



Entertainment

Why are women so into the man-on-man romance in Heated Rivalry?

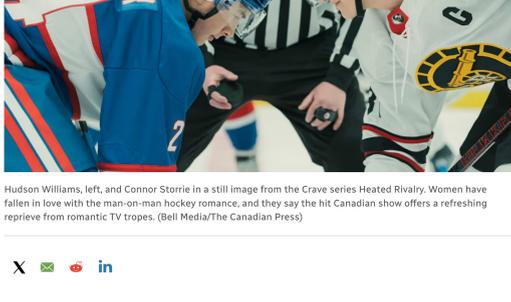
Some say the hockey drama brings a type of romance that's lacking in other shows

Kevin Maimann · CBC News · Posted: Dec 18, 2025 4:00 AM EST | Last Updated: 10 hours ago



Hudson Williams, left, and Connor Storrie in a still image from the Crave series Heated Rivalry. Women have fallen in love with the man-on-man hockey romance, and they say the hit Canadian show offers a refreshing reprieve from romantic TV tropes. (Bell Media/The Canadian Press)

Listen to this article Estimated 5 minutes



Connor Storrie as fictional hockey pro Ilya Grigoryevich Rozanov, left, and Hudson Williams as Shane Hollander. The two play rivals on the show. (Bell Media/The Canadian Press)

Williams plays fictional Canadian pro hockey star Shane Hollander, the on-ice rival of Storrie's Russian character, Ilya Grigoryevich Rozanov. Away from the hounding of the sports press, the two develop a secret — and complicated — sexual relationship.

The show, which premiered on Crave on Nov. 28, became a surprise smash hit and has already secured a second season. It is Crave's biggest-ever first-week debut for an original series, and it's already among the top scripted debuts this year on American streaming giant HBO Max.

In addition to its provocative premise and spicy scenes, some women say the show depicts a messy but endearing romance that's hard to turn away from.

Women 'sick of' hetero tropes

Singh says even though *Heated Rivalry* doesn't exactly cater to women, the romance between the two hockey stars has elements often missing from heterosexual relationships on screen.

Naming *Euphoria* and *Game of Thrones* as examples, she says women can be portrayed overtly through the male gaze in sex scenes, degraded and "almost viewed like an object."

"I think a lot of women are kind of sick of seeing that on screen," Singh said.

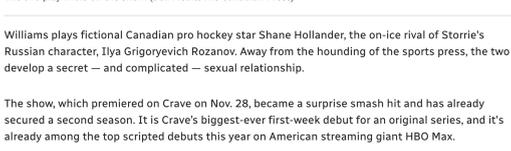
She says watching sex scenes between men can feel more "safe," in the sense that she doesn't see herself in them.

- [Heated Rivalry is getting a 2nd season on Crave](#)
- [Q WITH TOM POWER Heated Rivalry is a 'joyfully smutty' gay hockey romance — but it's also about love](#)

Another factor that's come up in conversations with friends, she says, is the equality in the relationship on display.

"Just this idea of seeing two people on screen both going into this relationship and getting what they want equally from it, I think that's something that often feels like it's missing from what you see on screen when it comes to heterosexual relationships and intimacy," she said.

Singh says the story has also done a good job of hitting other tropes many women look for in romantic fiction, like yearning, tenderness and suspense — "the will-they, won't-they, and that longing."



Pop culture critic Katherine Singh says some women are 'sick' of the way many popular shows portray sex scenes. (Submitted by Katherine Singh)

Carol Chung, a *Heated Rivalry* fan in Toronto, says she first heard of the show on the platform Tumblr and wasn't interested, as she generally finds the romance genre "pretty corny."

But as she saw more and more people — "mostly women and queer folks" — posting about it online, she decided to check it out.

Chung says she was personally pulled in by the "fantastic chemistry" between Hudson and Storrie, and has since come to appreciate the discourse as the show's online fandom explodes, saying it created a "weird sense of community."

WATCH | Heated Rivalry soars as 2SLGBTQ+ roles decrease:



Heated Rivalry, a steamy romance series featuring a relationship between two male professional hockey players, premieres on Crave and HBO Max on Friday, as U.S. advocacy group GLAAD says about 200 LGBTQ+ characters won't be returning to screens next year, about 40 per cent of all current roles.

"Conventional romance, especially male-female romance, is very fluffy, soft. There's like an instant meet-cute, they fall in love right away," said Chung, who is asexual. "It's all sunshine and rainbows, which is what I find off-putting about the romance genre."

With the exception of Episode 3 — her least favourite — Chung says the *Heated Rivalry* romance bucks those played-out trends.

"I like the messiness of the main relationship," she said. "These are two emotionally stunted young men who can't communicate to save their damn lives, and it's causing all sorts of friction and misunderstandings between them."

'Enemies to lovers'

Heated Rivalry's success comes alongside an explosion in popularity of books in the broader hockey romance genre. The book that gave the show its name — the second in Reid's *Game Changers* series — is [No. 1 on Amazon's Best Sellers in Literature and Fiction](#) list.

Jamie Ryan, who wrote a thesis at Queen's University on women's hockey literature, says lesbian romance has been more common in the genre, but queer male storylines in hockey romance have been gaining popularity for years in small yet dedicated online communities.

Ryan says the genre is a natural fit for "enemies to lovers" storylines, and the idea of forbidden love and the shirking of "hypermasculinity" add to the appeal.



Jamie Ryan, who wrote a thesis on women's hockey literature at Queen's University, says queer romances can show "a softer masculinity." (Submitted by Jamie Ryan)

Ryan says he can understand why a show like *Heated Rivalry* would appeal to female viewers.

"Oftentimes romances are fantasies — at a lower, sort of underlying level — about a man disengaging from patriarchy and siding with a woman or siding with the love interest," Ryan said.

"That's one of the reasons I often like queer romances, because it does oftentimes envision a softer masculinity or a sort of softer way of relating to one another ... that is not always available in everyday life for women who watch these shows."

Episode 5 of *Heated Rivalry* drops Friday, and the finale is set to follow on Boxing Day.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



[Kevin Maimann](#)
Digital Writer

Kevin Maimann is a senior writer for CBC News based in Edmonton. He has covered a wide range of topics for publications including VICE, the Toronto Star, Xtra Magazine and the Edmonton Journal. You can reach Kevin by email at kevin.maimann@cbc.ca.

[CBC's Journalistic Standards and Practices](#) · [About CBC News](#)

[Corrections and clarifications](#) · [Submit a news tip](#) · [Report error](#)

RELATED STORIES

- [Why steamy hockey romance books are having a breakout moment](#)

TRENDING VIDEOS

--	--	--	--	--

The National The National The National The National Business | Peter Armstrong

DISCOVER MORE FROM CBC

--	--	--	--	--

The National The Passionate Eye Radio - Ideas Radio - Tapestry Business | Peter Armstrong

--	--	--	--	--

Dana Masamra Katie Simpson Annabelle Olivier Doug Harrison Sports - Olympics - Summer Sports - Athletics - Track Life - Holiday | World Books Canada - Montreal |