

# The Evolution of Consent-Based Performance: A Literature Review

**Amanda Rose Villarreal, PhD**

## **About the Author:**

Amanda Rose Villarreal (she, they) is an immersive artist, a devising artist, and an intimacy choreographer. She earned her MA in Theatre Production from Central Washington University and PhD in Theatre and Performance Studies from University of Colorado Boulder. Their dissertation, “Unscripted Intimacies: Negotiating Consent in Gamified Performance” analyzes the ways in which intimacy choreography and game design can be used in tandem to support participants’ physical, emotional, and cultural boundaries within immersive performance, emergent performance, and live action roleplay.

As well as training performers and educators to utilize consent-based practices and choreographing intimacy for staged productions, Amanda Rose works with immersive performance and larp companies, crafting consent negotiation mechanics for unscripted interactions, tailored to fit the world of the production. Amanda Rose’s work has been featured at Toynbee Studios in London, Australia-based Viral Ventures, the Denver Center for the Performing Arts, Otherworld Theatre and Moonrise Games in Chicago, and the TANK in New York City, as well as in the ACLU’s National 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary tour’s immersive *UndocuMonologues* experience, and theatres and immersive production companies in Texas, Oklahoma, Colorado, Washington, and California.

An award-winning educator and TYA artist with over fifteen years of directing and teaching theatre with, by, and for youth, Amanda Rose is now developing a Theatre Education Credential at California State University Fullerton, where they serve as Assistant Professor of Theatre Education and resident Intimacy Choreographer.

## Introduction

As a new and evolving field, intimacy specializations are currently gaining popular recognition. This could perhaps be evidenced best by the February 20, 2021 *Saturday Night Live* sketch titled “Bridgerton Intimacy Coordinator” which highlights the need for good intimacy coordinators in film performance by presenting Pete Davidson and Mikey Day as technicians who “took a zoom class” in intimacy coordination, but whose presence and actions in the space serve to decrease performers’ safety throughout the process. While the sketch calls the audience to cringe and laugh at Davidson’s and Day’s portrayals of intimacy coordinators who are utterly clueless about appropriate modesty garments and etiquette, it simultaneously highlights the ways in which a loaded and sexualized environment can disempower performers. This SNL performance indicates a current level of popular awareness of the role of intimacy specialists in performance, and contextualizes common understanding of this role as limited to performances of sex and nudity. The *Journal of Consent-Based Performance* aims to recontextualize this awareness towards a more informed understanding of the evolving consent-based practices and definitions of intimacy within our field, and a literature review is one starting point for this work. I approach this literature review from the perspective of a theatre maker, educator, and intimacy specialist living and working within U.S. culture, here attempting to summarize the publications that are contributing to the field and U.S. popular understandings of it.

Before exploring the published literature, I believe that it is important to recognize the evolution of this field and the ways in which documentation around this field has itself created certain power imbalances. While some voices have become very prominent as they advocate for consent-based practices, other artists, who have been using consent-based approaches for generations prior to the emergence of “intimacy coordinator” or “intimacy choreographer” titles, may have gone unnamed. Many of those whose work has gone unnamed are artists of color, women, disabled individuals, trans and nonbinary individuals whose own experiences

of disempowerment in society and in the performance industry forced them to forge practices to protect themselves. These people are the pioneers of consent-based practice. As an intimacy specialist, I recognize that I may never know the names of many who forged the early path for this field, and I may never know the origin of the foundation upon which my practice continues to build. As a scholar, I want to ensure that our evolution moving forward is documented, and I want to understand whose work I should be crediting as I continue forming my own artistic consent-based praxis as an intimacy choreographer, as an educator, and as a theatre maker. I invite other artists and scholars to add to this literature review, and to document the as-of-yet unpublished history of consent-based practices used in performance, and those who created them.

### **Acknowledging the Unpublished Lineage of Consent-Based Practices**

Since the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements permeated the U.S. zeitgeist in 2017, intimacy choreography and intimacy direction for traditional staging practices—as well as intimacy coordination for film—have become more common topics of conversation. Separate, but often parallel, approaches to consent-based practice have emerged and continued to develop over the past decade; many of these movements emerged prior to the popularization of the #MeToo movement. Many movements emerged in the past and inform our work today, but remain unnamed.

The work of an intimacy choreographer is to uphold ethical interactions by using consent-based practices, to empower performers with the agency to assert their personal boundaries, to level power imbalances in rehearsal and performance spaces, and to craft choreography for performed intimacy—all with an informed and culturally competent approach that supports both performers and the production. In this spirit, I begin this literature review with an acknowledgement of the unwritten efforts and undocumented labor of intimacy choreography that predates the literature of this specific field. Throughout history, this labor has largely been placed upon the shoulders of those who have been disempowered

in U.S. society. Dr. Joy Brooke Fairfield (2019) traces the origins of consent-based practices in performance to generations of activists and communities outside of the performance field, writing that:

consent practices formalized by intimacy choreographers for the process of staging *simulated* sex are informed by the cultural work done toward normalizing negotiation of consent within scenarios of *actual* sex, efforts that have been historically led by survivors of sexual violence, sex workers, porn performers, sexuality activists, and members of kink communities. (Fairfield 2019, 68)

Although the work of normalizing consent negotiation has occurred throughout history, consent-based performance specialization is a “relatively new profession” within the theatre industry. This role focuses on “the business of safety, comfort, and risk management” (Fierberg 2020), establishing boundaries, and creating safe and sustainable performance practices for those simulating sex and performing other intimate contents. The role’s relative newness is illustrated by the evolution of the role’s title; some individuals and organizations prefer “intimacy director”, while some artists, such as Allison Bibicoff, use intimacy director and intimacy choreographer interchangeably (Bibicoff 2019). However, while awareness of intimacy choreographers is still emerging and industry-wide acknowledgement of this role is new (Martinko 2021), the work itself is not.

The more recent practice of documenting theories and practices of consent-based performance is the basis for this literature review. However, claiming that intimacy choreography was created by any one group of individuals within the past few decades would be ignoring the unrecorded efforts and emotional labor that have existed for much longer. Ann James, founder of Intimacy Directors of Color, writes that “we need to look at why intimacy direction is still so very white while the movement it sprang from was birthed by a Black woman” (James 2020). Here, James references Tarana Burke, who initiated the #MeToo movement long before its popularity was propelled to prominence following Alyssa Milano’s use of the #MeToo hashtag on Twitter in October 2017 (Fileborn and Loney-Howes 2019, 302). Similarly, the uncredited efforts of artists working to protect themselves from harmful

experiences throughout generations have been propelled into prominence by written documentation in recent years. While the rise of Performance-as-Research methodology has led to a larger emphasis on learning gleaned from artistic practices, publications have still tended, due to academic gatekeeping and the combination of biases permeating U.S. culture, to promote the voices of white artists and scholars.

I myself am one of these white scholar-artists. I am a member of the Theatrical Intimacy Education team. My cultural frame of reference lies within U.S. culture. I acknowledge the unpaid, undocumented, and largely unrecognized labor that has existed prior to the emergence of a written record of this work. Acknowledging that consent-based practices have existed prior to the naming of this specialization and the written record of this work as it relates to performance, and acknowledging that I may not have access to notable publications from around the world, I turn now to a review of the major publications related to the evolution of consent-based performance practices in the United States, starting with Tonia Sina's 2006 thesis.

### **The Published Lineage of Consent-Based Practice in Performance**

According to Carey Purcell's article "Intimate Exchanges" (2018) published in *American Theatre*, the words "intimate choreography" (Sina Campanella 2006) were first printed in Tonia Sina's (2006) MFA thesis. Titled *Intimate Encounters; Staging Intimacy and Sensuality*, Sina's thesis elucidated the need for intimacy choreography through her experiences as a fight director. In this thesis, Sina notes that "[t]he purpose of a Fight Director is to teach the techniques needed for fight sequences in a safe manner and to protect the actors from getting hurt. Likewise, if a movement coach is dealing with an intimate scene, the same rules of safety should apply" (2). In her fifth and sixth chapters, titled "Developing a Technique" and "Principles of Movement Direction" respectively, Sina summarizes her work as a fight director working with intimacy, drawing conclusions from her experiences. She does not outline a specific framework for choreographing intimacy in this thesis, although she

indicates that she will, saying: “when I develop a movement curriculum, I will involve sections of both sex and violence. I feel that it would be a unique and useful approach to the essential risk-taking portion of a movement class” (86). Her closing chapter implies that a framework or curriculum for intimacy choreography is needed, and highlights aspects of her own practice that may be useful in developing one.

Throughout the U.S., other fight choreographers and movement specialists were similarly acknowledging what Adam Noble (2011) calls “the danger” of “those gray areas in the theatre, where inexperienced actors and directors are left to their own devices” (14). Here, Noble is referring to actors and directors who are not specifically trained in stylized movement techniques. To assist in these situations, Noble published his Extreme Stage Physicality (ESP) approach in a 2011 issue of *The FightMaster*. This approach was crafted for choreographing both intimacy and violence, because Noble “find[s] the means to approach them quite similar. In either situation, we find that when words are no longer sufficient to express the depth of a character’s emotions, the body steps in to fill the void” (14). His system is simple, including five steps: writing out the *blueprints*, or planning for the scene (16); establishing *no-fly zones*, or clear communication about personal boundaries (16-17); *permission and touch*, a step in which Noble expects actors to give permission and clearly establish exactly where each touch will be placed (17); *ruthless pursuit* of a character’s objective, in which Noble says actors should do “*everything within their power*” (emphasis original) to achieve the objective (18); and *finding your flow*, a step which includes improvisation and experimentation through which “physicality is set and honed through slow repetition” (19). Noble’s framework for Extreme Stage Physicality proposes steps to take in choreographing both scenes that include intimacy and those that include violence, but draws no distinctions between the two in practice.

Pursuing consent-based practices in performances outside—but inclusive of—staged intimacy, Chicago artists and activists came together with Laura T. Fischer and Lori Myers, who founded the #NotInOurHouse movement in January of 2015 (Silets 2016). This organization advocated for policy change and crafted the *Chicago Theatre Standards*,

launching a pilot project with twenty-one theatre organizations (Fisher and Myers). The Not In Our House Community's document inspired a variety of advocacy movements throughout the United States, many of which adapted the Chicago Theatre Standards to better fit their own communities' needs. This widespread movement advocated for consent-based practices and improved safety of performers throughout the United States, offering an "ouch/oops" system for communicating crossed boundaries—a brief and simple framework for conversations acknowledging the experience of harm and clarifying that the harm was unintended. The Chicago Theatre Standards proposes guidelines focused on conflict resolution policies and companywide communication, rather than on a codified artistic approach to intimacy specialization within the field. Nonetheless, Fischer and Myers and the other Not In Our House collaborators published a document that established a widespread movement towards consent-based practices and performers' safety.

The specific and recent evolution of intimacy choreography as a craft has been highlighted in the media, with the attention to this field's evolution largely fueled by the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements. Major news outlets such as *The New York Times* (Collins-Hughes, 2017), *Huffpost* (Duberman, 2018), and *The Washington Post* (Andrews, 2019) have reported on the development of new approaches for staging intimacy, often citing Theatrical Intimacy Education or Intimacy Directors International in the evolutionary process. Theatrical publications, such as *Theatre Art Life* (Morey, 2018) and *American Theatre* (Purcell, 2018) have promoted intimacy practices in the past several years, especially since the popularity of the social media #MeToo movement exploded worldwide, and they continue to do so. Perhaps due to the contemporaneous documentation of the evolution of this field, intimacy choreography practices have been recognized and discussed outside of scholarship and the artistic industry, leading to public discourse such as is evidenced by the SNL *Bridgerton* sketch.

In 2014, Sina added to the work put forth in her 2006 thesis. Her article in *The Fight Master* revisited the concept of intimacy choreography, stating that "there was a desperate need for this untapped specialty." This article (2014) added new insights and conclusions that

Sina had gleaned from her continued work, and outlined a thorough, 8-step “Kissing Protocol” (12–15). Sina’s article addressed the broader field of artists engaging in consent-based practices, issuing a call for further development of intimacy choreography as a craft. In 2016, then, Sina put this call into action, partnering with fight choreographers Alicia Rodis and Siobhan Richardson and founding Intimacy Directors International (Richardson 2019). Together, they identified that a framework must be created to “avoid the potential discomfort of navigating power dynamics with the Director, which are known to cloud consent” (Morey 2018). They then developed the “Pillars of Intimacy,” which were listed on the organization’s website and in their training materials as Context, Communication, Consent, Choreography, and Closure (Intimacy Directors International, 2016). Although the Intimacy Directors International organization shuttered in 2020, several of its founders established IDC—Intimacy Directors and Coordinators—that same year, and the pillars are still used by this new organization, which functions with the mission of training and certifying specialists in their own approach to theatrical intimacy (Warden 2021).

Concurrently with the establishment of Intimacy Directors International and its “Pillars,” choreographer Chelsea Pace and movement specialist Laura Rikard were establishing Theatrical Intimacy Education. Rather than approaching intimacy choreography as an untapped area for specialty, Theatrical Intimacy Education promotes safe practices for staging intimacy as an ethical responsibility of all involved in the theatrical process or in the pedagogy of performance. Pace and Rikard have combined pedagogical expertise with specialized training to create a framework that promotes safety and consent while facilitating actors and directors alike in working with “scenes with physical touch, intimate contact, and sexual violence” (“Laura” 2019). The Theatrical Intimacy Education approach to “put ourselves out of business” by spreading awareness of best practices regarding staged intimacy is explained in “Welcome to the JCBP” (Pace et al. 2021), but could be summarized by a refusal of gatekeeping practices and a belief that all individuals are responsible for engaging with one another through using ethical practices. Pace, Rikard, and other faculty members within the Theatrical



Intimacy Education team work to promote a framework that can be taught and used at any level of theatrical production—in elementary schools, in BFA programs, in professional performance—by training educators, directors, designers, and performers alike, hoping that best practices will permeate the industry at all levels (Villarreal 2019). This framework includes explicit practices and tools for establishing boundaries and consent within rehearsal spaces, techniques for interrupting power imbalances in rehearsal, and ten “Ingredients of Intimacy” (Pace and Rikard 2019), outlined in Pace’s (2020) *Staging Sex: Best Practices, Tools, and Techniques for Theatrical Intimacy*.

Seeking to counteract the formation of homogenized and exclusive practices in this emerging field, artists and scholars from the Global Majority have worked to broaden the definitions of intimacy and consent in the theatre industry. In *Theatre Symposium’s* “Hidden Damage” (2019), actor, director, and activist Kaja Dunn calls attention to the intimacy work required of student-actors who are members of the Global Majority, writing that acting instructors who tell students to “ignore [...] race and just do the assignment” are thereby assigning harmful and often nonconsensual embodiment to their students (69). Dunn illustrates this with her own experiences, writing that her own instructors informed her that being required to perform sexually explicit scenes as coursework “was trying to get me used to the parts I could expect to play,” forcing Dunn into circumstances which left her “grappling with the literal embodiment of damaging stereotypes” (Ibid). A year later in the *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, in an interview titled “Intimacy Choreography and Cultural Change” (Fairfield et al. 2019), Dunn calls upon leaders in the field of intimacy choreography to inhabit the intersection of intimacy choreography and critical race theory (78). Dunn asks: “how do you take what we’re doing with intimacy choreography but also look at the dimension of differential racial embodiment. How do I have to think about consent differently when I’m working with Black and Latinx and Asian bodies on stage in relation to these white bodies onstage?” (82). She further calls upon white intimacy choreographers to investigate and

challenge the racial biases that have informed the prominent literature around, and leadership in, this work thus far.

In March 2020, Ann James published a similar call to action in her article titled “Intimate Reform: Making Space for Leaders of Color” published in *HowlRound*. This article acknowledges the financial requirements that can lead to gatekeeping surrounding certification in intimacy specializations, but highlights the psychological and emotional gatekeeping that emerge when trainings and leadership are dominated by white individuals. James cites Dunn, and adds: “simply put, we want training from people who look more like us. We want to ensure the physical and mental well-being of our own communities; to be trained and/or directed outside the white gaze.” James then continues, proclaiming her thinking in founding the organization Intimacy Directors of Color “to begin framing more culturally accessible methods of intimacy training so that these productions can hold space for the health and safety of actors of color.” James’s article also indicates that the leadership reform she calls for must be done holistically, purposefully, and through an informed means, rather than defaulting to tokenism or empty gestures driven by guilt. In summation, James writes that she “hope[s] the desire for holistic equity, diversity, and inclusion moves the field of intimacy direction to a place of transformation. There must be a shift to true equality in American theatre across the board or we will surely fail future generations of storytellers to come.”

Leaders within the field of intimacy direction partnered with Dunn and James in the investigation of equity within the field, and by working to expand the definitions of intimacy beyond performances that simulate romantic or sexual encounters and physical touch. Kaja Dunn has developed curriculum for “Foundations in Race, Intimacy and Consent” workshops in partnership with Theatrical Intimacy Education (TIE). These workshops are infused with critical race theory and facilitated separately for white practitioners and Global Majority artists (Theatrical Intimacy Education 2020) to create more welcoming environments for those who feel uncomfortable being led by white practitioners who do not share their lived experiences (James 2020). Theatrical Intimacy Education has also expanded the definitions of intimacy

used by the organization's faculty in scholarship, artistry, and in trainings for future intimacy specialists, illustrating a praxis of interrogating previous practices and working towards more equitable practices within the field of intimacy choreography. This definition includes the variety of vulnerabilities that emerge when participants' (performers, directors, etc.) identities coalesce in a space, creating unequal power dynamics in the working process or in the performance. TIE founders Chelsea Pace and Laura Rikard collaborated with Ann James—who is not only the founder of IDOC, but also a specialist in Afrocentric Intimacy Direction—and Actors' Equity Association Diversity & Inclusion Strategist Bliss Griffin to redefine the role of an intimacy choreographer. The new definition states that "Intimacy choreographers are responsible for consensual crafting and staging of stories with content of sexual nature or that leverages race, disability, religion, or age with appropriate cultural context and competency. They are required to consult on scenes with otherwise loaded, heightened, or charged content that draws on the actor's identity" (Griffin et al. 2020). James, Griffin, Pace, and Rikard use the critical conjunction *or* to indicate that sexual content is not the only form of intimacy performed onstage; they further indicate that intimacy choreographers are required for assistance in de-loading the working environments and rehearsal spaces in which participants often engage with quite loaded content, assisting performers in separating their senses of self from the performance and character that they are crafting to mitigate harm.

Artists and scholars have sought to broaden the theories and research fueling the evolution of intimacy specializations in many other directions, as well. Perhaps the broadest collection of writing on this expansion thus far is found in the Fall 2019 special section of *The Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* edited by Dr. Joy Brooke Fairfield. This collection includes four articles following "Intimacy Choreography and Cultural Change: An Interview With Leaders in the Field," a conversation between Dr. Fairfield herself and individuals whose names should sound familiar; Tonia Sina, Laura Rikard, and Kaja Dunn. The interview covers topics ranging from the history of *intimate* as a term to the artists' individual experiences, power imbalances created by the lived experiences of performers, and the

difficulty of naming and correcting faults in the practices that the performance industry has inherited (Fairfield et al. 2019).

Suzanne Shawyer and Kim Shively's (2019) article titled "Education in Theatrical Intimacy as Ethical Practice for University Theatre" follows the above interview. This article bridges theory and practice while arguing that because power hierarchies in the theatre industry and in higher education make establishing boundaries difficult for students, theatre programs in higher education are ethically obligated to acknowledge and prepare students to protect themselves within these hierarchies. Shawyer and Shively add that "[s]tructures of power and privilege may also intersect with students' trauma experiences; therefore common sense demands that theatre training programs should also be mindful of students' emotional health and safety" (90) before engaging with published theories of ethics and performance and reflecting upon the impacts of consent-based practices implemented at Elon University. The article provides a strong argument for moving towards more ethical practices in actor training, as well as providing concrete examples of how this can be done within the realm of higher education, for those who may be anxious about doing so. Laying out a path towards change inclusive of answers to *why* and *how* questions that might arise along the way, and examining the results of these changes at Elon University, Shawyer and Shively's article provides the guidance and assurance that programs eyeing consent-based practices, but uncertain how to employ them, seek.

"Staging Cruelty through Consent: *Sycorax* in Kansas," co-authored by Jane Barnette, Alysha Griffin, and Timmia Hearn-Feldman, follows. This article engages with Antonin Artaud's concepts of *theatre of cruelty* as the authors discuss consent, cultural appropriation, and trigger warnings in a production of *Sycorax*. The authors—the show's director, an actor, and an audience member—discuss consent through a decolonial lens and their own, individual, perceptions of the successes and failures of this specific production and the practices used. Griffin, the lead actor in the production, indicates that she was dissatisfied with the adaptation of the script, which she states "contains moments of cultural irreverence that parallel the

recurring sexual violence against black, brown, and female bodies” (Barnette et al. 2019, 109). While she appreciated the director’s use of consent in staging the violence onstage, she “yearned for an acknowledgement of the cultural and emotional invasions we made as artists which cannot be isolated from collective histories of intimate violence” (109), illustrating from a student’s perspective the needs for intimacy choreography that is culturally informed and competently approached. However, the actor and director discuss the consent-based practices used in staging violence within this production, agreeing that the use of stylized, contact-free movements both supported the storytelling and the performers’ boundaries, creating a consent-based performance that supported the actors while creating the desired unease within the audience. Hearn-Feldman, an audience member in attendance at this production, adds that this stylized movement and use of breath left them feeling “triumphant” due to the production’s combined use of trigger warnings and trauma-informed staging, which resulted in a performance that Hearn-Feldman calls “emotional and intense” but which “didn’t hurt to watch. It wasn’t traumatizing” (117).

Kari Barclay’s (2019) article titled “Willful Actors: Valuing Resistance in American Actor Training” moves from the performance-as-research methodologies employed in the co-authored articles of this special section to a historical account of actor training in the United States. Dr. Barclay recounts historical examples of the ways that directors and acting instructors have enacted power over their acting students, focusing primarily upon Sanford Meisner—who openly and publicly groped femme students on camera—Lee Strasberg—whose verbal attacks and emotional manipulations coached female performers towards “sexual and emotional availability” (123)—and other teachers of Stanislavski’s System and Method Acting in the United States. Barclay examines performance training in the context of “a specific conception of masculinity” ingrained in U.S. culture (130), which pressured performers to enact cishetero misogynistic scripts both in performance and in their offstage lives, in pursuit of the director’s vision of verisimilitude. Barclay then explores sites of resistance within such patriarchal acting training programs through the lens of Sara Ahmed’s *Willful Subjects*,

celebrating the resistance of these individuals as establishing precursors to the practices intimacy directors use today:

Willful actors like Olga Knipper of the Moscow Art Theatre, José of Sanford Meisner's master class, and Stella Adler of the Group Theatre might be precursors to today's intimacy directing movement. Articulating their noes in the face of training that attempted to direct their desires, they resemble the contemporary artists who denounce sexual exploitation and create opportunities for their colleagues to articulate boundaries in the rehearsal room. (137)

In "Willful Actors," Barclay brings intimacy direction into direct conversation with the Stanislavskian System and Method Acting, rebutting those who might disdain the practice of intimacy direction as a new invention that has no place among more established performance practices.

Closing out the edited section, Stefanie A. Jones's (2019) "An Intimacy Choreography for Sexual Justice: Considering Racism and Ableism as Forms of Sexual Violence" engages with activism and organizations that work toward reproductive justice in the broader U.S. culture to frame their interrogation of the foundations of the field of intimacy choreography and intimacy coordination. Jones introduces the theoretical standpoint of the "five circles model of holistic human sexuality" (143) into the conversation of staged intimacy, clearly summarizing theories of the complexity of human sexuality and the way that the elements of a holistic sexuality—including personal and cultural identity—can be used either consensually or nonconsensually, to manipulate. Jones uses this theoretical framework to comment upon the ways that actors' lived identities have historically been manipulated in narrative, in performance, and in broader U.S. society. Jones provides concrete examples and analysis from both dramatic literature and performance history, supporting their argument tying exclusionary racist and ableist practices to definitions of sexual violence. Jones issues a direct, eloquent, and well-supported invitation for intimacy specialists in the field of performance. Jones "encourage[s] us to richly imagine the art we could make with consideration of these specified forms of sexual violence: theatre that heals instead of injures or sickens; theatre that leads rather than limits our collective social movement toward and exploration of sexual

justice” (158), ending the special section by imploring us, as artists and educators of performed intimacy, to continue our educations, to challenge our own biases, and to purposefully craft artistic praxes that engage with sexual justice and disability justice in broadening our work.

Adding to the published scholarship noted above, recent dissertations have analyzed performance practices surrounding intimacy, including but not limited to the following:

Jessica Steinrock’s 2020 dissertation project at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, “Intimacy Direction: A New Role in Contemporary Theatre Making,” presents an overview and analysis of the emergence of intimacy direction as a theatrical practice. Steinrock’s dissertation examines the impacts of consent workshops on rehearsal processes and advocates for the further formalization of this role, while warning intimacy specialists of potential pitfalls we may face en route to full recognition of this specialization as a formalized field. Steinrock, CEO of Intimacy Directors and Coordinators, warns intimacy directors against secrecy that creates “information power” (148), for example, and more broadly states that “the specialization of intimacy direction invites continued critical analysis and exploration of sustainable techniques for the production of intimate storytelling” (204).

Kari Barclay’s 2021 dissertation at Stanford University, titled “Directing Desire: Intimacy Directing, Consent, and Simulated Sexuality on the Contemporary U.S. Stage,” analyzes the role of consent in historical directing practices, suggesting ways that directors and theater companies can use symbolic, choral choreography and trauma-informed practices to create performances that are not only more inclusive of multiple sexualities and postcolonial practices, but more accessible for performers and audience members alike. Throughout this dissertation, Barclay analyzes the impacts of working environment, cultural scripts, choreography, desire, and consent on performances and performers. Barclay notes: “since artists choreograph scenes with a variety of colleagues, it is not necessary to take intimacy *personally*. In a model of erotic repetitions, desire is not an individual possession but a collaborative creation” (194), calling upon intimacy specialists to build a “sexual commons”

(187) in which all collaborators negotiate with agency, determining—together—how to shape and perform stories of intimacy.

Amanda Rose Villarreal's 2021 "Unscripted Intimacies: Negotiating Consent in Gamified Performance" dissertation project at University of Colorado Boulder brings immersive performance and live-action roleplay into conversation with game design and intimacy direction. Villarreal analyzes extant practices that establish and erase consent within immersive spaces and theorizes practices to imbue unscripted theatrical interactions with consent, offering the use of game design to plan immersive experiences that texture both performers' and audiences' experiences with consent. Villarreal defines balanced consent mechanics as those that are multi-faceted and designed for both audience-participants and for performers, disallowing "agentic asymmetry" (54) and instead inviting all individuals in the performance to negotiate consent during unscripted interactions.

### Looking Forward to Further Evolution

This literature review is but a launching pad. It is up to us as a field of artists, educators, advocates, and researchers to expand our collective understanding and to credit those who have come before as well as those who are informing our practices now.

Forthcoming writings will continue to fuel the evolution of our field. These include an upcoming book on intimacy practice, in production with Nick Hern Books, by Yarit Dor—UK-based founder of Moving Body Arts LTD and co-founder of INTIMASK who has pioneered the development of modesty garments—and an upcoming chapter about Black women, intimacy, and emotional sustainability in the Stanislavski System by Ann James—founder of Intimacy Coordinators of Color. Expanding her work with Theatrical Intimacy Education and providing concrete tools for educators seeking to use consent-based practices in acting classrooms, Laura Rikard's *Consent in the Acting Classroom: Poeticizing the Uncomfortable* is forthcoming from Routledge, expected later this year (2022). Adding a practice-based lens to the theories Villarreal's dissertation presents, their forthcoming chapter in *Experiential Theatres* (edited



by Will Lewis, Sean Bartley, and Valerie Clayman Pye) “Intimacy in Play: Training Actors for Agentic Symmetry in Unscripted Interactions” proposes a framework for training actors for consent-based practices within immersive performance. As our field grows and formalizes, we hope to see more dissertations, theorizing, and analysis of practice related to consent-based work in performance that will add to our collective understanding and practice.

The *Journal of Consent-Based Practice* offers a place for artists, educators, researchers, and practitioners to gather and share our collective knowledge, fueling further evolution of our field. The writing that already exists indicates that there’s quite a bit more to the role of a qualified intimacy specialist than, as indicated in Mikey Day and Pete Davidson’s *SNL* performance, “a zoom class.” Great amounts of research and theory have combined with a vast history of practice undocumented in this literature review to move the field of intimacy specialists in performance to where it is today, as of this publication. And we look forward to further developments in the research, theory, and use of consent-based practices both in pedagogy and in performance.

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