

SDC & Intimacy Choreography

As theatre artists and organizations encounter a changing discourse around staging sexual content and intimate moments, initiatives that provide awareness of the issues and positively shift our language and practices are essential in creating a safer and more empowered industry. We believe it is a part of SDC's job to educate our Members on why the field of intimacy choreography has emerged and provide resources for building higher sensitivity and awareness around what is needed to ensure a context of consent in all rehearsal rooms. SDC recognizes that every project will need different resources and every director builds a rehearsal room in their own way.

Our approach, which will roll out over the next few months, is one of in-depth education that provides many paths and possibilities to staging intimacy versus mandating or endorsing a singular policy. That is not our place. But we do want to give directors and choreographers the tools for successfully grappling with intimacy onstage in our current 'me too' world and in doing so begin to set some best practices and standards. We deeply respect each individual Member's unique approach to their craft, and we sincerely appreciate the emergence of intimacy choreography and support all artists to work purposefully and intentionally when it comes to issues of consent and sexual safety onstage, whether that be with an intimacy choreographer or not.

To provide a wealth of information and resources to our Members, we will be creating an online and offline library where directors encountering sexual content or looking for guidance around intimacy staging may go. If you stage your own intimacy, SDC will offer you access to helpful language to assist you in creating the context for artists to speak up and actively set boundaries. If you want to learn more directly about the work of intimacy professionals, we will have information about what the field is, how it can help you, and where you can learn more. SDC will continue to provide our Members with resources for getting to know the community of intimacy choreographers and how to begin a collaborative dialogue with them. And finally, we will develop resources to help Members navigate and negotiate the addition of an intimacy choreographer onto the collaborative team, whether requested by you, your employer, or an actor. Everyone needs access to all the tools, even if they use them differently.

Intimacy Choreography, A Vital & Emerging Field

In 2006, the field of intimacy choreography emerged primarily out of academic institutions as a training tool and research field for stage artists. This scholarly work then evolved into organizations outside the higher education field, which offer tools, education, consulting, and comprehensive resources for staging theatrical intimacy. The two primary organizations who offer training and who choreograph intimacy are Intimacy Directors International (IDI) and Theatrical Intimacy Education (TIE). In collaboration with specific intimacy choreography organizations, Society of American Fight Directors (SAFD) trains their

choreographers in staging sexual violence. Many of these seasoned and trusted fight directors are now crossing over into intimacy choreography.

At the core of intimacy choreography is the use of a more formalized vocabulary and practice for staging intimacy or scenes of a sexual nature. The protocols of intimacy choreography give performers a common vocabulary that allows them to communicate with each other about the work they are doing and to define boundaries. There is a practice, a codified set of guidelines, that makes the process less intimidating and gives artists more agency in their own work.

Intimacy choreographers are experts in conversations of power and consent in any space where sexual content is being rehearsed. They aim to create cultures where artists are empowered to tell the clearest story possible without violating their own personal boundaries. And they ensure that throughout a run, the actors are continuing to have an open dialogue about the sexual staging, renewing consent and opening conversations to address the live and ever-changing nature of the theatre.

Techniques used by intimacy choreographers include: teaching languages of initial consent and renewal of consent, contact improvisation, checking in and out (making a ritual of intimacy, so actors have a mental separation of the work from their daily lives), and initiating channels for actors to communicate openly through the process about their experience. All of these tools give artists more agency to only agree to situations they feel physically and emotionally safe engaging in while continuing to respect the creative team and their process of telling a specific and compelling story.

With increased public awareness and discourse on sexual harassment and consent, many theatres, universities, and leaders in our field have felt a need to respond directly. Our field is addressing a critical need to improve the working conditions of our industry, and SDC is taking action as well.

Where We Stand

SDC believes that each director should have the freedom to tell the story they want to tell in the way they want to tell it. And we recognize a growing need in our industry to dismantle abusive power structures and respond to a tremendous outpouring of concern about how, on and off stage, we engage appropriately with one another. We look forward to leading the discourse around intimacy direction and providing vital resources for directors to uphold ethical practices and accomplish their best work.

With more resources to stage intimacy, we hope to give directors concrete tools to set-up systems in the rehearsal room and beyond. When actors are unified by a director around a specific language of consent, they are less likely to take actions that will put their fellow actors at risk. This shared awareness and work will ensure that stage intimacy continues to be consensual, even when directors have left the run.

"Uncomfortable" is not "unsafe." SDC's goal is to provide resources for safety. We understand that art can and often must be emotionally and physically challenging. We encourage our directors to make their most daring and rigorous work. And we believe that

exciting and influential art can and should be done in spaces where consent and boundaries are firmly understood. With our comprehensive resources, our repository of points of view and research, we aim to give every director the support they need to build more awareness around issues of intimacy and create their own culture of open dialogue and consent.

While our comprehensive library is coming soon, [CLICK HERE](#) for immediate information about intimacy choreography and to share with us your experiences and needs on this topic. We look forward to being in dialogue with you, our Members and leaders of the theatre community, about this vital and ongoing issue.