

Intimacy Coordination: An Overview of Creating Internal Change in the Field Through External Evolutions and Awarenesses

The incessant adaptation of online realities and the development of our growing media culture have fostered a symbiosis between the media we consume and the culture we actively partake in daily. There is an undeniable and unparalleled manner to the relationship between society and media; the content we create reflects aspects of our social and cultural contagions whilst simultaneously, our cultural and social functions become coded and re-informed by the media we consume. For example, if one were to reflect on the media that was widely disseminated in the 1950s, there would be a variety of cultural signifiers and societal standards latent in said content that we might not necessarily hold or value the same in modernity. With this said, not only has the content within our media come to be shaped by our social values and ideologies, indeed, the field of media itself and the manner by which it operates has, too, seen drastic transformation and change as a result of developed social demands. Unquestionably, one of the many ways future forecasting of the industry can be aided and implemented with ease is if producers and creators pay mind to developing social surges, asking questions like, “How does society’s current and heightened sense of [some sort of social topic or issue (i.e., gender, race, ethnicity, etc.)] apply to my field’s current practice?” or, “How can I incorporate this contemporary awareness towards [some sort of social topic or issue (i.e., gender, race, ethnicity, etc.)] into my media’s messaging?” There is a strong argument to be made that the consideration of progressive societal values will ultimately expand or ensure the shelf life of a media text. No one truly consumes outdated media materials and thinks, “Yes, this really stood the test of time.” Conversely, there is an inherent risk in creating media; regardless of its topic or genre, there is always an underlying chance that your IP will, in some ways, become outdated. Consequently, I believe a creator must care for their media's ethical and moral messaging beyond their singular or individualized perspective; as mentioned above, our media shapes our societal outlook and vice versa. For the purpose of this research paper, I intend to analyze how the media industry responded to both an internal demand and external awareness surrounding the sensitive matter of representing explicit and inherently sexual content on and off screens. Correspondingly, I will analyze the creation and implementation of the on-set role known as an intimacy coordinator.

Defining the practices of intimacy coordination is not simplistic by any means, nor is discerning the actualized realities of these positions, as the concept of intimacy coordination is often sensationalized or misconstrued due to the depth and complexity of this role. When intimacy coordinators themselves were asked to outline or provide an overview of their job's respective concerns and functions, they regularly used words like "collaboration, professionalism, safety, advocacy, and consent" (Horeck & Berridge, 7), with one individual stating, "the intimacy coordinator brings a professional process to the performing of intimate scenes..." (Horeck & Berridge, 7). Accordingly, employing this informed perspective of what intimacy coordination encompasses, this work will speak to the innovative process of ideating the intimacy coordinator, the positives surrounding the development of this role, the dichotomy of our media industry and environment prior to and post the facilitation of intimacy coordination and the potentiality of intimacy coordination and its future. Moreover, this research inquiries about the logistics around intimacy coordination through a North American lens, asking questions like, "How did the industry identify the dire need for intimacy coordinators, and how was the role imagined or created?"; "Are there overarching institutions that train and dispatch these coordinators? Do they have a union?"; and "When does it become required or mandated for an intimacy coordinator's work, if there are any policies surrounding obligatory intimacy coordination?" Ultimately, through the perspective of the media business, the development of intimacy coordinators was not solely a marker of correcting the mistakes of past generations of media makers; It was the field's recognition of the vulnerabilities and risks that come with content creation and the subsequent action towards utilizing the industry gaps for new and innovative roles that will ensure secure and safe practices throughout the entire production process – for all individuals involved.

Presenting the Past: The Origins of Intimacy Choreography and Coordination

In order to represent the media industry's landscape prior to the development of intimacy coordination, it is crucial to acknowledge the growth of social awareness around the media field and its harmful past. 2017 was a pivotal year in the media industry; *Moonlight* (2016) won Best Picture at the Oscars (Jenkins, 2016), Kendall Jenner and Pepsi created one of the most controversial soda commercials of all time (Pepsi Co., 2017), and certainly, not least, the phrase #MeToo went viral worldwide, encouraging survivors and victims of sexual assault and

harassment to share their stories and provide support for one another. Expressing the sheer monument of #MeToo, Rachel Loney-Howes writes, “#MeToo created a renewed opportunity for activists and survivors to interrogate and challenge the status of gender-based violence in their own local contexts...” (21). This statement, though true, can be extended in many ways; #MeToo not only served activists and sexual survivors with the awareness or urgency for a dire change, it in many ways informed the media professionals in the field of just how void the industry was when it came to specific and necessary protective measures. One sentiment of knowledge from the guest lecturer Marguerite Pigott stands out to me when reflecting on this era of our media world, as she proposed a methodology for making space for what one is passionate about or, in this case, what one believes is a harmful absence in our field, through identifying critical gaps and finding opportunities for innovating upon and correcting these vacancies (Pigott). In 2017, when the media industry exposed itself as somewhat precarious and harmful to those who worked in the field, a potential space and necessity for vicissitude presented itself to both creators and the world. Following the year of exposés and social awareness towards the institutionalization of sexual violence, the production conglomerate HBO made the employment of intimacy coordinators mandated “on all productions with scenes of sex, nudity and physical intimacy...” (Sørensen, 1395). Undoubtedly, this was an acknowledgment of and action towards the consequential collective social values following the #MeToo movement, as well as an adherence to the new industry standards for performing and handling explicitness or sexual representations.

Although the popularity and constitution of intimacy coordination are inextricably tied to the emergence of #MeToo politics within the business, the overarching concept of intimacy choreography has been proposed and ideated upon much before 2017. Amanda Rose Villarreal attempts to trace the lineage of intimacy coordination in performance and media contexts, pointing to a literature work by Tonia Sina that offers the methodological process of fight directors in film and television towards an imagined intimacy director role (qtd. by Rose Villarreal, 9). Markedly, Tonia Sina discusses how the industry’s prioritization of ensuring all simulated violence is safe and informed can be easily applied to the representation of intimacy or inherently sexual encounters (qtd. by Rose Villarreal, 10). It is clear here that Tonia Sina was

aware that care and coordination were absent regarding intimate scenes in our media. Not only did they find this gap, they also offered pre-existing modes of mediation in the field that could be adapted to solve this absence. Moreover, Tonia Sina's work was published in 2006 (Rose Villarreal, 9), a decade before the #MeToo movement. For certain, there were leaders and creators already in the field (Tonia Sina worked as a fight director at the time of her writing) imagining solutions and new avenues for the more discreet insufficiencies within the media world. Accordingly, Tonia Sina's writing did not remain solely a theoretical proposition; in 2014, it inspired the first institution for intimate advocacy and directing, being the Intimacy Directors International, founded by Alicia Rodis and Siobhan Richardson (Rose Villarreal, 12). Analyzing this timeline of translating writing and research into practical and tangible actions truly embodies and expresses the actualized nature of creating change in an industry. Conversely, it does beg the question, "If Tonia Sina did create a framework and methodology for implementing the principles of fight direction for intimate scenes, why did it take almost a decade for this framework to be adapted and put into practice?" This is truly an example of how "higher" theory becomes challenging to translate to reality, and most certainly exemplifies that Tonia Sina, though brilliant for connecting the industry absences to a potential new practice inspired by roles that are pre-existing, is not necessarily or inherently a creative leader or producer. Generally speaking, an individual who can identify the gaps in the industry may not necessarily have the opportunistic or leadership mindset to create change and innovation based on this observation of absences. Throughout the duration of the Media Entrepreneurship course, we have heard from industry leaders who acknowledge how important blending consistency and action is. Arthur Smith wanted to work in the sports division of CBC, so he went to their head offices and pitched himself (Smith); Matt Bishop bet on himself and took risks to achieve his full potentiality (Bishop); Marguerite Pigott constantly pivoted, finding absences and turning them into opportunity (Pigott). Ultimately, these are the markers of success, and most certainly, they are some of the most complex parts of ensuring accomplishment in the media business, as one needs to not only be able to identify industry trends and needs but, from these observations, take active steps towards successfully fostering progressive actions that are mandatory for results. Analyzing the positive, innovative, and beneficial nature of the origins of intimacy coordination, as well as

the lack of urgency individuals advocating for these new positions took up when it came to constructing change, we witness the ability to identify dangerous absences alongside the failure to lead a successful change. Conclusively, it can be said that though intimacy directors were illustrated as a vital and missing piece to the industry, it was unfortunately not until the industry was very publicly exposed for these absences that we saw any concrete action or effort towards correction.

Implementation Of Intimacy Coordination: Inquiries Into The Logistics Of Being An I.C.

Without intimacy coordinators, in the wake of the #MeToo movement, the industry would have run the risk of continuing its legacy of neglecting appropriate workplace standards and not ensuring healthy consensual boundaries for its employees. Marci Liroff, a working intimacy coordinator since 2018 (Liroff, para 2), emphasizes the indispensable presence of intimacy coordination, stating, “Without an intimacy coordinator, actors are often left to their own devices to map out how an intimate scene should go. There is a high risk of blurred lines and abuse in a workplace where workers are required to kiss and simulate sex...” (para 3). Subsequently, there is no debate around the necessity of these individuals while on set; however, the standards around deploying intimacy directors on productions remain a matter of question. Liroff highlighted that in the SAG-AFTRA 2020 agreement, intimacy coordinators assisted in drafting and finalizing new policies that have to do with ensuring the rights of actors and the integrity of the director’s or writer’s vision when it comes to representing these intimate scenes (para 1). Upon review, I found that SAG-AFTRA’s website contained extensive guidelines for becoming an intimacy coordinator and the standardized protocols for these positions, chronologically outlining their work from pre-production to post-production. The linear process of intimacy coordination according to SAG-AFTRA is as follows: During pre-production, the coordinator meets with the producer or writer to discuss the intimate scenes and the broader script, then in turn, ensures that the actors in this scene have been made aware of the potential nudity or sexual nature of it (SAG-AFTRA, 5). Following this, during the filming of the production, the coordinator will then “review nudity riders, scene content, modesty garments and barriers with performers and directors...” all the while ensuring the continued consent of the performers when filming these moments (SAG-AFTRA, 5). Inquiring into the potential regulations around

utilizing intimacy coordinators, SAG-AFTRA states that they “*believe* that intimacy coordinators should be hired in scenes involving nudity or simulated sex...” (SAG-AFTRA, 2). This answers any questions surrounding whether or not the federation has strict policies about having intimacy coordinators on set; Though they may believe and recommend to productions to seek out the work of an intimacy coordinator, they do not necessarily have stringent enforcement of the presence of coordinators. Comparatively, when inquiring into solely Canadian intimacy coordination, it was found that the prominent overarching institution for intimacy coordinators in our nation is entitled Intimacy Coordinators Canada. While not a legitimate union, Intimacy Coordinators Canada illustrates itself as a collective of certified coordinators while simultaneously providing accessible hires for I.C. work in film and television. To receive certification as an intimacy coordinator under the I.C.C., one must complete four levels of training (ICC, “Pathway to Certification”), starting with a four-week beginner’s guide to intimacy coordination online course (ICC, “Pathway to Certification”), followed by another six-week online course that is at the intermediate level. After the completion of the initial courses, candidates will enter level three, a twelve-week hands-on program costing \$2500.00 (ICC, “Pathway to Certification”), and level four, twenty hours of one-on-one mentorships and shadowing working coordinators for the additional cost of \$2500.00 (ICC, “Pathway to Certification”). Primarily, what I find most interesting about this process is that first two of the levels of certification are through the organization “Intimacy Directors and Coordinators Canada” while the remaining two levels are through the Intimacy Coordinators Canada program. Consequently, the process of becoming an intimacy coordinator is not a swift one, taking up to five years, as applications for levels three and four are not accepted unless an individual has three hundred hours or five years of experience on television and film sets (ICC, “Pathway to Certification”). From a business perspective, not only are there no overarching policies in the North American industry for the mandatory deployment of intimacy coordinators, there is no singular or standardized union for this type of position; In fact, based on research, there is a notable amount of collectives, federations, and organizations for intimacy coordinators to join, with no definite unionization aspects or universal educational modes (i.e., training looks different depending on which collective one seeks to join). All in all, it is truly up to the discretion of the

production to decide whether or not they want to hire an intimacy director, with an overwhelmingly wide range of organizations and federations from which to source.

Forecasting The Future: Revising and Assessing The Sector

Evidently, intimacy coordination remains a stagnant practice in film and media, with little to no innovation surrounding the constituting and organizing of these individuals. For example, the fact that there are many federations for training and hiring I.C.s, with an absence of a primary union, expresses the need for improvement towards the respective management and assemblage of these professionals. Employing a business lens, the variety of companies representing intimacy coordinators speaks to an over-saturation in the field. Though there has been a notable amount of founding these collectives for intimacy choreography, it becomes very overwhelming when searching for the correct certification process and subsequential application to become a member of one of these groups. Markedly, this is due to the wide variety available to newcomers; there are too many conflicting organizations that all have different suggestions or requirements for beginners, thus there needs to be some adaptation or centralization in the industry in order to make the act of becoming an I.C. and locating or hiring an I.C. easy and accessible. Subsequently, the most productive solution, from my perspective, would be to create a national federation or organization to facilitate a process that is more streamlined, seamless, and universally observed across the nation. Not only will the constitution of this singular institution for intimacy coordination foster heightened accessibility, but it will also create a direct line of employment for members as it can be partnered with or created under the broader IATSE or SAG-AFTRA associations. Connecting the national intimacy coordinator collective to one of the major unions and organizations benefits both parties; the unions can now avoid the extensive outsourcing of labour to hire intimacy coordinators, while the intimacy coordinator organization achieves a legitimization through affiliation with these longstanding coalitions. The amalgamation of these organizations could be the potential future landscape in which intimacy coordinators are employed, regulated, and accessed. Furthermore, it would be in the best interest of SAG-AFTRA or IATSE to create a branch for training and supplementing intimacy coordinators. These institutions stand to gain a notable profit from creating a centralized collective for I.C.s as they will become the sole tool for certification and thus generate

noteworthy internal revenue based on their preliminary costs for beginners who to train with them in order to be an intimacy director. Moreover, there is a self-sufficiency aspect to the centralization or unionization of intimacy coordinators, as members of this proposed organization would have to pay both initial and annual membership fees, like those who are a part of IATSE or SAG-AFTRA. Consequently, the training programs will be supplemented and funded through the revenues generated by these membership payments, which will be a circular and self-sufficient means of sustaining the program. Correspondingly, IATSE or SAG-AFTRA do not need to completely redesign the pre-existing programs for certifying intimacy directors, as it would stand in their best interests to absorb or purchase the rights to one of the already established collectives. This process of obtainment is not a new framework for diversifying and extending a conglomerate's reach; indeed, we almost too often see major corporations in the media industry buying out specific smaller companies in order to purchase their I.P.s and audiences essentially. With that said, in the context of SAG-AFTRA or IATSE procuring the rights to one of these pre-standing organizations for intimacy coordination, it will enable them to firstly diversify their revenue through obtaining new membership fees from intimacy coordinators, secondly centralize the sources for intimacy direction which positions them as the sole place for productions to outreach about I.C.s and thirdly ensure that they are promoting and protecting the consensual practice of simulating intimate representations. Ultimately, I believe that this proposed model would work to benefit both the intimacy coordinator community and the pre-existing unions, who essentially will come to rely on intimacy coordination the more production houses mandate them, like HBO. Conclusively, this is my methodological analysis of how individuals in this sector can strengthen and adapt to how the industry already works by employing the use-value of intimacy coordination to facilitate the founding of a centralized organization protected under the broader unions.

Concluding Remarks

The advent and subsequent implementation of intimacy coordinators in the media field have exemplified how the business has responded to developed societal awareness and created pathways for correcting prior industry absences. Though the lineage of intimacy coordination can be traced back to years preceding the #MeToo movement, this social movement aided and

prompted the urgency around creating safer and more consensual atmospheres for those involved in media productions. Thus, intimacy coordinators transformed from an imagined role to an actualized reality. Principally, intimacy coordination is vital to the business, as, without it, productions run the risks of misconduct and potential abuse in the workplace. Intimacy coordination, a relatively new practice, needs innovation regarding the infrastructure for training and disseminating these professionals onto job sites. From a business standpoint, both the pre-existing intimacy coordinator collectives and the overarching SAG-AFTRA or IATSE unions stand to mutually benefit from amalgamating. Through centralizing the process and constitution of intimacy coordinators, the broad and longstanding unions like SAG-AFTRA or IATSE will become the sole organization for sourcing individuals with certifications in intimacy coordination. Correspondingly, the notable increase in the past decade of industry use and employment of intimacy coordinators expresses how valuable they are to our contemporaneous production process and being the dominant source for hiring these individuals would create extended significance for these unions and likely grow employment opportunities. Subsequently, if intimacy coordinators were centralized through these umbrella unions, they would receive a legitimization around their existence and work that their current over-saturation of collectives cannot provide. Truly, the future of intimacy coordination could be a very productive one that looks more accessible, central, and influential in how we view the representation of intimate matters on screen. With that said, the power of present intimacy coordination is a success for the business already, as it provides performers with consent-informed consideration and care, maintains artist integrity for writers and directors, and, most of all, attempts to ensure that individuals working in the field do not fall victim to any harmful workplace proceedings like many of those in previous media-making generations have.

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