be new even to those who have made scientific researches on the subjects of sex and human physiology' ([1918] 2004: 9, 9, 10). Her most insistent emphasis was on what she brought new to the discussion.

Stopes also recognised, however, even if she did so less forcefully, her dependence on the work of others. She acknowledged that *Married Love* was based on 'facts gleaned from wide reading' (ibid.: 9); in particular, her debt to the work of the socialist poet, social reformer and campaigner for homosexual rights Edward Carpenter and the sexologist Henry Havelock Ellis is well-attested. Among other commonalities, *Married Love* echoed the rapturous and mystical tone of Carpenter's *Love's Coming of Age*, while it also learnt from the sexual frankness of Havelock Ellis's sexological writing (McKibbin 2004: xxiv–xxvi; Porter and Hall 1995; Weeks 1989).¹ Beyond this, however, her wide reading yielded a series of less easily attributable but perhaps more longstanding ideas that circulated in a host of advice work from the late nineteenth century. The previous chapter noted the continuation in Stopes's work of the nineteenth-century anxiety about the electro-magnetic exchange between the proximate bodies of fellow sleepers, and her concern about the loss and replenishment of vitality in and after sex also maintained the nineteenth-century paradigms of the health discourses discussed in

Chapter 3. Stopes's sexual science drew not only on the innovatory work of the sexologists, but also on a body of heterodox physiological ideas by then largely discredited by orthodox scientists and medical practitioners.

By incorporating twin beds into her schema of marital advice, albeit to reject them, Stopes was also less innovatory than she might have seemed. In writing so vehemently against them, she was responding to a fashionable mode of sleeping and to the place accorded them in some visions of modern marriage. Since the late nineteenth century, twin beds had been part of the repertoire both of writers concerned with health and hygiene and of those dispensing marital advice – and very often these were the very same advisers and practitioners. These included writers who, like Stopes, were convinced of the broader health implications of the transfer of vital energies between co-sleepers and those whose interest was more squarely in the physiology, affective dynamics and politics of the marital sexual relationship *per se*. Just as twin beds were mobilized as a prophylactic barrier against the transfer of vital energies or foul air between sleepers, so too they lent themselves to the increasingly hard-fought and contentious debate about marriage. As always, consensus was hard to come by: what kind of separation was desirable, not just on health grounds, but also on marital? The American physician George Napheys observed in *The Physiological Life of Woman* (1869), 'A great deal has been written upon the effect on health and happiness of occupying separate apartments, separate beds in the same apartment, or the same bed. This vexed question it is impossible to settle by absolute rules, suitable to all cases' (1869: 61).² Napheys' call for a moderate pluralism, however, did not stop his contemporaries from fighting their particular corners, and by the end of the century, when separate beds for married people were often mentioned explicitly in marital advice literature, the tendency was to recommend them.

Nonetheless, the rationales underpinning these recommendations of twin-bedded sleep remained diverse, even contradictory. Some advocated them as a safeguard to the married couple's sexual relationship, to be sustained through a physiologically based compatibility founded in physical differentiation. Others, more concerned to reform the sexual balance of power within marriage, suggested that twin beds were not so much a route to sexual desire but, on the contrary, a useful aid to achieving the desired state of sexual continence. Common to all was a conviction of the importance of achieving the optimal positioning of the sleeping bodies of the married couple in order to protect and ensure their affection and respect for each other. All convey a sense of a relationship vulnerable to being buffeted, becalmed or scuppered by the vagaries and inequalities of sexual desire, but all also saw this as a vulnerability that could be mediated, mitigated and managed by the proper spatial distribution – in double bed, twins or separate rooms – of the two spouses. Moreover, all advisers recognized the bedroom as a place of

pleasure as well as of danger. Some were more concerned with one side of the equation than the other, but all were seeking to minimize the threat and maximize the joy by means of the technology of the couple's sleeping arrangement.

Warnings about the dangers of impure air bore frequent reiteration alongside or as a part of more explicit delineations of the pleasures and dangers of the marital bedroom. 'Re-breathed air is poisonous', George Napheys reminds his readers. 'A room twelve feet square is too small for two persons, unless it is so thoroughly ventilated that there is a constant change of air' (ibid.: 62). Unusually, however, he did not see this as sufficient justification for separate sleeping: 'When both parties are in good health, and of nearly the same age, one bed-chamber, if sufficiently roomy, may be used without any disadvantage to either. Such an arrangement is also to be commended, because it secures closer companionship, and thus developes [*sic*] and sustains mutual affection' (ibid.: 61–2). The exceptions to this were in the case of illness or a substantial age difference between spouses.

More immediately relevant to the marital, as opposed simply to the bodily, health of the couple was the exchange of electrical or magnetic influence. The phrenologist Orson Fowler was one of the few who welcomed this exchange. '[W]here two really love each other', he wrote, 'both *get and give* strength' ([1875?]: 550; original emphasis) by it. This judgement formed the foundation of his antipathy to twin beds or separate rooms for married couples. For Fowler, sharing a room and a bed is productive of physiological and emotional harmony, for 'It interchanges their magnetisms; ... creates many a cosy chit-chat; and facilitates all the other mutualities inherent in married life'. Conversely, 'separate dormitories', as he calls them, 'rob each of a true God-created luxury' (ibid.). Such an arrangement was desired only by 'poorly sexed wives' and spouses who are repellent to each other, and is 'a virtual divorce in spirit'. The choice, he avers, is straightforward, if stark: 'Either affiliate, or else separate' (ibid.). Fowler's recommendation is rooted in a sense of both the desirability of mutual physiological exchange and the reciprocity of sexual desire. For him, the 'marvellously vivifying' effect of magnetic interchange provides a foundation and blueprint for a wider commonality and mutuality of sexual communication. The merging of magnetisms results in a healthy equality of energetic investment in the marital relation. The position of the British hydropathic practitioner R. B. D. Wells was similar. 'Married couples, between whom there is a natural affinity, and when one sex is of a positive and the other of a negative nature, will be benefited by the magnetism reciprocally imparted', he wrote. He concedes, however, the rarity of such a circumstance: 'Unhappily, such cases of connubial compatibility are not common' ([1880?]: 65). For the most part, married people were therefore best advised to sleep separately.

Most advisers felt that such magnetic or electrical exchanges necessarily damaged the marital relationship owing to the deleterious leaching of vital force by the weaker party. Edward B. Foote, in *Plain Home Talk about the Human System* (1896), based his argument on the necessity of dissimilarity rather than mutuality: 'Physical adaptation in marriage consists in part of a perfect dissimilarity in the electrical conditions of the husband and wife', he wrote, 'The amount of enjoyment which is realized in the sexual embrace, must depend upon the electrical differences existing between the two. If the quantity and quality of this element is nearly alike in both, then will intercourse be insipid' (1896: 805). 'A perfect dissimilarity', for Foote, is necessary to secure sexual compatibility. Harmony is the result of difference, while similarity induces insipidness. Sharing a bed on a regular basis will generate this equalization of electrical difference, even if these energies are disparate at the outset:

Married people sustaining the monogamic relation, especially, make a great mistake in allowing themselves to sleep together. This practice leads in a measure to uncongeniality. From five to eight hours bodily contact in every twenty-four with one person not only causes an equalization of those magnetic elements which, when diverse in quantity and quality, produce physical attraction and passionate love, but it promotes permanent uncongeniality by making the married pair grow alike physically. The interchange of individual electricities, and the absorption of each other's exhalations, lead directly to temperamental inadaptation. (ibid.: 867)

Contrary to George Bernard Shaw's later pronouncement that marriage combined 'the maximum of temptation with the maximum of opportunity' (quoted in Wingfield-Stratford 1930: 142), Foote's understanding is that sexual desire is dissipated by over-exposure to the beloved. Contrary to Stopes's rhapsodic recommendation of marital bodily intermingling, Foote deplored the intercorporeal merging brought about by bed-sharing, an equalization of the magnetic or electrical elements resulting also in a physical equalization as the couple begin physically to resemble each other. Far from a harmonious marriage being rooted in a couple's similarity to each other, the opposite is the case. The remedy was to sleep separately, and twin beds had the advantage over separate rooms as they continued to allow spouses the 'social enjoyment' of '[t]he retiring chit-chat, and the morning helps of a little pinning or brushing, and aid in buttoning or hooking' (Foote 1896: 868), while preserving the electrical dissimilarity which sustains marital affection. To Foote's mind, twin beds are a mechanism of mediation which allows the free flow of social enjoyment while inhibiting the dissipation of vital force through the equalization of bodily energies.

For many advisers, marriage was threatened not only by such physical and physiological risks but also by the moral dangers excited by the proximity of the spouses in the bedroom. This was particularly the case for those associated with the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century 'social purity' and 'social hygiene' movements. These advocated temperance, self-discipline and continence in sexual matters (anti-masturbation, anti-prostitution, anti-sexual excess in marriage), and they rejected the double standard in marriage (one set of rules about marital fidelity for husbands and another for wives), arguing instead for wholesale marital reform and the elevation, equalization and spiritualization of the marital sexual relationship.³

For such commentators, the problem inflamed by spousal proximity was the exacerbation of sexual temptation: 'Our system of sleeping in the same bed ... is the most ingenious of all possible devices to stimulate and inflame the carnal passion. No bed is large enough for two persons', wrote homeopath and temperance advocate Dio Lewis (1875: 71).⁴ In the following year, Eliza B. Duffey argued that 'the close bodily contact under common bed-covering, in the slight protection which the night-clothing affords, is a constant provocative of amorous ideas and sensations to the husband, if not to both' ([1876] 1889: 224). And as late as 1911, Eli Brown and Joseph Greer concluded, 'Double beds are a relic of a primitive age, and should be relegated to the past with other things which the present has outgrown. And no matter who else may sleep together, husband and wife should not' (1911: 240). The remedy recommended for such temptation is either separate rooms – Emma Drake found that the fact of there being two rooms relieves 'many temptations and prevents the familiarity, which even in married life, breeds contempt' (1901: 85) – or separate beds. Dio Lewis suggested that '[a] little curtain which may be drawn aside at pleasure will serve to protect you from each other's observation when bathing and dressing' (1875: 81). The curtain's other benefit was the social one identified by Foote: 'Two narrow beds, separated by the curtain, will make conversation as easy as though you occupied the same couch' (*ibid.*). While for Foote separate beds were a mechanism to safeguard sexual desire, for Lewis, Drake and Duffey they were a device to contain, marshal and regulate it, to allow the relationship to thrive on a higher plane. For all, desire was not only a force at once potent, precarious and unstable, but also, ultimately, subject to the will, self-discipline and ingenuity of the married couple.

Sexual temptation, if not resisted or avoided, was likely to lead to sexual incontinence and excess within marriage as much as outside it, and this is something that nearly all such writers warn against. Even Orson Fowler, the greatest celebrant of marital sexuality, and for whom everything, even 'the rap at the door' ([1875?]: 203), was sexed, was far from recommending the unchecked yielding by married people to every sexual whim, warning that 'sensuality leads to excessive indulgence' (*ibid.*: 625).⁵ His advice was

to 'keep your mind pure, your thoughts and affections continually upon the highest plane ... and the animal part of your nature will be easily controlled' (ibid.). Dio Lewis tells one of his correspondents, a recently married man, that 'your shameful indulgences have spoiled everything. When you destroyed the delicacy of your sentiment by gross excess, you had no resource left' (1875: 81). Premature and excessive sexual indulgence in a young man, Eliza Duffey agrees, 'will stunt his development and perhaps kill him outright' ([1876] 1889: 178–9), but excess in marriage is no less debilitating:

The tender, delicate organs of generation in woman are often abused to such an extent by too frequent use, that they become inflamed, and ulcerate, and render the woman an invalid. Even the husband does not see the cause, or measure the extent of his folly, but persists in his selfish course in spite of the suffering he causes his wife. (ibid.: 215)

For women the danger is to their physical well-being, but for husbands the dangers are still greater: 'in lessening their respect and consideration for women, in deadening their finer sentiments, strengthening their sensual impulses' (ibid.: 220), their moral well-being is also compromised. This compounds the concomitant threat to men's physical health:

When it [the conjugal act] is repeated too often, the man will become gradually conscious of diminished strength, diminished nervous force, and diminished mental powers. Excess weakens a man's energies, and enervates and effeminates him. It moreover renders a man liable to an infinity of diseases, and a readier victim to death. All the train of evils which follow masturbation, attend, only in a lesser degree, the too lustful marriage bed. (ibid.: 220–1)

In Duffey's understanding – and it is by no means hers alone – excessive marital sex renders the husband less of a man. The diminishment he suffers is not just to his mental, physical and nervous capacities, but also to his very masculinity. The explanation is, once again, rooted in a common physiological rationale: a certain amount of semen needs to be retained and 'reabsorbed into his system, adding vigor and tone to his whole being' (ibid.: 179). If the prompts of every desire are answered, 'the most important agent for the nourishment of the brain, and strengthening and hardening the body is wasted' (ibid.). The British hydropath R. B. D. Wells concurred. In a chapter on 'Matrimonial Excesses' he observed, 'When a married man indulges too freely with his wife he loses spirit, energy, and enthusiasm, and becomes a tame, inefficient, undignified, and debilitated member of society. ... he drains his system of its best blood, and robs his body of that which should

give it nourishment' (Wells [1878] [1910?]: 50, 51). The scope of the bedroom to become a site of vitiation is thus expanded. It continues to encompass environmental depletion, as the air in the room is poisoned by the exhalations of those who sleep there, but this is now matched by the degradation of its occupants' bodies, drained of vital force by reckless sexual self-indulgence. The consequence, many writers remind their readers, is damage not just to the health and morale of the spouses, but also to the well-being of the marriage. All too frequently, a failure of sexual continence results in the distaste of each spouse for the other and disaffection with the marriage itself (Duffey [1876] 1889; Lewis 1875; Wood-Allen 1901).

For each of these advisers, sexual continence – whether understood as total abstinence or, more frequently, as the willed moderation of sexual intercourse – is the cornerstone of conjugal happiness. Alongside the related issues of diet, sleep and exercise, which also required heightened levels of self-scrutiny and self-restraint, it is the discipline which will best ensure the enduring well-being of the couple. The sexologist Havelock Ellis shared this conviction, calling chastity 'the natural instinct of dignity and temperance' (quoted in Hall 2011: 97). The aim was to nurture the higher forces and contain the lower. J. E. H. (Jane Ellis Hopkins), the author of an essay entitled 'True Manliness' and addressed to male readers, agreed: 'Will you let the animal that is in you, maddened by the spiritual forces of your nature, drag you at its heels in the dirt; or will you master it and make it serve the man? The man or the maddened beast, which is it to be?' (1903: 125).⁶ The quest for self-control might be a noble and civilizing one, but it required elemental struggles on the part of anyone seeking 'true manliness'.

Despite the common call for sexual continence, none of these writers are quite sure what constitutes the desired optimum. R. T. Trall, in the much-republished *Sexual Physiology and Hygiene* (1903), notes a 'diversity of opinion' on the question, and suggests that it can only be decided by reference to 'normal instincts, and these, unfortunately, we do not know where to look for' (1903: 232). In the absence of such hard data, and taking account of differences in stamina, temperament and so on, Trall suggests that 'few should exceed the limit of once a week; while many cannot safely indulge oftener than once a month' (ibid.: 233), and these become the parameters within which many advisers work. Some are more troubled by this inability to define 'the normal', however, and so recommend no sexual indulgence 'beyond what is required for the creation of our offspring'. To permit the gratification of any measure of 'animal enjoyment' separate from procreation would be to risk leaving 'no solid barrier between us and an ever-descending scale of sensuality' (*Duties of Parents* 1872: 37, 38).⁷

Within this regime of moderation and continence, the clear consensus is – again, anticipating Stopes – that women should set the sexual pace. For

Fowler, 'Woman is the final umpire as to its frequency. Following her lead will usually conduct all to matrimonial harmony, ignoring it to discord' ([1875?]: 625). Emma Drake urged this as the basis of equality within marriage – 'liberty for both equally. Not liberty for one, and the grossest bondage for the other. Nowhere does the wife's opinion deserve greater respect and tolerance than here. Nowhere should her negative be so willingly accepted' (Drake 1901: 90–1). So too argued the anonymous author of *The Duties of Parents*. 'In all matters respecting connubial indulgence', it was suggested, 'it is time that the principle should be universally recognized that pure women are the final and authoritative judges. It is for them to determine how frequently, and at what intervals, such indulgence is admissible, whether as an expression of mutual delight, or for the higher purposes of propagation' (*Duties of Parents* 1872: 39–40). Despite her different counsel regarding the frequency of marital coitus, Stopes's advice to husbands that 'each act of union must be tenderly wooed for and won, and that no union should ever take place unless the woman also desires it and is made physically ready for it' ([1918] 2004: 53–4) was again an echo of the work of marital advisers of an earlier moment and quite different ethos.

The admonitions of the nineteenth-century advisers and the attendant recommendations of separated sleep convey a sense of the importance given to the cultivation of sexual continence. The twin strategies of self-denial and self-discipline were to be exercised in the service of better health, an elevated moral sense and an enhanced spiritual dimension to the marital relation. Twin beds, by this account, are objects of prophylaxis and aids to willpower, working in the interests of an enhanced moral state, and as such they easily find a place in the familiar twentieth-century narrative of the nineteenth century's anti-sex ethos. Foucault famously termed this 'the repressive hypothesis': the belief that, in the long history of western sexuality, the nineteenth century was characterized by the 'monotonous nights of the Victorian bourgeoisie', when 'the conjugal family took custody of it [sexuality] and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction' (1979: 3). Sex became utilitarian, the story goes, a matter of duty and fertility rather than pleasure.

While continence is unquestionably a frequent refrain in the marital advice literature of this period, to interpret it all as straightforwardly and prudishly anti-sex would be misleading. Its advocacy is of a particular kind of sex, in a particular context, and to a particular end; and important within this range of particularities is pleasure, including sexual pleasure, for the wife as well as the husband. 'Whatever may be the object of sexual intercourse, whether intended as a love embrace merely, or as a generative act', wrote R. T. Trall, 'it is very clear that it should be as agreeable as possible to both parties. Indeed, when it is otherwise to either party, it is a cruelty' (1903: 234). Fowler thought the question of sexual pleasure was particularly germane to women. 'Right

intercourse', he suggests, 'strengthens and benefits both, without exhausting or injuring either. It exhilarates the female more yet. She receives an exchange of magnetism that is most thrilling to her every function of mind and body. All female experience is summoned to attest this act practically' ([1875?]: 622). Such pleasures might not be valued for their own sake, but for the sake of the health of the wife, the marriage, or the offspring conceived thereby, its importance is forcefully affirmed.

Part and parcel of these formulations was the recognition – again, reiterated by Stopes some decades later – that the sexual relationship was of a piece with the happiness of the relationship. To be sure, not all wrote of it in these terms. The physician, social purity campaigner and temperance advocate Mary Wood-Allen, for example, saw married companionship as quite distinct from sex: 'There may come times when to occupy the same bed, with no thought of physical union, will be to both a source of rest and sympathetic companionship' (1901: 49). But nor was it uncommon to see a harmonious sexual relationship described as an important means of securing the ideal of marital companionship. Dio Lewis suggests, 'When young people are just married, the principal attraction is the sexual contact. With little opportunity to know each other's moral qualities, they have, at first, scarcely any bond of union but the animal' (1875: 70); in Lewis's account, sexual attraction forms the initial bond from which can develop the later moral union. Sylvanus Stall, writing for the *Sex in Life* series, was not only as keen on a regime of continence as anyone, but also made a point of validating marital sex: 'The act of sexual congress may be indulged in between husband and wife for the purpose of expressing their mutual affection, augmenting their personal endearments, and for quickening those affections and tender feelings which are calculated to render home the place of blessing and good which God intended' ([1897?]: 88). The condition most conducive of this ideal state, Stall suggested, was '[m]arital moderation', and this 'is most easily secured and maintained where married people occupy separate beds' (ibid.: 98). Sex, in Stall's account, is not simply a symptom of humanity's baser animal forces, but, when properly regulated by the will and its material aids, is also understood as an integral part of the emotional-moral-physical complex that is capable of rendering the marital relationship ideal.

For Edward Foote too, twin beds were part of the regime of discipline and continence, but this was not an end in itself. Rather, it was aimed not at the stifling of pleasure but at its protection and production, its sharpening rather than its extinction. Foote argued, 'Sexual pleasure depends, in great measure, on the *electrical difference* existing between the parties, and the longer intercourse is abstained from, the more unlike will they become electrically, and consequently, greater will be the enjoyment if long intervals intervene between each copulation' (Foote 1896: 871; original emphasis). His

argument depends not on any simple condemnation of the moral dangers of sensuality, but on continence as an act of good husbandry in the marital economy. Desire, like the air in the bedroom, like the vital force that sustains life in the human frame, is finite, vulnerable and precarious. It is a resource to be preserved and cultivated, not mindlessly squandered or dissipated.

Even Eliza Duffey, who argues that women's passions are more maternal than sexual and is vociferous regarding the importance of continence, is careful to delineate the significance of marital sexual pleasure. Nor does she leave vague the means to this end, naming the clitoris as 'the female organ of sensation in the generative act' (Duffey [1876] 1889: 30), and advising husbands to take the time to awaken women's desire for and pleasure in sexual intercourse. In an extraordinarily uncharacteristic, but nevertheless repeated, discursive turn, she urges husbands to 'use the same arts that the libertine in his superior wisdom knows so well how to employ – arts perfectly proper and commendable in lawful wedlock' (ibid.: 204). A woman forced into sex rather than wooed – or, given Duffey's own characterization, seduced – will find that 'the apple of pleasure will turn to ashes in her taste ... [and] she will feel deep regret that she should have lost out of her life something so essential, which of right belonged to her' (ibid.: 206). So important is this advice that she repeats it, almost verbatim, a few pages later when she urges husbands to 'practice in lawful wedlock the arts of the seducer' (ibid.: 208). Duffey's emphasis on sexual pleasure belies Axel Nissen's recent conclusion that her book is a 'concerted attack on sexual passion', her mission to save women from 'the undesirable, even life-threatening sexual passions of husbands and bachelors' (Nissen 2009: 99, 98–9). Her allegiance to sexual continence is more nuanced than such an interpretation allows. In particular, when her recommendation of the arts of the seducer in the context of marriage is put alongside her advocacy of twin-bedded marital sleeping, her advice takes on a rather different character:

If married people *wish to gather all the delicate aroma of mutual passion*, there should be no occupying the same bed, nor even the same room. There should be no robing and disrobing in each other's presence. All the duties of the toilet should be performed in the secrecy of their individual dressing-rooms; and there should be the same outward show of decorum, one towards the other, that there was in their unmarried days. These seem like little things, and they are almost universally disregarded. But it is a great mistake. This kind of familiarity surely breeds contempt and indifference. (Duffey [1876] 1889: 224; my emphasis)

These words serve as a prelude to her endorsement of twin beds' contributions to morality and good health. They establish the expectation that

married people will, indeed, wish to experience the raptures of 'mutual passion', and then warn readers of the practical impediments to its achievement – a lack of decorum regarding the 'duties of the toilet'. Like Stopes, Duffey names the daily necessities of washing and dressing as insidious spoilers of sexual desire, calculated to breed 'contempt and indifference'.

Having established these as impediments to the maintenance of mutual passion in marriage, Duffey turns her attention to more positive interventions, and in particular to the capacity of twin beds to safeguard desire: 'I would especially recommend the use of separate beds by married people on the score of morality and good health. Two people are seldom, if ever, both benefitted by sleeping together' (ibid.). But this advocacy of separate beds here has nothing to do with prudery or an 'attack on sexual passion' (Nissen 2009: 99), and everything to do with cultivating the most satisfying sexual relationship. She warns that 'satiety blunts the edge of passion' ([1876] 1889: 223); but twin beds, she suggests, keep that edge honed. Like Stopes more than forty years later, Duffey's strategic prescription is to deploy distance in the service of intimacy and passion.

This is not to underplay the contrast in tone and emphasis in the two advice books. While Stopes acknowledges the commonplace sexual trials and shortcomings of modern marriage, she refuses, especially in *Married Love*, to dwell on these, concentrating instead on the utopian possibilities – physical and metaphysical – afforded by the sexual rapture which is every wife's due. In Duffey's text the accent falls differently. There is, to be sure, a nod to the clitoris, the 'organ of sensation in the act of generation'; there is a glimpse of the promise of 'mutual passion'; there is, most strikingly, the welcoming of the arts of the libertine into the marital bedroom. Her credo, indeed, is that it is sex that sets the perfect marriage apart from the merely satisfactory one: 'I believe in marriage *all through* – the soul, the mind, the heart, and the body, and I would make the last the weakest and least indispensable tie; though I would say that a perfect marriage includes this with the others' ([1876] 1889: 212; original emphasis). While Stopes suggests that a harmonious sexual relationship generates the mutual regard and affection that can secure the happiness of the marriage, Duffey's view is that a merely good or satisfactory marriage can be sustained without sex. An ideal marriage, however, cannot.

Duffey's conclusion is not dissimilar to the one arrived at by Stopes by a different route: namely, that the addition of the body to the union of soul, mind and heart qualitatively transforms a marriage, elevating it to the level of perfection. But Duffey's book, like those of many of her contemporaries, dwells not on the possibilities, let alone the mechanisms, of mutual passion, but on the pitfalls, abuses and disappointments of contemporary sexual practice in marriage. Her book reverberates with her concern for 'the moans of suffering women ... [and] husbands [who] are inconsiderate and even

brutal' ([1876] 1889: 198). It is above all this contrast in emphasis and tone that sets Stopes's work apart and makes it new. Her impulse is optimistic and utopian, while Duffey's is diagnostic and corrective. This notwithstanding, the essential co-ordinates of Stopes's case – men's ignorance of women's sexual responses, the importance of the frequency of sexual contact being set by women, the centrality of mutual passion to the perfect marriage – were firmly established not only in the work of Duffey (in particular), but also that of other social purity marital advisers.⁸ Rather than their advocacy of continence being straightforwardly anti-sex, it was instead an attempt to safeguard the sexual and affective dimensions of the marital relationship by equalizing the access to desire of husbands and wives. For Foote, it was the 'perfect dissimilarity' (1896: 805) of the two spouses as manifested in their unequal magnetic or electrical energies that safeguarded the sexual relation, while for Duffey and others it was to be secured by seeking – by recourse to the barrier method of twin beds – a more equal desire for sexual contact.

In common, too, to the late Victorians and the would-be iconoclast Marie Stopes was a clearly developed sense of the conscious management of the proximity of the spousal co-sleepers. While Stopes was to throw in her lot squarely with the double-plus-single bed arrangement, earlier writers, although generally against the double bed, were less dogmatic about the relative merits of separate beds and separate rooms. The author of *The Duties of Parents* argued for periodic separation, on the wife's terms, thinking it indispensable that:

every bride should, if practicable, have her separate sleeping-apartment. ... I am far from meaning that, as a rule, husband and wife should habitually sleep apart; this is a matter which every couple must decide for themselves; but there are seasons when isolation is desirable; and all that I am urging is, that women should have a place of refuge at such periods. (1872: 45–6)

More absolute was Dio Lewis: 'Change your large bed for two small ones, and let them be in adjoining rooms, so that you can converse, but not see each other while undressing or bathing and dressing', he advised one correspondent expressing dissatisfaction with his marriage (1875: 71). For Sylvanus Stall, 'Marital moderation is most easily secured and maintained where married people occupy separate beds' ([1897?]: 98), and Duffey ends her chapter on marriage and its abuses by making her recommendation of separate beds for married people ([1876] 1889: 224).

Strikingly, however, there was no necessary correlation between sexual attitude and preferred sleeping arrangement, as testified by the instance of George Drysdale, 'the one declared sexual liberationist of the nineteenth century in Britain' (Mason 1994: 179). Drysdale was passionately and

earnestly against the cultivation of sexual abstinence as a virtue. He saw this aspiration as dangerous, and 'frequently attended by consequences not one whit less serious than sexual excess' (Drysdale 1886: 80). The remedy for the deleterious effects of abstinence in young men was, to his mind, 'a moderate indulgence in sexual intercourse, together with the freedom from study, exercise and amusements in the open air' (ibid.: 82). Despite his anti-abstinence stance, however, Drysdale wrote in favour of separate beds: 'The custom of two persons sleeping together, which is so general in this country, is not, I believe, so healthy as the continental one of using separate couches' (ibid.: 207). Drysdale's exceptional, controversial and avowedly high-minded argument for the benefits to health, both bodily and mental, of sexual intercourse is not incommensurate with a preference for separate beds.

As well as dispensing marital advice, commentators such as Fowler, Foote, Duffey and Stall were all also contributors to wider health cultures, broadly vitalist, fully persuaded of the health-giving benefits of fresh air, and advocating moderation in matters of food, alcohol, sleep, dress and exercise as well as in marital sexual contact. Twin beds had currency between as well as within regimes of health and marriage. A writer might recommend them not only as aids to health, but also as technologies conducive to the equalization and enhancement of marital sexual desire. The introduction of a space between co-sleepers was in many cases, therefore, part of a totalizing regime of self-management, justified not on one count but on several. In their capacity to signify across a range of domains, the invocation of twin beds in the service of health and the regulation of desire is premised on their mediation of proximity and distance. Marital intimacy, alongside sleep hygiene, was constituted and fine-tuned across the space between.

The cultivation of self-discipline, restraint and continence, informed by the desirability of sexual moderation for the sake of physical and marital health, the nurturance of character and the moral well-being of the couple, is most explicitly advocated by commentators aligned with the social purity and temperance movements, and for this reason their work is easily susceptible to being read as confirmatory of the fabled and paradigmatic, if now largely discredited, Victorian squeamishness about sex.⁹ To read this work as straightforwardly anti-sex, however, is to underestimate the importance of such principles from a range of diverse ideological perspectives. Temperance, moderation, continence and restraint were ideals rehearsed so regularly as to enter the realm of common sense. Still more strikingly, these attributes were also valued by theorists associated with sex reform but not with social purity, including Havelock Ellis himself: 'Asceticism is the virtue of control that leads up to erotic gratification', he wrote, 'and chastity is the virtue which exerts its harmonizing influence in the erotic life itself' (quoted in Hall 2011: 97).

Continence was as available to the idealizing impulse as were other modes of self-discipline and self-restraint, and its discourses extended far beyond the teachings of social purity campaigners. These cultures of restraint in the service of self-improvement need to be understood not only as arising from a habituated and multiply constituted ethos of denial, but also from a cultural fascination with, and endless scrutiny and anatomization of, the mysteries and precariousness of human sexuality, and a need for its conscious and attentive safeguarding and management. It is at the intersection of these two phenomena that twin-bedded sleep becomes indelibly meshed with ideas and ideals about sex in marriage.

Twin beds were generated by two overlapping idealizing discourses. The first was the fearful culture of nineteenth-century health regimes, whether orthodox or fringe, with their anxious desire to isolate sleepers in the relative safety of their own single beds, separated from the threat posed by the exhaled breath and vitiating energies of their bedfellow. The second was the sometimes optimistic and ameliorative, sometimes castigatory and anxious, culture of the marital reformers who sought to improve the lot of married women not only by protecting them from the more insatiable sexual demands of their husbands, but also by intervening to equalize, maximize and eulogize the possibility of sexual pleasure for both spouses. Both sets of ideals found the double bed to be a space too undifferentiated, too vulnerable to action without reflection, too likely to militate against the conscious exercise of self-discipline. In the context of health regimes, individuation promised safety; in discussions of marriage, it offered mediation. With twin beds, the space between introduced a material break that brought with it a temporal one; it prompted a pause, a moment of reflection, an extra beat in the rhythm of the communication between fellow sleepers. In so doing, the space between twin beds becomes a player in the twentieth-century realignment of the terms of marital engagement.