

VC: Hello, I'm Vanessa Corwin

KK: And I'm Kathleen Kaan

VC: Did you ever wonder what goes on behind the cameras in those steamy sex scenes we see in film, television, and even theater? These days, most likely an intimacy coordinator is involved. With us today is Evelyn Fogelman, an intimacy coordinator, to give us a behind-the-scenes look at this new and growing profession. Evelyn, welcome to the podcast. Thanks so much for joining us.

EF: Thank you so much for having me.

VC: So, first of all, could you explain for our listeners exactly what an intimacy coordinator or intimacy coach does?

EF: Yes, so intimacy coordinator is the title we use specifically for those of us who work in the TV and film industry. A similar role in theater would be an intimacy director. Intimacy coordinators work as a consent expert, a choreographer, and a performer advocate for any scenes where we're doing simulated sex, hyper exposure, nudity, anything that's going to put a performer in a hyper-exposed environment.

KK: You have been in the film business for over ten years as a stunt woman, receiving some nominations for your work. Tell us about the experience that led you to something like this, being an intimacy coordinator, from stunt woman.

EF: So, my path through the industry has been quite unique in many sense(s). I actually started doing the bulk of my work in the production department. I started as a production assistant and I worked on set as like a base camp PA and all of those various roles to support production and I became an assistant director from that. And then from working as an assistant director is actually when I transitioned more to working in the stunt side of things because I had opportunities to work with the stunt department and support them in like the same logistical capacity, I was supporting the full productions in. And it was a fun job, we got to do really cool scenes, and we got to really-I liked how we got to hyper-focus more on singular scenes than running the entire production. In doing that work, that's where I've had my glorious claim to fame as a stunt woman which is where I do this amazing trip and falls in the background of a few things so the award that I've gotten for that work really go out to the absolute incredible work of our teams that I was able to support heavily from a logistical standpoint. But what this also gave me was a really deep peek into physical movement storytelling and the protections we have to put around performers who are using their bodies to tell stories. And so, with stunts, what that is protecting people in a very real way, of people who are falling off of things, or falling to the ground, or getting hit by things and all of the things we had to put in place around that. And so, from that, the transition from that to intimacy coordinating is actually very, very similar. So instead of protecting someone who, say, is jumping out of a building, we're putting all of these protocols and protections in place around someone who is exposing their body or they are simulating some really intimate acts, and we're thinking about how do we support this person not just physically, but also mentally through that process.

VC: So, when you started, was there even such a thing as an intimacy coordinator or intimacy coach?

EF: Not even the emotion of one. I know that in the theater industry there has been intimacy coordinators for a bit longer but the concept of an intimacy coordinator wasn't even introduced to me until around 2016-2017. That was when I first heard the term, heard it being brought into the industry.

KK: Since this was now an option for you, did the me-too movement help with this? Was it something that edged you on to say yeah, I need to protect women?

EF: Oh, absolutely. I mean all performers. The me-too movement really pulled back the curtain on a lot of things in our society but it definitely exposed Hollywood in a very real way, because so much of that movement centered around bad behaviors that were going on within the industry were systemic. And as a woman who is in the industry who had been exposed to different types of sexual harassment myself and had witnessed different types of sexual harassment on set. The idea that I would be able to make a positive change for the industry towards not having the next generation experience that

was huge to me. And for the actual profession I think the me-too movement cast a light on it in a way that was really needed at the time so we had trailblazers like Alicia Rodis, Claire Warden, trying to get this thing on its feet in the industry.

KK: I'm thinking, do you have any idea of the number of intimacy coordinators that now exist since it started?

EF: It would be tough for me to give a specific number because we practice all across the nation and all across the world. This is not just confined to the United States, it's also abroad as well. Personally, I trained with coordinators from the United States, the United Kingdom, from Australia, from New Zealand, from Canada, so we, it's quite a widespread industry so I would say we're certainly in the dozens. I don't know if we've cracked three figures yet but we're rapidly growing.

VC: You're getting there, right? So, who hires you, from a production?

EF: So, it typically is either the director or production coordinator or producer. It really depends on who's kind of taking the lead on that. My relationship to the director is very important when it comes to intimacy coordinating so I am always thrilled when the director is the one that reaches out and we get to have that kind of initial contact with each other and touch base on what they're looking to get out of that relationship but sometimes it's the unit production manager that says hey, like the actress says they won't go on set unless we have an intimacy coordinator, are you free Friday? So, it really depends. But it's coming from production or the director.

KK: When you're there, let's say you have an actor that feels one way and on the other hand the director wants something else. Where do you fit in? How do you manage to play that little game where you're satisfying everybody?

EF: Well, that's a lot of my job, is managing that kind of dynamic. So, people have a lot of different feelings about this role, but my goal is to be a collaboration facilitator so what I'm doing is I'm not there to block communication between the performers and the director. I'm there to make sure that we're defusing those powers-power dynamics that exist between the person that's like writing your checks and you want to do a good job, so say a performer is really on board and wants me there and the director really doesn't, I do my best to really communicate with the director, how can I best support you in this process? Do you want – do you feel comfortable choreographing this yourself? If so, great. I'll be here to help make sure that the boundaries we've established are being enforced, but like I will let you do your work and I'm here as a resource as needed. So, it really comes down to open communication. A lot of times that hesitance is a fear that they're losing control, particularly from directors, is that they're, someone's taking their creative control away from them. And I cannot emphasize enough that that is not what I'm here to do. And in fact, I'm here to offer options and tools. I have so many tools at my disposal that I can offer to help you achieve what story you're trying to tell.

VC: Can you elaborate a little more about what you might do on set and if you could give some examples of some techniques you might use?

EF: Yeah, so my work actually starts even before we step on set. The first thing I do is we sit down and I have conversations with the director and the cast and we really outline, first, what is the scene we're doing, what's the story you're going to tell, what's the idea, why are these characters here, and then how did they arrive here, and then physically how do you envision telling that story. We really get into the nitty-gritty details. You'd be surprised. People say, oh, they have sex. Well, that could be so many things and it's my job to kind of tease out the idea and the very physical boundaries around what the imagined storytelling is. I take that information to the cast and we work together to establish their boundaries around that specific work. So, it's about me presenting as much information to them as I can, we give them context for their consent. And then if there's something, the director would really like this shot, of this body part, this distance and they're like ooh, that's really close, I don't love that, and then it's like, OK, let's talk about it, what's that bringing up, so tell me more about that, is it the body part, is it the distance, and it's really just trying to understand their consent. So, my goals when we get on set, we have a really clear idea of this container of boundaries that we're working within. I take two sides of the script and two sides of the personal performers' boundaries, and in that there's play. So, then I'm there with literal tools, as in like squishy balls and pieces of foam, neoprene, modesty garments, all these things to physically help support the scene and then I also come with choreography tools. There're different options if a performer doesn't want to be seen in a certain angle or in a certain way, we can move their bodies in a way that's more

comfortable for them and still achieves the story we're trying to tell. And that's what we're always in pursuit of. We're always in pursuit of telling our story and getting that but doing it in a way that feels safe for everyone involved.

KK: Do they ever use body doubles anymore?

EF: Yeah, Body doubles are an option that we can offer to someone. So, say that someone's been on a network TV show where you don't know that you're going to have a sex scene three seasons later. That's not even been written yet. Say that comes down and that performer is really uncomfortable with physically doing that scene for whatever reason. It could be a personal issue, a mental health issue, things like, different things that could be going on, that's something that could absolutely be offered. Is the boundary around your character doing this or is it that you, your body, cannot do this? So, in that case body doubles are on offer for people who need them.

VC: We hear that there are some people in the industry who think of an intimacy coordinator or coach as more of a police officer. So, can you explain that and what do you say to those who think that way?

EF: Yeah, so that's what we touched on a bit earlier is that idea that I'm somehow the barrier between the actor and the director and I'm there to be the morality police, sort of like here's how we do these right police, that's not the role at all. My role there is entirely a support role. I'm there to make sure that everybody who's involved has the support they need. And for some people that's not a lot. Some people just like, I'm good, I know myself, I know how to do these scenes, I feel really confident in my body and I just want to talk to the director and get this done. In which case, I go, "great." And I like to say in those kinds of scenarios, I act as a human emergency exit sign. You know if you go into the scene feeling super confident and then all of a sudden you get in front of the camera, you get in front of the crew, and someone had onions, and the lights aren't right, and things are... you can come to me and say "look, I'm not feeling the way I thought I would feel and I need help". And you have an advocate there, right there for you. And we're going to find solutions together for this.

KK: So, then it doesn't matter, or does it matter if the director does not want an intimacy coordinator on set but the actors do? How do you work that out? It seems like you are a real good PR person because it takes all of that too.

VC: And a little bit of therapist as well. (KK: Yes! Laughter)

EF: A lot of training goes into this, this kind of all sides of this from the physical choreography and movement training to also a lot of mental health awareness training. Now I'm not a licensed therapist but I have emergency, I have mental health first aid training, things like that so I can be a first point of contact support say if someone is having a mental health crisis as things come up. But in situations say when the actors want support and the director doesn't, yeah, there's a lot of having to be very still and calm in myself and know that I'm not going to make everybody happy all the time and I am there to provide support to the people that are most vulnerable in this situation which in most cases is the performers.

KK: Is there certificates, schools, organizations that give you something that now you are an intimacy coordinator after doing A to Z study?

EF: It's still an evolving field in how intimacy coordinators are trained. But right now, they do exist, what we call certification programs and there is now a list that SAG/AFTRA has compiled of certification programs that meet their qualifications for intimacy coordinators who complete them and be put on a SAG/AFTRA qualifications list. These are intimacy coordinators that have met a certain threshold of training and experience and now effectively are being endorsed by SAG/AFTRA as meeting this minimum requirement. So, the organization I actually completed my training with is Intimacy Directors and Coordinators which is, I love them to death, they are a fabulous organization, I can't say nice enough things about them but there are other organizations throughout the country and abroad as well that do similar training. But again, the training is an evolving field. And it's something where self-study is a huge component of this so it's not like you can just walk into a classroom and expect to know everything you need to know to go on a set and do this work. I think a background in the industry is really, really important in some capacity, whether that's as a performer or as a crew member, things like that. And you also have to be really hungry for knowledge on things like mental health, on

representation in queer rights issues, anti-racism practices as well as movement techniques as well as literal choreography for sex scenes. There's a lot that goes into it in training and outside of training to prepare you for this work.

VC: Now speaking of the Queer community, tell us about your experience with the LGBTQ+ community and how that has helped you grow in this industry.

EF: Yeah, so I am a proud member of the LGBTQ community. I identify as bisexual and I am in community with wonderful people all day long, we're talking about these issues constantly in society, we're talking about consent and how we read consent culture in our community and outside our community. It's also given me a unique perspective. I'm able to support directors when they want to tell queer stories from a very authentic point of view. We're still telling stories, they're not my story, but I'm able to lend my own experiences, my own personal experiences to that storytelling and help craft something that feels more authentic to my community and that's always an exciting opportunity. I just did a lovely visual album where we did telling a story of like Queer love for the first time and it was just delightful to work with these two performers and tell that story and find these little storytelling moments in our choreography where it's not just about telling a really hot sex scene but it's about like finding those moments of personal growth and intimacy outside of the movement and little like things we can sneak in like oh, that feels much more real to me, let's take a pause here, let's give you guys a moment to take that breath or take that look, laugh about something and that's always exciting. So yeah, being a part of that community has really informed my work and continues to support me in that work. My community is wholeheartedly supportive of the work I do and that's always lovely.

KK: Isn't it gay pride month?

VC: Happy pride month!

EF: It's so exciting, I love pride month!

VC: What would you say are the biggest challenges and the biggest rewards of what you do?

EF: I would say the biggest challenge right now is definitely a lack of education about the work, so I talk about this a lot in my cohorts and my other colleagues about half of your job when you come in to work isn't just doing the job but it's educating and that can be really difficult because you are going against a lot of preconceived notions about what you do, you're going into this, a lot of times there are situations where there is a lot of resistance to what you do and so it takes an immense amount of patience and self-assuredness in the value of your work to be able to step into that environment especially if you are say, younger to the profession, you're still trying to get your feet under you, and, you're kind of getting thrown in, like, "prove to us why we need this!" That's where community really becomes a huge part of this, is making sure you have people supporting you that you can talk to and be like, "Oh, man, everyone here seems to hate me, they want me to go home", and it's like they remind you why you're there, and yeah, that's a challenging part. But rewarding? I could be here all day talking about the rewards but for me the core reward is that I adore our industry in what we can create and the stories we're able to tell and the way we're able to impact culture and impact people's perception of the world and to be able to make the process of doing that safer and into an environment where we put the artist ahead of the art is so deeply rewarding to me, because I suffered harm in the industry myself, not just in the idea of sexual harassment but also just the psychological pressures that are put on you in the industry and so bringing the idea of consent into the industry for me is a very revolutionary act. And I talk to my colleagues about this a lot. The word "no" just has not existed in entertainment in a significant way. So, it's very rewarding to see people's reactions to someone who is giving them permission to say "no."

KK: I'm excited, I'm thinking this podcast will go all over the place and let people finally know what intimacy coordinators do, because this is truly an education for us.

VC: Absolutely. What advice do you have to give to someone who is thinking about entering this profession?

EF: I would say the best thing to do if you're thinking of entering this profession is, there are many kinds of introductory courses. IDC offers a kind of intimacy coordinating 101 courses. Throw yourself into that like initial education. Explore it, be curious and be really open to expanding your definition of what this work is. You may come in

with a very narrow idea of like oh, this is what I'm going to do and it's going to go like this, but I think having a really open mind to all of the ways in which this work is going to challenge you and it is going to demand that you look outside of yourself and that you examine things you might be uncomfortable examining about your role in the world and how you can help contribute to improvements in the systems that we currently work in, I think that's a really key part of this work that goes often kind of unnoticed by the flashy like headlines.

VC: And last but certainly not least, if people want to find out more about you, maybe hire you, where can they find you?

EF: Yeah, so you can find my website, its evelynfogelmancreative.com so you can find all of the information on my work and my booking there. You can also find me on the Internet at [etrainlife](http://etrainlife.com), you can find me on social media there, that's where a lot of, I do a lot of comedic education, particularly about Queer culture and things through those platforms. But specifically, my intimacy work, you can find it at evelynfogelmancreative.com.

KK: Well, we really want to thank you. This has been fascinating, educational, and exciting to know that there are people like you out there to protect.

EF: I'm so glad. I love this work; I would do it every day of my life if I could.

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