

# How Hollywood GOT EVEN SEXIER

We spoke to a top 'intimacy co-ordinator' to find out what goes into the screen's most memorable sex scenes

When the most recent season of *Bridgerton* landed, it wasn't only the romantic storylines and regency outfits that had the British public racing to press play. Known for its saucier scenes, the series isn't afraid to bare all – literally. From romps against trees to carriage antics, fans were thrilled to see the sexy times well and truly back – with Penelope Featherington and Colin Bridgerton falling in love (and having plenty of fun along the way). Perhaps not all too surprisingly, the show soon rocketed to number one on Netflix.

But behind every great sex scene is a host of individual elements that have contributed to your steamy viewing pleasure:

talented actors, a great script and, perhaps most importantly, an intimacy co-ordinator. Polin's love story (including *that* chaise longue scene) wouldn't have been possible without the help of intimacy co-ordinator Lizzy Talbot. And *Bridgerton* isn't alone in its choice. From *Sex Education* to *Normal People*, plenty of hit TV shows employ intimacy co-ordinators among the regular roster of talent.

*heat* spoke to intimacy co-ordinator Brooke M Haney to get the lowdown on what actually goes into creating some of TV's most raunchiest scenes...

## WHAT IS INTIMACY CO-ORDINATION?

One of the first 50 intimacy co-ordinators to be recognised by SAG/

AFTRA, Brooke Haney is no stranger when it comes to choreographing sex. Having worked on shows including *Harlem* and *Mayor Of Kingstown*, Brooke's career has spanned both TV, film, and stage. In their most recent venture, Brooke wrote a book called *The Intimacy Co-ordinator's Guidebook*, outlining guidance for other intimacy co-ordinators.

But while Brooke's been working as an intimacy co-ordinator for years, the industry-wide acceptance of their role is a more recent move. "For film and TV, the Me Too movement was the turning point for sure," Brooke says. "Why it was so hard, I don't understand. We have a storyteller for everything in films, for fights and lighting, so





Simone (Kate) and Jonathan (Anthony) share a Bridger-tongue sandwich



Sharon and Michael used their Basic Instincts



And they call this work...



Isabela and Quinn took things to the next level in Harlem



Regé-Jean Page (Simon) and Phoebe (Daphne) dialled it up to 11!



April (Michelle) said no thanks to skin on Skins



Jen-An got her hands on Hamm for The Morning Show

why not for touch?"

But what exactly is an intimacy co-ordinator? Put simply, the role involves someone who shapes those most intimate moments, helping actors set boundaries for creating scenes depicting sex, from a brief touch to a tussle in the sheets.

"Queer intimacy is my speciality," Brooke tells us. "And, I do think queer intimacy is different. It's as simple as sometimes taking parallel lines and making them

perpendicular. When we think of sex, we think of a man and woman mostly, and we often think of that as intercourse. But when you're working with queer intimacy, that world opens up – hands, toys, positions. There's a vastness to it."

## IS THAT OK?

When fans streamed *Bridgerton* season three, many were quick to praise the show's portrayal of consent – with one dubbing Penelope and Colin's sweet-but-steamy rendezvous "the most beautiful of all *Bridgerton* sex scenes". Throughout the whole scene, Luke Newton's Colin continuously checks in with Nicola Coughlan's

Penelope. If we needed any more proof that consent is sexy, this is it. "We are seeing more realistic representations of sex on our screens," says Brooke, "and people want to see more. We get so much of our education from media, whether it's

TikTok, news articles, or TV. People want to know what their options are without having to go and ask their parents or friends. You could be 30 years old and questioning your current love life, or lack of, and want some ideas."

## SLIGHT OF HAND

Of course, filming a great sex scene involves far more than giving it your best shot. Much like any other scene, there's plenty of rehearsals to be done. "It can be

awkward for some folks, because it's a weird thing to do at work," Brooke ponders. "But it often ends up being very technical. Intimacy co-ordination becomes like a stunt. If we're doing something where someone is shown falling off a cliff, we don't

show the pads and everything they land on. This is similar." When filming sex scenes in *Normal People*, Paul Mescal and Daisy Edgar-Jones revealed they were slathered in Egyptian Magic Skin Cream to replicate sweat, while Olivia Colman revealed how a carefully positioned "big, wet sponge" helped lighten the mood during a sex scene with Emma

Stone in *The Favourite*. "I bring a lot of fun to the work that I do when that's what people want, because it's just ridiculous and silly," laughs Brooke. "If I'm doing a comedy and we're trying to get the bounce, I might just have a character sitting on a ball and bouncing up and down. There's no need to make them do squats! "So much of the scene is slight of hand. It could be a ball between two actors, or there

might not even be a second actor there, as all we really need to see is someone's face. Sometimes I'll use a clothing tagger and tag the bedsheets to an undergarment, so the actor can roll around and the sheet will go with them. There's all these tricks the cameras can't see."

While there are plenty of great sex scenes floating around – for Brooke, *I May Destroy You* and *Booksmart* spring to mind – there's plenty of shitty ones, too. When asked about some less favourable on-screen smooches,

Brooke says, "Any sitcom from the '80s. You can tell that the kiss is always just whichever character has the courage to do it. There's no storytelling happening, but they give me a giggle."

## PUSHBACKS

Sam Heughan, who stars as hunky Scotsman Jamie Fraser in *Outlander*, made employing an intimacy co-ordinator one of his first moves when becoming a producer in 2019. He'd previously been open about his own experience on the hit

series – including one sexual assault scene with co-star Tobias Menzies, in which he branded the nudity "unnecessary". Likewise, many of the stars of hit Channel 4 drama *Skins* have reflected on the now-controversial show. April Pearson, who starred as Michelle, previously revealed that she felt "too young" as a teenager to be shooting certain scenes, saying, "There's a difference between being officially old enough and mentally old enough. I feel like I wasn't protected."

But not everyone sees intimacy co-ordination as a welcome change. Jennifer Aniston once revealed she turned down an intimacy co-ordinator on the set of *The Morning Show*, while *Game Of Thrones*' Sean Bean argued an intimacy co-ordinator would "spoil the spontaneity" of sex scenes. And while Michael Douglas is known for starring in some of the most thrilling (and erotic) films ever made, the *Basic Instinct* actor isn't a fan, saying intimacy co-ordinators "take control away from filmmakers". "I feel for actors who

aren't having a positive experience," Brooke says. "I think a lot of actors who haven't worked with us yet don't understand the art of it. I can be a wallflower. My job isn't to take over in any way, but to blend in and support."

If one thing's clear it's that intimacy co-ordination isn't going anywhere. We love on-screen sex in every which way it comes – especially when it's consensual and safe. ■

Brooke's book, *The Intimacy Coordinator's Guidebook: Specialties For Stage And Screen*, is available to buy now



I prefer to go with the flow