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The Intricacies of Intimacy Coordination on TV's Hottest Show 'Heated Rivalry'

Chala Hunter, the intimacy coordinator for 'Heated Rivalry', dips into the logistics of bringing some of the show's sexiest scenes to life and responds to those Jordan Fortunan comments: "Everyone has their own experience of what is and isn't authentic."

BY MIKAELA FELL | DECEMBER 23, 2025 7:00AM

Connor Storrie (left) and Hudson Williams (right) in episode four of 'Heated Rivalry'

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Filming an intimate scene is never as spontaneous as it looks. There's choreography, negotiation and planning involved — especially on a show like *Heated Rivalry*, where sex isn't just an incention but one of the primary ways the story gets told.

Based on Rachel Reid's bestselling novel and one of TV's biggest surprise hits of the year, the steamy queer hockey drama follows the long, sometimes fraught, frequently passionate relationship between Shane Hollander (Hudson Williams) and Ilya Rozanov (Connor Storrie) — a story that's full much. They lock and they vent, and that's kind of what they do. *Creative Jacob Tierney told The Hollywood Reporter.*

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Which meant that, from the outset, *Heated Rivalry* had to get its intimacy right — and to do it sensitively, but emotionally and literally. The person entrusted with that responsibility was intimacy coordinator Chala Hunter, whose job was to help translate the series' often explicit scripts into scenes that felt grounded, consensual and dramatically truthful.

"I approach every scene with the same goal of ensuring that everyone is consenting to what they're doing and that we're all on the same page about the action that's going to occur," Hunter says.

Below, Hunter discusses how working on a queer storyline shaped her approach, her collaboration with Tierney, Williams and Storrie, and how she helps actors feel comfortable on set.

What are your introductory conversations with the actors like? Especially in a show like *Heated Rivalry*, where sex is part of the language they're using to tell the story.

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My whole intention is to ensure that any action that's going to take place on the day of filming has been fully consented to by all of the involved parties (and) then everyone else — this includes the crew — knows what is going to be taking place so we're all on the same page. The consent piece is obviously essential. I literally take the material and I go, "Okay, what are the intimacy moments that involve some intimacy or hyper-exposure — (and) flag that as a breakdown, then I bring that content to the performer and get a sense of their boundaries and consent levels.

That means having a conversation about the scripted action that allows them to feel that it is allowed to exist for them, that they're comfortable with it. I'm comfortable with this, I'm comfortable with this. Or, "I'm comfortable with this scripted action as long as A, B, C, D occurs." (The conversation) are very detailed. It requires a lot of listening on my part, not just active listening but a kind of deep empathic listening. Sensing if someone is maybe not completely saying what they mean, and then I try to ask more questions to really flesh it out to make sure that if they're consenting to something, they're doing that confidently. Not because it feels coercive or because they feel pressured or because they feel like they're supposed to say yes.

Sex and intimacy are foundational to *Heated Rivalry*, especially early on. How did that shape your collaboration with Jacob Tierney, and with Hudson Williams and Connor Storrie?

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What I meant for my practitioners was knowing the scripts inside and out. I read them many many times. I do a complete breakdown of them in this giant spreadsheet system that I have, so I felt like I had a really good internal tracking system of the narrative arc that plays out through the intimacy in this landscape.

I'm lucky to have worked with Jacob in the past. He knows each other (and) have a great collaboration. It's always trying to respect the director's process and space and the actors, but I felt quite comfortable being like, "Do you think that the way that we have set it playing, the way that this intimacy is playing at the moment makes sense given where we are in the story?" Or making subtle tweaks and offers. "I wonder if emotionally it should be a bit more like this. What do you think? Do you want to try one like that?" That type of thing.

When I'm on set, I'm looking at the monitors, but I'm literally listening with my whole body — sensing what's happening for them, getting a read on whether it's telling the story right, keeping an eye on all the technical things simultaneously. I definitely brought that to my work, my (work) with Jacob and also to my collaboration with Hudson and Connor. Luckily, we all get along really well, so that was a very pleasurable kind of back-and-forth.

In telling queer stories, are you, as the intimacy coordinator, looking out for different things than you would if it was a heterosexual couple? Are there different considerations?

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Content plays such a big part in (this role). The content within the story but additionally the content that the actors are being, which includes all kinds of things regarding their identities, the space that work is. The time of year it is, what's happening culturally and socially at that moment. Context, content, context.

I was considering if the whole time is a holistic way thinking about how those characters identities and their lived experiences influences some of the (physical) actions that we're portraying but also how it influences the emotional and the psychological landscape. I try to not make assumptions whether I'm dealing with a heterosexual story or a queer story or a story that involves people anywhere on the gender spectrum or who have any sort of sexual orientation. I try to not make assumptions, do as much research as possible, and then genuinely look to the actor to lead it and respond to relationship to that.

There's been comments made, I'm sure you've seen them, that this isn't what gay sex looks like. How do you respond to that?

Everyone has their own experience of what is and isn't authentic. It's not for me to tell anyone what is or isn't authentic for them. everyone has their own subjective experience of being in the world and certainly of what feels authentic to them. Intimacy is even more heightened, (and) it's a very individual, specific experience.

These scenes put actors in vulnerable positions. How are you making them feel more comfortable?

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I try to bring a very grounded, direct, calm energetic set. I set that tone when I come in and I maintain that throughout. I try to be very adaptive to establish trust with them. It does know that I'm there to make sure that I'm there to support them and ensure that anything that's occurring in the filming of this intimate content they're consented to.

I feel like my approach is (coming from a) direct, grounded (and) real place. I have felt that takes the curse off of it. (I'm) just raising things that I feel are important to consider. I'm not there to make judgments or to hold up to ask questions, to actually feel responsible (and) to just ask for what they need or vocalize what's going on for them. I feel (I can) use it with openness, relaxation and directness that really (helps) actors to feel agency and a level of comfort. Even if they are feeling a bit awkward or nervous. It's a vulnerable thing to do.

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Connor and Hudson have to build their own repertoire with one another as characters and actors. As we're discussed, the intimate scenes play a big part in the story. How are you helping in build that relationship to feel comfortable in that sense.

Connor and Hudson are both so talented and so wonderful and so popular that they really built a lot of that themselves with Jacob. When it came to intimate moments, we would all kind of catch up with each other. I felt it happened very organically in this case, honestly, that it was like it's kind of the dream artistic collaboration.

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