

EPISODE 7
DRAFT VERSION 2
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HOST Aimée Lindorff

GUESTS Michelle Miall Director
Intimacy Coordinator

Blurb:

Michelle Miall is an intimacy coordinator in training and talks to SQ On Air about the emerging field of intimacy coordination - what it is, what's involved, and how it's changing the way we look at movement on screen in a post-#MeToo/post-COVID world.

Aimée	Welcome to SQ On Air, presented by Screen Queensland, exploring the news and issues affecting the Queensland screen sector I'm Aimée Lindorff and in this episode, I talk with Michelle Miall about the emerging role of intimacy coordinator in the screen industry. What they do, why they do it, and how sets have changed in a post- Me too - and post-COVID world.
Aimée	Well, Michelle, thank you so much for joining us on SQ On Air.
Michelle	Pleasure. Thank you for having me.
Aimée	For those who aren't familiar with the term, can you tell us what is an intimacy coordinator?
Michelle	The best way to explain what an intimacy coordinator does is to liken it to a fight choreographer, or a stunt coordinator. When you have a fight scene in theater, or film, or TV, or you have a stunt that needs to be done, you bring someone in who specializes in helping facilitate that moment, or that scene. And an intimacy coordinator is basically that for intimate work. So if there's intimacy between actors, or nudity, or it can even be something that we don't necessarily associate with intimacy immediately. So anything that requires, I suppose, getting up in

	<p>each other's faces. Even work with children, the adults and children, familial relationships, that sort of thing. So anywhere that we step into territory that is potentially intimate of a quality, that's where I think an intimacy coordinator comes in.</p> <p>And just like a fight choreographer, or a stunt coordinator, our job is to help facilitate the director's vision, to help create beautiful detailed moments of intimacy that serve the story, and the character, and allow the actors to do their best work, to feel safe and comfortable, to create an atmosphere of trust and safety so that they are free to be fully embodied in character, to be fully present in that moment.</p> <p>And ultimately, I suppose you're thinking about, it's an unusual workplace, but it is a workplace ultimately or a set. It's about making that workplace safe, and making great work.</p>
Aimée	<p>And what's your background? How did you get into this as an area of focus?</p>
Michelle	<p>So, I'm a theater director. I've been working in theater coming on 20 years as a theater director and I'm a teaching artist. I came to this just by lucky chance, I suppose. Ita O'Brien, my mentor and the woman behind Intimacy on Set UK. She came out to Australia at the end of 2018 to run workshops through MEAA, the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, and I was selected to be a part of those workshops. So, I did two days with her then, workshops that were for actors and for directors, so there was an actor's workshop and the director's workshop, and also for people who were interested in going on to become intimacy coordinators as well.</p> <p>So, I put my hand up then and said I was absolutely keen, and from there, I was fortunate enough to get to work on a theater project at the beginning of last year, an independent theater project, and there was a group of people who approached me, friends and colleagues, who were doing this, all of them, for the first time.</p> <p>So, a first time producer, a first time director, and they asked if I'd be interested in coming and working with them as the intimacy coordinator, so I did that and then later in the year, got the opportunity to work on a feature film, and through all of that, being mentored by Ita online. So, we've worked together even though she's based in the UK and I'm here, and it's gone from there. So, that was how I came into it.</p> <p>it's been gaining momentum for the last, I'd say probably almost five years now. Ita's been working in the UK, in the US Alicia Rodis and her colleagues, their company, Intimacy Directors International, IDI, have been working in this area and also in New Zealand, Jennifer Wood Leland has been working in this area.</p> <p>So, it's almost like there's a groundswell happening in different places, and these people are communicating and connecting across the globe to share that work and to refine that</p>

	<p>work and to spread it and bring it around to as many people being able to utilize it as possible.</p> <p>That's really the idea, is to share the process, to create awareness and advocacy around it.</p>
Aimée	<p>Can you expand on the family dynamic? Because I think that's such an interesting point.</p>
Michelle	<p>We worked in a safeguarding children module. And obviously this is around areas of anyone working with children being aware of potential red flags I suppose, in terms of making sure that children are safe, and if there's anything going on with them, and that sort of thing.</p> <p>But on a level for intimacy coordinators, I was fascinated to realize the depth to which this work goes. And that when we're talking about the fundamentals of intimacy coordination, and intimacy work, we're talking about the fundamentals of consent, and openness, and transparency.</p> <p>And so when you're talking about working with children, and this is in no way, I'm not even going into that area where there might be something potentially I suppose big in terms of the content, I'm talking about incidental contact, familial, like you said, familial relationships, a mother and a child, a father and a child, whatever.</p> <p>You're taking into account that there is contact happening, whether it's a pat on the head, or a holding the hand, or picking that child up. This is where I'm continually fascinated by my training and what I'm learning, because to have that revelation of, "Oh my God, a child working in a theater production where they're just picked up by the person playing their mother, and they're cuddled, that's an area that needs consent." And how do you work with children and their caregivers to ensure that that child feels safe, and that that child is giving consent as much as that child can?</p> <p>And so even just finding a way to bring that openness and transparency in the process involving a child. And no, you're not going to go into a level of detail that you would with adult performers. But to be able to explain to them, "Well, there's a scene happening here that isn't appropriate for this child to see. And it's mom and dad in the bedroom." Working with that child's parent, I understand in that situation, to decide what's the best way to approach this with this child performer, but that was done in a way that brought openness and honesty to that situation.</p> <p>And so the breadth of this work is so incredible that we're not even talking about intimacy in the, I guess, typical sense that we'd understand it, something of a sexual nature</p>
Aimée	<p>That's the mistake people make is that, when you say intimacy, you're talking about sex. But intimate acts can be as simple as touching, or hugging, or picking up.</p>

Michelle	<p>That's right. It's so much bigger than that. And that's what I find remarkable about this work, that it's not ... The first level, I suppose, of recognition we have, and I certainly had this, was going, "Oh, yeah, right, kissing, nudity, sex. Got it." And then when you start digging into it more deeply, and you understand how expansive this work is, because we make those assumptions, and that's when we risk overlooking things. And not by any ill intention, but simply because we haven't thought of it.</p> <p>And that's what I find really interesting about this work is that it draws attention to all of this stuff, and it shines a light on it, and it makes us aware of things that we might not have been aware of before. And that saying, I hear it a lot now, I'm a parent, and I hear it a lot with parenting, "When you know better, you do better." But it's so true.</p> <p>As a director, and I've been doing this in theater, in this theater thing for a while now, and when I look back on the work I've done that has required intimacy, and I am talking in that instance of a sexual nature, and I think about the process I undertook without these skills, without these tools, without even any sort of process, we didn't have something to refer to, guidelines, or anything like that, I did the best I can, and we worked through it the best way we could.</p> <p>When I look back and I go, "Oh my God, I didn't even think of that." Or, "That never occurred to me." Or, "I hope that person was totally okay in that moment. I checked in with them and they said they were okay." But there's something about this work of intimacy coordination, and the crux of it that we talk about, and I love this phrase, and Eta talks about holding space.</p> <p>And that was a new concept to me coming into it. The idea that we are holding space for the actors. We're holding space for these things to arise if they do. And it's almost like you're opening up a conversation that allows these things to come out where they might not have otherwise, and they would have stayed inside with someone, and that would have left, maybe it's just a bad taste in their mouth, but maybe it's something deeper.</p> <p>There are actors I've spoken to, or people who work in the industry who once were actors, who stopped being actors after they had a bad experience. So yeah, that breadth of awareness is so important, and it's so interesting to bring that to my work</p>
Aimée	<p>Why now do you think? I mean, stunt coordinators have been a staple of the, particularly Hollywood machine for quite a long time, but intimacy coordinators seem to be only a very recent phenomena. So, what is it about now that we're seeing this role emerge?</p>
Michelle	<p>Well, I think, clearly, there've been incidents over recent time that have drawn attention to and shone light on areas that are problematic, things that have arisen. We've had the Me</p>

	<p>Too movement really kicking off and gaining momentum, and I think with that, people's stories start to come out and they start to share those stories, and we've started to realize that there's a better way of doing this.</p> <p>A lot of people I come across, and certainly my colleagues and the people I talked to about this, people have, by and large, I think been trying to do the right thing and trying to work in a way that respects actors in the process and each other, but there have clearly been issues around intimate work and safety and vulnerability for actors involved, but the timing is quite crucial, I think, given the awareness that's coming to these sorts of issues now</p>
Aimée	<p>I think stunt work is probably the closest comparison in terms of the role, because it's such a specialist area, but there seems to be a much more openness to having a stunt coordinator on set because it's not something that actors naturally do.</p> <p>It's not something that they can all do, so they have to be guided through the process, whereas that idea of intimacy and being able to kiss, and being able to have sex, and being nude, everybody does that in some capacity at some point in their existence, so it seemed as less specialized in terms of-</p>
Michelle	<p>Yeah. You can just jump in there and go for it. Yeah, and I think that's a really important observation, and one that is quite crucial to why this work is important. When you think about the increasing awareness around mental health in general, across all industries, across just individual care, and we think about, so the care that's taken in the creation of stunt work and physical work, fight scenes, and so forth, it's quite apparent.</p> <p>It's physically obvious. It's visible, you can see it, that if someone doesn't know how to do something, or if indeed something is beyond their skills or it's not safe, then you need to get a specialist in. You need to take care of this in a particular way to ensure their physical safety, and when it comes to intimate work, we're talking about mental health, we're talking about emotional safety.</p> <p>So, the damage that's potentially done and that I think has been done in the past, it's not visible, and those stories aren't immediately obvious unless someone comes out and speaks them, as we've found in the last few years especially, it's only when these scabs are pulled back, when we actually see what's going on underneath and the stories that haven't been told. So, the idea of that damage being less obvious I think is one of those factors. The other thing, and this is really crucial to our work as intimacy coordinators, we talk about the work being professional, not private.</p>

	<p>This is about actors being able to keep their own private selves private, and the work is about creating a language that can be shared between director and actors, creating a palette, I suppose, of physical work, just like choreography. It is choreography essentially, so that just like a dance, it can be repeated, it's repeatable, it's detailed, it serves the story and it serves the characters, and it serves the director's vision.</p> <p>So, when you create that sort of a structure, that sort of scaffold, it's about serving character, and it's about serving the story. So, the actors aren't being asked to draw on their own personal experience in a way that leaves them vulnerable, and that's another thing Ita talks about, and I think is very important, that this is about letting the actors be open, but not leaving them vulnerable.</p> <p>And I think that's something, that we often talk about the vulnerability that's so crucial to the work, and that becomes difficult when we're talking about, I suppose, personal, private sexual history, people's personal, private lives being accepted as this is the territory that we want you to draw on, when there is no physical choreography, there is no shape being created that's about exploring the characters and the story.</p> <p>And we're understanding much more now, I think, what potential danger that holds for people, and why that doesn't work ultimately.</p>
Aimée	<p>One of the key phrases that I keep hearing about this subject is almost mental health first aider and providing that framework, not only physically to engage with the scene itself, but also the emotional and psychic kind of energy that goes into these scenes that people don't know about.</p>
Michelle	<p>Yeah. Yeah, absolutely, and while the mental health, again, it's something we talk about, is where are the boundaries of this role? And there's a lot of misconception around the role of intimacy coordinator for various reasons, for example we're not sex experts. This is about working with the actors and working with the director's vision, and in the same way that line in regards to mental health and counseling and this sort of thing, there's a line there as well.</p> <p>So, I think that's part of our role, to have that awareness of what an actor might be dealing with. If there's material potentially that's triggering, certainly it's our role to engage in what we might call body listening. We're aware of how the actor is, in the moment, working through the process and it's our job to identify and notice if something's not feeling right. holding space is the term that Ita uses, and I love that idea that it does feel like juggling the needs and awareness of a number of different people and roles at the same time. So, being</p>

	<p>that conduit I think is part of the role too, and that awareness of the actors and how they're feeling and the director and their vision and right through from the beginning of the process to the end of the process. Yeah, absolutely.</p>
Aimée	<p>And certainly developing a language for an area of film and television that we are not particularly articulate about.</p>
Michelle	<p>Yeah, and that's, I think, what's so hard for... I mean, I've worked as a director, I've worked in intimate moments in theater and we tried to work in a way that's as respectful of the actors and considerate and break down some of the nerves and the hesitation around it, but having that specific process, for me, was so enlightening</p> <p>There's different physical movement practitioners whose work we might draw on in terms of describing the kind of movement or where the sense of weight might be in the body, or the swiftness, the pace of the movement. Those sorts of things. So, actually finding ways to talk about the physical shape of the intimate work. It's about creating a language that you can work with between the actors, the director, and as an intimacy coordinator help facilitate that, so that it is accessible. It's not just feeling like, "Oh God, I have to jump in here and just have a go."</p>
Aimée	<p>Creating that language around consent and making sure that everybody's aware, as you said, of what the intention is, what the outcomes should be, and making sure everybody's comfortable at every step of that process of achieving that vision.</p>
Michelle	<p>that's the crucial cornerstone of all of this work, is that openness and that transparency, and that's right from the beginning at auditions at contract signing, from that point onwards, and having that clarity around what the work might be, what's being asked of the intimate work, are the actors comfortable with that? This is from the outset, so before someone is signing their contract or signing onto a project, that they're fully aware of what's being asked of them, and that they're comfortable that they're agreeing to that.</p> <p>And then as you move into the process, having that clarity of vision, so the director, what they're wanting to see, what they're wanting to get in that intimate moment, and making sure that then through the process of discussing and the shape of the scene, agreeing touch, so that consent process where we're ensuring that, "This part is okay to touch." "This part of my body is okay to touch." "Can I touch you here?"</p> <p>We're actually working through that very specifically to ensure that there's no surprises. And taking into consideration that that might change. There's that contingency there in</p>

	<p>working the process, that you have a safe word, you have a timeout word that at any point if someone needs to stop working, and that's not just the actors involved.</p> <p>That might be someone working in the crew. It's about everyone being safe in this process, and that's what's, I think, interesting about the nature of the work, that we start from a place where we think, "Well, this is about taking care of these actors." Or maybe it's the female actors. Well, that's what we're starting at, and then, well, no. It's the whole cast. It's the crew. It's the people doing the post production on the footage. This is about ensuring that no one is put in a position where they're feeling compromised or unsafe.</p>
Aimée	<p>I don't think the editing or grading or colorists are really considered when talking about sex scenes, but they do, particularly if it's a particularly violent or confronting scene, they also do need to process what they've seen on screen.</p>
Michelle	<p>Absolutely. And that awareness, I think, is what's really interesting about this work that, like I say, we might start off at a place where our assumption is, this is the reason for this work, it's because this female actor felt uncomfortable, and then you realize that, no, it's not just about a female actor, it's about every actor, and it's about the people who are exposed to this intimate content. So, the people standing around, the idea of no nudity outside of filming or outside of the specific rehearsal, if we're in theater.</p> <p>The idea that someone could be confronted with nudity on set or in rehearsal or moving forward to post production and that the materials labeled very clearly, and it's ensured that no one is exposed to anything that they're not prepared for. This idea that there's no surprises along the way is really quite important, and I think that idea expanding to include everyone involved is part of why this is so important because it is for everyone's safety and ensuring that everyone is taken care of.</p>
Aimée	<p>what I'm hearing, particularly when you talk about some of the processes, is so much of that language I'm hearing from sex work and also sex therapy as well, where they're talking about safe words, they're talking about watching body confidence and the fluidity of consent. All of these are areas that have been explored for many years through sex therapy and sex work.</p>
Michelle	<p>We do have colleagues who are training in this work specifically who come from that background, and the different places that people are coming from to this work is really interesting, and I'm sure that it's across over, it's quite a logical one in that there's a level of</p>

	<p>awareness that comes from those sorts of areas that I think we're trying to bring to this work.</p> <p>The commonality there is, I suppose, that that transparency and that openness and that care being taken, that makes a lot of sense that there's that common thread.</p>
Aimée	<p>Listening to how we see the intimacy coordinator potentially being involved in the production from pre through to post, what do you say to those people that say, "Well, you're placing so many barriers, or so many processes, or so many steps in to a production that's already full of so many processes, and steps, and procedures, that you're actually removing that capacity for improvisation, or creativity."? How do you respond to that?</p>
Michelle	<p>So a couple of things jump out at me in that question. The first one, I'll work backwards, is the word improvisation. And that's something that immediately we'll say, "Well, that's the whole point." This is about avoiding improvisation in the same way that in a fight scene, you wouldn't give a couple of swords to two actors and say, "Well, go out there and improvise. And then next take, let's do something different. See what else you can find."</p>
Aimée	<p>I'm going to throw a fist here instead.</p>
Michelle	<p>Yeah, just go for it. Let's see what happens. The element of surprise. You just wouldn't do that. And with good reason. So in the same way, I think ... Yeah, it's really interesting with the actors craft, because absolutely, there has to be, in the actors craft, and when actors go out on stage ... I'm a director. I talk to my actors and my cast about their work. I work a lot with students, so I talk to them obviously. Professional actors know this already.</p> <p>But they go out there, and you're discovering new stuff every night. You are open to discoveries. And that's what keeps it alive. Certainly with theater, you don't want to squash that. But when it comes to intimate work, we're talking in the same way that we talk about fight choreography. It has to be safe, it has to be repeatable. And it can't be safe, and it can't be repeatable if it's open to improvisation, and it's open to change.</p> <p>And so in the same way that you would create a detailed, structured fight scene, you choreograph it, you create it in a way that fully realizes the story, that fully tells the story that the actors can absolutely give everything to, you do that so that when the actors are then engaging in that scene, they can give it everything because they know they're safe. When you build a fight scene, when you build hand to hand contact, you do it in such a way so that that safety is built in.</p> <p>And when the actor is in the moment, they know that they can give 100% energy to that moment because it's safe. They're not going to injure the other actor, they're not</p>

going to injure themselves. You can only give 100% energy to something like that if you know that you're not going to hurt yourself or hurt your fellow actor.

In the same way with intimate work, if you know that that repeatable choreographed shape is there, you can completely commit to character, you can be completely full of character, absolutely embody and present in the moment. And I think the idea that it needs to be spontaneous, that it needs to be ... To keep it interesting, and to keep it creative, is a bit of a trap.

And in fact, I would suggest that for a lot of actors, having to improvise, or having ... Without the certainty of, "We've done this work, we created this shape." There's the voice in the back of your head that's not present in character, and in story, because that voice in the back of your head is you watching what's happening, and almost safeguarding yourself, or thinking, "Am I doing this right? What am I doing?"

And I've done this in the past without this process, with two actors going in for a kiss. And I can tell you, we come out of that rehearsal, and they've been half present because they're having to think about it as they go.

So that's the first thing I would say in terms of improvisation. We don't want improvisation, we want a repeatable, beautiful, detailed scene that the actors can trust that everything is going to stay the same. And within that, they can commit completely to the emotional journey of the characters, and 100% energy to what's happening.

In terms of adding barriers, that's another thing I think there's another misconception. This isn't about creating barriers. I used the word barriers before as a physical ... In terms of actual costume piece, because we do have these really nifty solutions to things like avoiding contact between genitals, and even avoiding rubbing, to be blunt, because again, if you've got body to body contact in a mostly nude situation, and you're working with simulated sex, you want the actor to feel comfortable and safe to commit to that scene, and commit to that physical shape without the fear that that body contact is going to create a reaction in their own body, which is a perfectly natural thing.

So we try and create a situation where they're not feeling vulnerable, but they're able to be open to what they're doing. They're able to be open and in character, and engaged in that moment completely.

So the question of creating barriers, and adding in processes and procedures where there's already just no time already, and I get that completely. And I'm new to working in film. And so for me, stepping into that from a theater background was a real jump in the deep end to go, "All right, there's no time at all. Okay, literally no time." There's absolutely nothing in what we're doing is trying to intervene, or slow down those processes.

Like I said, the ideal situation looks like this when we're in it from the beginning to the end, and if we can schedule in ... Say for a film shoot, we can schedule in some rehearsal time maybe at the end of the day so the actors can go through it before they

come back the next day. That's the ideal. That's, at the moment, certainly not often the case. It hasn't been the case in what I've done so far. And we work with that. Look, something is better than nothing. So if we can work in the process while ...

And in a way, it's taking that pressure off the director too. I know that's what I experienced when we were really time poor. And we're working in a fully intimate, nude scene, simulated sex, and we have no time left to work on this. And the director is busy setting up the shots, and the actors are ready to work. And there is no slowing down of that process. There's no stopping everything because we need to focus on this. It was a case of working in with the process so that I could make it safe for the actors, and I could get the vision that the director was trying to achieve in collaboration with him.

And interestingly, like I said, jumping in the deep end for me where I just come from a theater background where we've got the luxury of time, although, we're always feeling like we don't. But compared to film it's ... We got heaps of time. In that instance, I went, "Okay, what can I do with the time I've got? Well, what's the most important part? The most important parts are, I've got an understanding of what the director wants." In this instance, he wanted me to create some of the detail. And so okay, talking to the director, "Here's the shape, what do you think? Here are the beats."

And so you're looking for shortcuts. So because you're time poor. So some of the things ... And I haven't worked in all these, but my colleagues have talked about, and I find awesome to think about. Obviously you've got storyboarding, you've got quick sketches, stick figures. One of my colleagues works with articulated art models, the little wooden models that you can move and shape. So you can create really specific pictures, "Is this what you're looking for?"

So finding ways to go, "Right, shortcut to, this is the shape we're going to create." And walking that through with the actors and going, "Okay, these are the physical beats. Are you comfortable with that?" And if you've got time, then you can slow this all down. But most crucially, it's making sure that that physical shape is going to be there, the actors are comfortable with it, that you've gone through agreeing touch, that everyone is comfortable with where they're being touched, and that there's an awareness of the time out, that they can call time out if there's a problem, and that then they can integrate that character in an emotional journey to that physical shape.

So that all sounds like a lot, but we did that in 20 minutes while the shots were being set up. So the idea that we're going to get in there and ... I love the actor I was working with who hadn't worked with the intimacy coordinator before said, "Oh, I didn't know what this was going to be like. I thought some old lady with a clipboard was going to come in, and now you're here. This is great."

So I understand, because I've come from that place of going, "What on earth is an intimacy coordinator going to do? And how are they going to slow down or obstruct this process?" And once you're actually working in it, and you've worked with an intimacy coordinator, and you see how it works, it's almost the opposite. It's about being able to get

	<p>straight to the point of creating this detailed scene efficiently, effectively, and in a way that tells the best story in a really beautiful, detailed way.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">So I think it's like with any really effective tool, or process, it makes the work better, and it helps you get there faster in the end.</p>
Aimée	<p>It's interesting to hear you say that, because I think one of the things we're particularly exploring at the moment with the COVID safety guidelines is, they are introducing a whole bunch of new processes and considerations on set. But we went through the same process when introducing stunt coordinator, and stunt accreditation on set. So it really, as you said, it's not about putting up these barriers in place to stop people being creative, but it's actually about to help you get the best outcome more concise, quickly, and most effectively without causing any problems on set, or hurting the people that are involved.</p>
Michelle	<p>Yeah, exactly. Without compromising on safety. That's right. So taking everything and doing it the best way possible. Yeah, that's really what we're trying to do.</p>
Aimée	<p>So, obviously this is a very, it's a unique role, it's very specialized content. Talk us through the accreditation process. It is an accredited role. So, tell us a little bit about that.</p>
Michelle	<p>There's Ita O'Brien in Intimacy on Set UK, and that's where I've begun my training and I'm being mentored through. Intimacy Directors International is the American company that I know Ita has worked alongside them in terms of what they've been doing and that idea of how we're working towards this accreditation.</p> <p>So, from my work we go through different levels until the point of accreditation. So, the level one workshops, that's what Ita came out and did at the end of 2018 in Australia, and then working through the next level of face to face workshops, which unfortunately, was due to happen in July this year. She was going to come out here again to do that, and that unfortunately got canceled. The silver lining, I suppose for me, was that without being able to physically come out to Australia or to, in fact, a number of her candidates, or intimacy coordinators in training, Ita moved a suite of training online.</p> <p>So, from May to about a month ago, myself, two practitioners here in Brisbane, Andrea Moore who runs the acting degree at QUT, the acting course at QUT, and Jackie Somerville, who runs the acting course at Griffith University at the Conservatorium. We, alongside colleagues from Sydney and Melbourne and New Zealand and Europe and London, so all</p>

	<p>across the globe, we've been coming together weekly on Zoom and working through anything that we could work through online.</p> <p>So, that's been, I suppose, a suite of complementary training alongside the specific process of intimacy coordination. So, everything from sexual harassment and bullying, to unconscious bias and safeguarding children and a bunch of different areas that are integral to the work alongside the actual process of being an intimacy coordinator, the training itself, when we can do face to face training, would go up, I believe, through level two, level three, and then level four, working to an assessment and then becoming accredited.</p> <p>So, that would be with Ita in my instance gaining that accreditation with her. So, it's the degree of intensity of the training alongside accruing a certain number of hours, depending on which area we're becoming accredited in. So, under Intimacy on Set, I believe Ita's divided it into theater, film and TV, and pedagogy, so that the teaching of the work, and they're the three areas that she's accrediting... Accrediting? She's accrediting people in, and that's based on, not only the training under her, but also the practical experience working on projects and accruing a certain number of hours towards that final certification.</p>
Aimée	<p>So, in terms of the study and the training that you do, sounds like there's a lot around, not only choreography, but a little bit of psychology, a little bit of therapy, and then also the body language aspects where you're actually learning to interpret those micro expressions and micro behaviors.</p>
Michelle	<p>Interesting that you say that. I think, again, it sits alongside those areas. So, as part of our work, one of the things I know we'll be doing, if we haven't already, is that mental health first aider, and being able to identify those signs, and it's something that we talked through in our Zoom sessions, that idea still of where do we sit in terms of that that role of actual counselor, is something that doesn't sit in the role of intimacy coordinator for us, but the awareness of where that is needed certainly does.</p> <p>So, being able to have, for ourselves in our specific area, geographical area, a number of, or a list of practitioners that we can perhaps refer an actor to if they need someone to talk to if something's triggered them or if they're struggling in their work or for any reason. So, that's not our role, but that's part of our awareness, I suppose you might say, to notice if someone needs that help. The movement work and the physical work, it's interesting to see what everyone brings from their own background, and that's something that I've really enjoyed about working under Ita, is that she encourages that sense of, well, what's your background? How do you make this work?</p> <p>How do you find that physicality with your actors? What's your specific background and how can that apply? And that's in addition to anything else that you might take on. So,</p>

	<p>through working with Ita, I've expanded, I suppose, my movement vocabulary and the work that I've started to delve into because that's something that I found really interesting, and different ways to communicate with actors through that different movement work. And yeah. I suppose then when you're talking about that psychology and that awareness, it's certainly, I know in fact, Ita's talked about the material she's dug into in understanding better in terms of psychology and those sorts of aspects of the work, and it's by no means, are we stepping into that territory.</p> <p>We're not psychologists, we're not training to become psychologists or counselors, but I think it all connects up an awareness of that, and that's as much in the actual work itself of the material that you're working on, because of course, intimate work, intimate content, story, characters, they're completely anchored and rooted in the psychology of what's going on for that person at that time.</p>
Aimée	<p>Given we are in the midst of a global pandemic, where the virus is transmittable through touch and through intimacy and through closeness, do you see this kind of role being more prevalent on nonsexual sets as well? Sets that don't necessarily have that kind of intimacy?</p>
	<p>I think it's a level of awareness that this role speaks to, absolutely, that we're now moving into post-COVID. Personally, that has formed a part of my work as a director, the training I've had as an intimacy coordinator, I've drawn upon in the work that I've directed post lockdown, so we've been able to go back into the rehearsal room and part of that process in achieving the company's COVID safe plan and ensuring that the actors were safe and comfortable was not just a logistical sanitizing, hygiene, distanced thing, but it was actually about me saying, "Okay. Well, let's implement the same process as we would if there was intimate contact."</p> <p>So, for the actors, there was only, I suppose if you might call, regular or non-sexual contact, there were hugs and incidental contact. You know, a hand on a shoulder, that sort of thing, which I think pre-COVID would just be considered incidental. Probably wouldn't have even thought twice about it, but yeah, we worked through a process of agreeing to touch because we were coming from a situation where we'd been in lockdown and everyone is reacting to that differently. So, absolutely that was something that we took into consideration and we held that space for them. It's interesting to see how something that's so specific to intimate work becomes a greater conversation when we come out of lockdown and we haven't been in contact with people for a couple of months.</p>

Aimée	It certainly does open up the conversation more broadly to be acceptable on set. I think if ever there was a time to start talking about introducing intimacy coordinators as a permanent fixture in feature films, post a global pandemic might be the time.
Michelle	<p>Yeah, and look, I think that awareness for me, I mean, that's been fascinating working through the training and discussions with Ita and my colleagues where things that have never necessarily had to come into my scope, and I guess, just thinking about touch, thinking about contact and the significance of it in a way that I suppose I hadn't before, there's a lot around it that's very easily taken for granted, and I think that's what this environment, post-COVID, is going to do.</p> <p>We no longer take that for granted. We haven't been able to hug people outside of our families or made the contact, and so yeah. All the physical contact closeness that just used to be every day is now no longer, so it's out of the ordinary. So, it's forcing us to think about it and think about our reactions and to think about how someone else might react, because we can't assume anything in this environment. It's all unprecedented.</p>
Aimée	Thank you so much for your time, Michelle, and for sharing the interesting new world of intimacy coordinator.
Michelle	My pleasure. Thank you so much for having me. It's great to be able to talk about it. That's part of what we want to do, is just spread that awareness of the work and of the role, and yeah. Advocate for the value of it. Thanks very much, Aimee.
Aimée	Thanks for listening to SQ ON Air, don't forget to check out the latest screen industry news on screen Queensland's website at screenqueensland.com.au