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Sex and safety on set:

Intimacy Coordinators in television drama and film in the VOD and post-Weinstein era

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Title

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Abstract

This article examines the work of Intimacy Coordinators on television drama and film sets and the rise of this new role in the screen industry from a policy and production studies perspective. Since HBO made the employment of an Intimacy Coordinator mandatory on all productions with scenes of sex, nudity, and physical intimacy in 2018, intimacy coordination has become an industry standard and expectation. Through interviews and analysis of production practices, this article explores how Intimacy Coordinators change and challenge established production practices on and off set and interrogates the reasons behind the emergence of this role in the screen industry. It situates intimacy coordination in the context of recent industry policies and initiatives that promote equality and diversity, and counter harassment and abuse in the post-Weinstein era. It analyses this role on relation to changing production and distribution models and regimes in the era of VOD portals. The article argues that intimacy coordination is not only a catalyst for reforming practices on set, but a way for the screen industry to negotiate contemporary and historic concerns about sexual harassment and abuse, comply with recent policy and funding requirements, and a mechanism for mitigating economic and reputational risk to productions.

Keywords

Intimacy Coordination; VOD; #MeToo; screen industries; equality.

Introduction

Sex, nudity and physical intimacy have always been part of television drama and film. Recently, the ways in which these scenes are scripted, acted, and directed have come under renewed scrutiny in the screen industries. In October 2018, HBO announced that the employment and presence of an Intimacy Coordinator were now mandatory on all productions with scenes of sex, nudity or physical intimacy (Katie Kilkenny 2018). Since then, intimacy coordination has become an industry standard and expectation on television drama and film sets in the UK and US (John Bucher 2019, xxi and 2), and, for example, an Intimacy Coordinator worked with Daniel Craig and Ana De Armas on *Bond 25* (2021) (Simon Boyle 2019b) and with the cast and crew of Netflix's award-winning television drama series *Sex Education* (2019 -) and HBO's *The Deuce* (2017-) (Travis Andrews 2019). This article explores the work of Intimacy Coordinators in television drama and film and analyses the rise of this new role in the screen industry from a policy and production studies perspective.

The article examines how Intimacy Coordinators are changing and challenging established production practices on set and in the wider screen industry. Intimacy Coordination is a new job role in the screen industries and therefore the first part of the article contains a detailed description of the emergence and work of Intimacy Coordinators on set. This situates the arrival of intimacy coordination in television drama and film in the context of, on the one hand, recent socio-political debates, initiatives and movements in the screen industry in what Shelley Cobb and Tanya Horeck have named the post-Weinstein era (2018, Bucher 2019). On the other, it interrogates intimacy coordination on set as mitigation of risks to performers and productions. The second part of the article analyses intimacy coordination in relation to wider policy initiatives in the screen industry, as well as structural changes to screen funding, production, distribution and certification regimes following the rise of online streaming and Video on Demand (VOD) services and portals. It positions the work of Intimacy

Coordinators within two seemingly diverging trends. On the one hand, intimacy coordination should be understood in the context of the screen economy and recent funding requirements, industry initiatives and policies that are in place to counter harassment and embedded, institutional sexism and inequality in the screen industries (Karen Boyle 2019a, Kate Fortmueller 2019). On the other, the rise of this role is part of the production and distribution logic of streaming and VOD portals and their ability to produce and distribute content exclusively for a '18' certification.

The article argues that whilst this new role is a catalyst for changes in practices on set, intimacy coordination has gained traction and risen to prominence now, because it offers the screen industry a way of redressing and negotiating contemporary and historic political and cultural concerns about sexual harassment and abuse in the industry. Intimacy coordination is also a mechanism for complying with recent policy and funding requirements, as well for mitigating economic, legal and reputational risks to productions. Today, the ways in which nudity, sex and intimacy are discussed, directed and acted on and off set are no longer only an ethical issue for individual directors, producers, cast and crew members on discrete productions. It is an industry concern with potentially significant financial and reputational consequences for any production.

Intimacy coordination in the screen industry

Recent years have brought renewed attention to both historical and recent cases where cast and crew have, at best, felt compromised and coerced, and, at worst, been exploited, abused and assaulted at work. When Alyssa Milano repurposed Tarana Burke's #MeToo to highlight sexual abuse and harassment in the screen industries in 2017 (Boyle 2019a, 3, Bucher 2019), the hashtag soon became shorthand for sexual harassment and abuse on and off set, as well as a way for cast and crew to call out, expose, and register institutional sexism and abusive

practices in the screen industries (Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey 2019). Existing equality and diversity campaigns, and feminist movements coalesced under national and international calls for equal and safe working conditions in the screen industries, and Time's Up in the US and No Grey Area and Equity Safe Space in the UK were established (more on these later).

Differentiating between #MeToo as a moment and discourse, and Me Too as a feminist movement and activism, Karen Boyle reminds us that for the contemporary moment to effect long-term change it has to be seen in the context of decades of feminist activism and scholarship (2019a, 1 & 8). Whilst women have long been speaking out against abuse, institutional sexism and structural inequality in the screen industries (Miranda Banks 2018, Fortmueller 2019), #MeToo made an impact because it resonated and was "widely heard" (Boyle 2019a, 5). The #MeToo moment highlighted the prevalence and extent of historic and current abuse, harassment and discrimination in the screen industries. This reignited debates around equality in the screen industries as well as health and safety and production practices on and off set in relation to the depiction, direction and discussion of sex, intimacy and nudity. Importantly, they also exposed the lack of safeguards against this. US Intimacy Coordinator Claire Warden connects the rise of intimacy coordination in the screen industry and #MeToo, and says "Now that we understand how *not* to do this, the question becomes, how do we do this in ways that aren't wrong? How *do* we do intimacy well?" (Interview with Author, 2019). Intimacy coordination addresses precisely this question.

Although #MeToo and the arrival of Intimacy Coordinators on set are temporally close and of course entwined, intimacy coordination also has to be understood in the context of policies and initiatives to promote equality in the screen industries as well as in the light of the emergence of new production and distribution regimes of streaming and VOD portals.

Materials and methods

This article is based on interviews with exclusive industry informants (Hanne Bruun 2016), pioneering Intimacy Coordinators, conducted in the spring and summer of 2019. Ita O'Brien is the founder of Intimacy on Set (intimacyonset.com) and pioneered intimacy coordination in Britain as the Intimacy Coordinator on the Netflix series *Sex Education* (2019-). Claire Warden has credits both as an Intimacy and Fight Coordinator on theatre and HBO productions and is the Engagement Officer of Intimacy Coordinators International (<https://www.teamidi.org/>) in the US. Both are former actors and have track records as Movement Directors in theatre, where this role is long-established (see for example Litz Pisk 1975). The article also draws on the discussions at a roundtable discussion called *Policy into practice: creating long-term change in the screen industries*, at Glasgow Film Festival's Industry Focus in March 2019. The roundtable explored practical and policy responses to #MeToo with Intimacy Coordinator Adelaide Waldrop, Equality Campaigner for Raising Film and Director Hope Dickson Leach, and CEO of the Swedish studio and production facility Film i Väst Mikael Fellinius.

The article is also based on analysis of production practices as expressed in production accounts and documents, i.e., cast and crew contracts; insurance policies; compliance reports; equality and diversity statements; and health and safety and risk assessments. Moreover, it uses reports, data and statistics from national screen agencies, trade unions and guilds in the UK (the British Film Institute (BFI), Equity, PACT (the Producers Alliance for Cinema and Television) and BECTU (Broadcasting, Entertainment, Communications and Theatre Union)) and the US (The Television Academy, The Motion Picture Academy and the Screen Actors Guild – American Federation of Television and Radio Actors (SAG-AFTRA)) as well as articles in the popular and trade press.

The analysis of the work and role of Intimacy Coordinators is underpinned by policy and production studies and feminist media scholarship.

Geographical focus

The article focuses on the television drama and film industries in the US and UK. These countries were the first to introduce Intimacy Coordinators on film and television drama sets in 2018. They are also the homes of the first organisations for intimacy coordination, established in 2018: Intimacy on Set in the UK and Intimacy Coordinators International in the US, which in 2019 opened a branch in the UK. Both organisations offer training and certification of Intimacy Coordinators as well as consultancy to the screen industry. The organisations have played an instrumental role in incorporating intimacy guidelines on set and pioneering best practice in the USA and UK.

The UK and the USA are the two largest production centres in the Anglosphere and the biggest exporters of television and film in the world (Jeanette Steemers 2004, 2014, Petros Iosifidis, Steemers & Mark Wheeler 2005). Netflix, Amazon, Hulu and YouTube, the leading VOD platforms and streaming services and portals in the western world, are North American (Amanda Lotz, 2017). As such, the UK and the USA yield significant influence over policy and production practice in Europe and North America, and often set the agenda for smaller screen economies. This article is therefore relevant for the study of screen policies and production practices across the western world.

Intimacy coordination on set

HBO hired its first Intimacy Coordinator for the production of the second season of *The Deuce*, a television series about the porn industry in New York in the 1970s. This was a request from leading actor Emily Meade (Kilkenny 2018) who plays a Prostitute turned Porn Star. In interviews Meade linked her request to concerns about the content of her scenes in the series, the heightened focus on sex and nudity in the film industry in the wake of #MeToo, as well as to already established health and safety practices on set. She noted that a

child on set has to be accompanied by a chaperone and an animal by a handler, “Yet, when it comes to sexuality, which is one of the most vulnerable things for all humans, men and women, there’s really no system. There’s never been a person required to be there to protect and bring expertise” (Meade as quoted in Kilkenny 2018). Meade describes this as a question of safety for herself, the cast and crew involved in filming the scenes, and points to the lack of standards and definitions around this,

When there is a stunt of any kind, even if it’s tiny, even if it’s crossing the street while a car is driving, there needs to be a stunt coordinator.... And yet with sexuality, there has been at most a ‘closed set,’ (which means) only the necessary crew members are allowed on set. But even that is a subjective concept that isn’t often very strictly paid attention to. (Meade as quoted in Travis Andrews 2019).

To accommodate Meade, the production hired Alicia Rhodis, an Intimacy Coordinator with experience of working as a Movement Director in theatre and the founder of Intimacy Directors International¹.

HBO has since rolled this role out as a requirement on all productions with scenes of nudity, sex and physical intimacy. This has support from cast and crew. Meade describes this as one of her proudest achievements, and *The Deuce*’s writer and producer, the journalist and award-winning showrunner David Simon, told the magazine *Rolling Stone* that he will no longer work on a show without an Intimacy Coordinator (Kilkenny 2018, Everythingshowbizz 2018).

It is probably unsurprising that the role of Intimacy Coordinator is already well established in theatre and was first introduced to the screen industries on the set of a television drama series. In both types of productions the main cast and crew work closely together and need to be on board for long periods of time. A successful collaboration can make or break the profitability,

popularity and longevity of a show. Trust, transparency and consent are therefore paramount for an effective shoot and production (Bucher 2019). In theatre, a designated rehearsal period prior to the opening of a show allows cast and crew time to rehearse scenes with nudity, sex or intimate acts, as well as prepare psychologically, emotionally, and physically. However, the costs and time pressures of television drama production rarely afford this, as Meade explains, “television is produced in a much shorter timeframe, meaning actors sometimes learn about the specifics of a sex scene just 24 hours before filming it” (Meade as quoted in Brenda Kerr 2018). This fast turnaround necessitates an Intimacy Coordinator on set, as a dedicated person who can ensure clear communication and consent between cast and crew.

The work of Intimacy Coordinators on television drama and film sets

The Intimacy Coordinator’s role is to choreograph and supervise scenes involving sex, intimacy and nudity. Intimacy Coordinators discuss and plan the practical, physical and psychological preparations for and performance of these scenes with the actors, crew, the Director and the Producer, as well as negotiate and supervise their filming. The presence of an Intimacy Coordinator is intended to create a professional working environment where processes, practices and actions are transparent and rehearsed in advance, foregrounding the safety, dignity and wellbeing of cast and crew.

On set, Intimacy Coordinators liaise with Heads of Department and crew below the line in order to facilitate a common understanding of what specific scenes entail. Ita O’Brien explains, “the key points to establish upfront are: making sure all are clear and in agreement with the content of the work and the intimacy required” (Interview with Author).

Consultation takes place on many levels and cross multiple departmentsⁱⁱ. For example, the Intimacy Coordinator will negotiate the parameters for “closed sets” and ensure that only key crew is present during the filming. This involves agreeing with the camera and lighting

departments which angles are permitted and/or blocked and how the set and actors are lit. Also, the Intimacy Coordinator will coordinate with make-up and wardrobe departments to ensure that intimacy patches and clothing are available so that the actors are protected and able to cover up between takes. Aspects of intimacy coordination are akin to stunt coordination, and the Coordinator will also ensure that protective mats, cushions and kneepads are in place if needed. If there is violence in the scene, Intimacy Coordinators liaise with the fight or stunt coordinator.

Sex as risk

Sex, nudity and intimacy in film and drama are often framed as “risky” for the performer as well as the production, as demonstrated by Meade’s account. Reflecting on safety and the potential emotional and physical impact on actors performing intimate scenes, British Intimacy Coordinator Adelaide Waldrop says, “Anyone who wants to do a fight scene without a fight coordinator will be seen as mad. I do not see why this would be different with intimacy” (roundtable discussion at Glasgow Film Festival Industry Focus, 2019). Body doubles and stunt workers routinely stand in for actors in scenes with nudity and sexual content, and Intimacy Coordinators work with both. In their research on stuntwomen in Hollywood, Miranda Banks and Lauren Steimer note that “polite nudity” is part of the doubling work that a body or stunt double can be asked to perform (2015, 144-5). Although stunt workers are unionisedⁱⁱⁱ and normally credited^{iv}, this type of work is often “hidden” and written out of the production narrative by promotion and marketing teams (Banks and Steimer, 2015). This is because the very point and nature of the work of the double is to create the illusion that the performance is by a particular actor or actress (John Baxter 1974, George Sullivan and Tim Sullivan 1983, Jacob Smith 2004, Sylvia Martin 2012, 2016, Steimer 2009, 2019, Banks and Steimer 2015). Intimacy Coordinators work with all performers on set.

Scenes of nudity and sex are seen as a risk to productions as well as to the performers (Mette Hjort 2012, 2 & 13, John Tulloch & Belinda Middleweek 2017). In the anthology *Film & Risk*, Sylvia Martin frames stunt work as a way to reduce accidents and injury to cast and crew and in this way mitigate costs and delays to schedules (2012). In his production guide, *A Best Practice Guide to Sex and Storytelling. Filming Sex and Nudity*, Bucher offers a guide to the practical preparations and precautions that each production department should take when filming scenes of sex and nudity. As well as an ethical consideration, Bucher very clearly frames the production of such scenes as a risk to the production and as a potential legal and economic liability (2019, xxi and 2).

These intertwined perspectives on safety and risk to, on the one hand, the performers, and on the other, the production, provide a useful frame within which to approach and analyse the role and rise of Intimacy Coordinators on set. Intimacy Coordinator Ita O'Brien sums up, "The impact of a major star getting hurt or walking off the set would be catastrophic in terms of costs, time and delays to the production" (interview with Author).

Communication and definitions

Intimacy and fight coordinator Claire Warden note that in the screen industries, "There is no clear definition of nudity, or what a closed set actually is. There is not even the stipulation that sex has to be simulated" (interview with Author). Lack of definitions as well as vague descriptions of intimate scenes in scripts and contracts can lead to different expectations of what scenes entail and how they should be directed, acted, filmed and edited. This means that the execution of a scene is often left to the director on the day, and this allows for a degree of interpretation that is open to abuse or inconsideration. The role of the Intimacy Coordinator is, therefore, to define, name and provide clarity in terminology on set. In order to safeguard the dignity of cast and crew, the Coordinator also ensures that the language and phrases

around intimate acts and body parts are neutral and the tone professional. It often falls to the intimacy coordinator to call out gendered, condescending, or sexually charged language.

O'Brien suggests a structured process of approaching scenes of intimacy and sex, where scenes are first discussed, and then talked and walked through with movements and body parts named before acting out the scenes in rehearsal. She says,

The crux of this work is to allow the actor to serve the character, keeping their personal and private intimate expression separate. So, the next step is that the actor and director identify the role of the scene, the characters' emotional journey, the power play and the beats of the scene. Once this is established, we'll agree touch. So, there should be agreement and consent. Then sculpt the physical journey of the scene, saying it in words. Then we craft the emotional journey in words. And then we put the emotional and the physical journeys together There should be pre-agreed times where there is nudity and a closed set is imperative. This allows the actor to be personally safe so they can be artistically vulnerable. (Interview with Author)

This process, O'Brien adds, improves performances because it establishes "a safe space to be sexy" (O'Brien in Carey Dodd Associates 2019). This allows the performers to keep their personal history, sexual orientation and preferences separate from their professional work (interview with Author). As well as protecting people and performers, this professionalises production practices.

Conducive contexts: Clout, contracts and consent

Critics have noted that systemic inequality and embedded sexism are part of the British and American screen industries, and that certain practices and language, e.g., the notion of the "casting couch," trivialise and normalise harassment and enable abusers like Harvey Weinstein to operate (Boyle 2019a; Fortemuller 2019). These underpinning structures and

systems facilitate what Boyle, using Liz Kelly's terminology, calls a "*conducive context* for additional, material acts of sexual violence: legitimating and supporting a culture of male sexual entitlement, dominance and coercive control" (2019a, 77).

Reflecting on the mythology of the "creative genius," Warden and O'Brien noted that this glorification has been counterproductive to a safe, consensual and transparent set. Echoing Stefania Marghita's "auteur apologism" (2018, as cited in Boyle, 2019), Adelaide Waldrop noted, "Unrestricted creativity has been a licence and pretence for directors to get away with anything without being challenged" (roundtable discussion at Glasgow Film Festival Industry Focus, 2019).

Intimacy Coordinator Claire Warden notes that, "Power in the entertainment industry is particularly potent." There are significant imbalances in clout, contractual status, wealth, age and influence on and off set, and an Intimacy Coordinator can redress this as Adelaide Waldrop illustrates,

It is not always easy for an 18-year-old, up-and-coming actress to say to a 60 year-old acclaimed director that a shoot or set makes her uncomfortable. A neutral Intimacy Coordinator whose job it is to observe, act as an agent for the actress or actor and safeguard the integrity of the production, can. (Roundtable discussion at Glasgow Film Festival Industry Focus, 2019)

Scenes with sex, intimacy and nudity are of course not problematic in themselves. They can be part of the work of an actor. According to a survey of the CVs of 66,011 actors with public profiles, 60% of women and 79% of men stated that they were willing to perform nude (Stephen Follows, 2019). Levels of nudity, scenes of sexual content and intimacy are ideally contractually established in actors' contracts as recommended by the actors' unions Equity in the UK and SGA-AFTRA in the US. However, in reality, contracts are opaque and do not

reflect practices on set. This is because, firstly, at the casting stage, it is seldom clear what precisely a role involves as scripts rarely specify or detail exactly how a scene will be directed, edited or used. Secondly, as Meade's account above illustrated, television drama series are often written and produced over long periods of time, and scripts change in response to political, artistic and cultural events, reviews, popularity and budgetary constraints. To allow for this, contracts are worded in ways that allow for adjustments and are consequently either vague or effectively all-encompassing. As an illustration of this, the contract for background actors of the television drama series *Westworld* (2016-) contains the following disclaimer:

This document serves to inform you that this project will require you to be fully nude and/or witness others fully nude and participate in graphic sexual situations. By accepting this Project assignment, you may be required to do any of the following: appear fully nude; wear a pubic hair patch; perform genital-to-genital touching; have your genitals painted; simulate oral sex with hand-to-genital touching; contort to form a table-like shape while being fully nude; pose on all fours while others who are fully nude ride on your back; ride on someone's back while you are both fully nude; and other assorted acts the Project may require. The Project will also include language and sexual situations that some may consider personally objectionable or uncomfortable. (Contract for a background actors for the television series *Westworld*, as cited in Follows, 2019)

Thirdly, a common theme in the interviews and discussions with the Intimacy Coordinators was the inherent difficulty in an actor's ability to say 'no' to a scene or directions on set. Claire Warden observed that actors are trained and conditioned to always, "agree to whatever a scene entails." This, Ita O'Brien argued in her interview, is tied in with assumptions of professionalism, "the implication is that a good actor will do anything" (interview with Author). Linking this to employability, Rachel Flesher, Intimacy Coordinator on the Netflix

show *GLOW* told *Washington Post* that actors' "hireability is based off their willingness to do whatever it takes" (Andrews 2019).

These factors complicate meaningful consent and mean that, to quote the film analyst Stephen Follows,

Unless the actor is very famous or powerful, they will have little to no say on how the action is shot or how footage featuring their naked body will be used. Once they have signed the employment contract, they are at the mercy of how filmmakers want to play the scene and cut the edit. (2019)

These power imbalances, contractual and contextual factors, coalesce to form such "conducive contexts." This has made and is making it difficult for actors and performers to challenge existing and embedded practices on set.

Claire Warden, therefore, sees her role both as a movement guide for performers in specific scenes as well as an advocate on behalf of the performers on set. With Adelaide Waldrop, she sees the Intimacy Coordinator as an intermediary who is not directly affected by the power dynamics on and off set, and whose future employment prospects are not in question.

Intimacy Coordinators are, as described above, changing production practices, and in this process, at least to some extent, ameliorating, mitigating and eliminating some of these conducive contexts that enable abuse and harassment. Their role is instrumental in challenging existing behaviours and practices and shifting power dynamics on set.

Equality & diversity

Institutional sexism and lack of equality are widespread and persistent systemic challenges in the media in the UK and US as noted by many (please see for example Ingrid Bachmann, Dustin Harp and Jamie Loke 2018, Boyle 2019a, and Kantor and Twohey 2019). This not

less so in a screen industry where the majority of Directors, Producers, and Heads of Departments as well as the technical crew are male and predominantly white (Shelley Cobb, Linda Ruth Williams, and Natalie Wreyford 2015, Stephen Follows, Alexis Kreager & Eleanor Gomes 2016, Follows 2018, Fortmueller 2019, Boyle 2019a). This is the case in film as well as in television production. In the keynote address of the 2019 Edinburgh Television Festival, one of the world's largest and leading fora for the television industry, Journalist and Broadcaster Dorothy Byrne noted that in the UK, only 2.2% of television company directors were BAME and fewer than 25% women. This, she argued, matters because the screen industry, "cannot reflect society properly, if we ourselves don't reflect society. If you change who makes TV, you change TV" (2019).

Feminist scholars have noted that interwoven systems of oppression, and intersectional axes of identity, personal experiences and characteristics, such as gender, sexuality, race, class, and ethnicity, can serve as tools of marginalization, discrimination and domination (hooks 1987, Kimberlé Crenshaw 1989, Carolyn Byerly 2018). This is reflected in the screen industries. Research by the British actors association Equity demonstrates that sexual harassment on and off set is often gendered and disproportionately affects women and the LGBT+ community (2019). 40-50% of women and 66% of the LGBT+ have experienced some form of sexual harassment in the workplace, as opposed to 18% of men (Comres 2017, Equity 2019). The Intimacy Coordinators interviewed for this article were sentient to these intersectional dimensions of their work and framed their work as part of wider, macro-level contexts of the politics of gender, ethnicity, sexuality and oppression. When interviewed for this article Ita O'Brian was working on redressing the gender balance on a 'closed set.' Claire Warden and Adelaide Waldrop explicitly stated that they saw their roles as championing equality and diversity on set, off set and across the screen industries.

Intimacy coordination on set – Why now?

Given that knowledge of abuse in the screen industries go back decades, one might wonder why Intimacy Coordination has become industry practice only in the last two years? In part, the heightened awareness and resonance of the #MeToo moment and movements have put pressure on producers, production companies, platforms and portals. They have harnessed an environment where companies have to be seen as taking seriously their duty of care to cast and crew, and where initiatives and policies to tackle harassment and promote equality have to be publicly demonstrated and evidenced. Employing an Intimacy Coordinator offer individual productions a way to acknowledge and address these inequalities and counter gendered or discriminatory harassment on set. The cynical observer will notice that HBO was quick to promote it as a news story, when they made Intimacy Coordinators obligatory on their productions, thus displaying the production company's ethical credentials and public commitment to eradicate sexual harassment. HBO of course deserves credit for pioneering this role as mandatory. Intimacy Coordinators are changing practices, precautions and sentiments on set, as we have seen above.

Today, intimacy coordination on set has become an accepted industry standard that the leading industry association and guilds benchmark against. The association Directors UK is currently working to integrate Intimacy on Set's guidelines as industry standard and best practice (Intimacy Directors International 2019, Equity 2019). The British actors' union Equity set up the support network Safe Space in 2019 to enable reporting and combat harassment in acting. Safe Space collaborates with the Trade Union Congress (TUC) and 20 other trade unions on the #ThisIsNotWorking, a campaign for placing the onus to actively prevent sexual harassment on employers (Equity 2019). In July 2019, the US actor's association SAG-AFTRA entered into a formal collaboration with Intimacy Directors International, with the aim to standardise and implement guidelines for intimacy coordination on set and promote the use of Intimacy Coordinators within the screen industry (Intimacy

Directors International 2019). Today, intimacy coordination as a production practice is adopted by even the most iconically gendered franchises, like the James Bond films (Boyle 2019b).

However, there are at least two further reasons for the rise of this new role in the screen industries. Both have to do with recent changes to the funding structures, as well as the production and distribution models and regimes following the rise of the VOD platforms and portals in the screen industries.

VOD and 18 certification

Scenes involving nudity, intimacy and depictions of sex are increasingly part of mainstream and award-winning film and television. Tulloch and Middleweek (2017) note a rise in “real sex” in feature film across the world and analyse these in different cultural and geographic contexts. Francesca Carpentier, Elise Stevens, Lu Wu and Natalee Seely’s content analysis of nudity and sex in television demonstrates a marked surge in scenes with sex and nudity across genres since the 1990s (2017, 690). They attribute this to the proliferation of teen drama and the arrival of reality TV shows, where sex and nudity are often prominent. Explicit depictions of sex and full nudity are central to the storylines of award-winning television dramas like *Game of Thrones* (2011-), *Westworld*, *The Deuce*, and *Sex Education*.

The distribution context and model of VOD portals facilitate and amplify this trend. In his *A Best Practice Guide to Sex and Storytelling*, Bucher links the rise in storylines in television and film that include sexual situations, nudity and “once taboo subjects” to the proliferation of online content providers, streaming and VOD services and portals, and predicts that, “[a]s the number of mediums and formats continue to expand for entertainment content, narratives and scenes involving sexuality and nudity will increase as well” (2019, xx).

VOD and streaming services are part of a highly competitive and crowded market that sits outside of traditional, electronic programming guides. Therefore, many of these portals use high-end drama and film to promote and profile their brands, content and shows, and increase viewers and subscribers. This drives the production, co-production and acquisition of long-form television drama and box sets that subscribers will sign up for and return to (Michael Curtin, Jennifer Holt & Kevin Sanson 2014b, a, Holt and Sanson 2014, #EdTVFest 2018).

As global and IPTV based media portals, platforms and apps, services like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Hulu have relative freedom from national media regulation (although, as Ramon Lobato notes, this is likely to change (2018, 243)). Content on these platforms is therefore subject to less scrutiny and regulation, and often has more explicit content. Furthermore, streaming and VOD services are essentially non-linear and algorithmically curated databases, presented as interactive and on-demand catalogues of content (Lobato 2018). This means that their content is not part of a schedule and exists without “time specificity” (Amanda Lotz 2017, 23-32). This is fundamentally different from “traditional,” linear scheduling practices, where considerations of flow, watersheds and primetime content are the structuring principles (John Caldwell 2003, Lotz 2009, Lobato 2018, 241-243). A consequence of this is that drama content is now acquisitioned and produced for a viewing and distribution context where historical notions of time, scheduling and pre- and post-watersheds are irrelevant. Rather, content on VOD platforms is filtered and certified by age certifications. The means that television series on VOD portals can be targeted at an “18” certification and created with more adult and explicit themes and content in mind.

Apple, Amazon, HBO and Netflix are horizontally integrated companies and this also fuels this trend. As production companies, commissioners and co-funders as well as distributors, these companies are able to produce, co-produce *and* distribute specifically for “18” certification in a subscription-based and online distribution context.

This combination of the ability to produce specifically for “18” certification and the increase in the production of content are also propelling a need for Intimacy Coordinators in film and television drama.

Changing cultural values

In her *#MeToo, Weinstein & Feminism*, Boyle highlights the cultural value of inequality and institutional sexism in the screen industries, and demonstrates that this is structural, systemic and ongoing (2019a). However, in the past few years, significant cultural and economic values are also attached to equality and anti-harassment in the screen industries. This shift takes place on an institutional level. It is driven by changes to policy and implemented through the screen agencies and funders.

Today, gender parity and diversity on and off screen are seen as instrumental in creating working environments that are less prone to sexual or gender-based harassment and violence (Eva Redvall & Inge Sørensen 2018). This is reflected in recent initiatives, policies and requirements for funding by publicly funded film institutions in Europe. In the UK, the BFI launched its *Set of Principles: for the prevention of harassment and bullying in the screen industries* in 2019 (BFI nd). These outline best practice and production standards as well as guidelines on preventing harassment on set. Signing up to these principles as well as compliance with equality, diversity and health and safety policies are prerequisites for winning funding from BFI. Also, productions in breach of any of these guidelines or principles are precluded from nominations for the BAFTA awards. In addition to issuing guidelines and policies, many European funders and screen agencies have incentivised equality in the screen industry by making funding and the ability to win awards dependent on adhering to anti-harassment guidelines. At the Swedish Film Institute, observing gender quotas is a criteria for qualifying for funding across all the screen agency’s funding

programmes (Maria Jansson 2016, 2017). In March 2020, the Danish Film Institute (DFI) in collaboration with the Danish Producers Association introduced reporting on gender and diversity as a criteria for funding, as a response to the Danish and international #MeToo movements (DFI 2020).

Attaching economic value to equality and diversity and making these a funding criterion are likely to have played a part in focussing the screen industry's attention on matters of equality (Inge Sørensen 2018, Redvall and Sørensen 2018, Sørensen and Redvall 2020). This has contributed to this rise in intimacy coordination on sets in Europe.

In the US, the conviction of Harvey Weinstein in February 2020 of third degree rape and a catalogue of sexual assaults (Sam Levin 2020), served as a reminder that legal action can have very real reputational, personal and financial implications for producers and production companies alike. Time's Up, an organisation set up in the to counter harassment in the US screen industry in the wake of #MeToo, is working with 5050by2020, an organisation backed by the Creative Artists Agency (Bucher, 2019, xviii), to achieve equality. Similarly, equality is central to the work of the screen industry's initiative The Hollywood Commission on Sexual Harassment and Advancing Equality in the Workplace, which launched in 2017 (Cara Buckley 2017). Intimacy Coordination and the guidelines introduced by Intimacy on Set and Intimacy Coordinators International offer a framework within which production companies and producers can negotiate and minimise such risks.

Conclusion. From individual concern to industry practice

Intimacy coordination, then, is a symptom of and a practical solution to contemporary cultural and political concerns around sexual harassment and abuse in the screen industries and the need to redress these. It is a mechanism for tackling pressures of policy and public

sentiment, as well as negotiating changing funding, production and distribution contexts in the screen industries.

These concerns and needs manifest themselves in different ways and on different levels. On productions and on set, Intimacy Coordinators offer a system to counteract and challenge harassment and abuse as well as to ensure the wellbeing and safety of cast and crew. On the level of the production companies and VOD distributors, the employment of an Intimacy Coordinator is a way of publicly and visibly asserting a company's ethical credentials and commitment to equality and non-tolerance of harassment. It is also a mechanism manage risks to productions and protecting budgets, production flows and schedules. On the level of the screen industry, the rise of this role is a way of addressing the issues around sexual harassment and abuse in the post-Weinstein era as well as complying with anti-harassment, equality and diversity guidance and policies, whilst continuing to produce ever more increasingly explicit "18" certified content.

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ⁱThis role is called a Movement Director or Intimacy Director in theatre, and an Intimacy Coordinator in film and television.

ⁱⁱ For a detailed and extensive breakdown of practical measures and considerations for each department and job role, when filming sex scenes, please see Bucher's *A Best Practice Guide to Sex and Storytelling. Filming scenes with sex and nudity*.

ⁱⁱⁱ Stuntwomen in the US are in the union Stuntwomen's Association of Motion Pictures (SWAMP) and stuntmen in Stuntmen's Association of Motion Pictures (SAMP).

^{iv} Exploring 'invisible' work below the line the Indian film industry, Ranjani Mazumdar notes that the work of body doubles in India involves standing in for stars' body parts, but also the performance of intimate acts that the star is not willing to perform. More often than not, body doubles receive no credit and have to sign non-disclosure agreements as part of their contracts. The facts that this work is obscured and that the identity of both the double and star are protected by affidavits leave body doubles vulnerable to abuse and harassment, and with little protection and opportunity for recourse if the things go wrong on or off set. This conflation between double and actor, as well as the invisibility of the work of the body double and stunt workers make issues around consent, safety and wellbeing more, not less, complex and problematic on Indian film set (2015). This is beyond the focus of this article and would be a fascinating and important area for future research.