

Why "Heated Rivalry" Is a Girl's Best Friend

It's not *only* about the sex.

By Lisa Ferri

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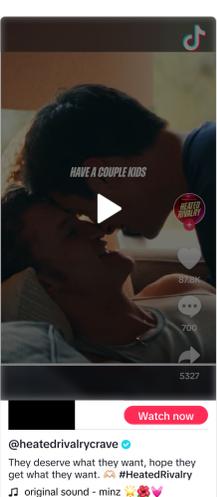
Convincing my friend Katie Couric to binge a horny gay hockey show was not on my 2026 bingo card. But here we are. Ever since watching (and re-watching) HBO's *Heated Rivalry*, I've been preaching the gospel of Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander to anyone who'll listen. And I'm not alone. *Heated Rivalry* has a chokehold on our collective consciousness. Especially women. Even women like me — straight, who've never read a romance novel, and who couldn't tell hockey from water polo. Every casual conversation, every text thread, every phone call, every algorithm: *Heated Rivalry* has taken over.

Call it what you will. Infatuation. Curiosity. Activated like some kind of smutty sleeper cell. The women of the world have gone feral for two fictional gay hockey stars. And I'm here for it. Maybe we needed this alternate universe at a safe distance from an onslaught of depressing headlines. Maybe we manifested it. (I don't know who put this super specific entanglement on their vision board, but thank you.)

Maybe it's the appeal of a Cinderella story. And as Cinderella stories go, you can't beat Connor Storrie and Hudson Williams, two unknown actors who catapulted from obscurity to triggering Beatlemania-level hysteria in a matter of weeks. To quote Storrie during the 32nd Annual Actor Award nominations, "Eight months ago, I was waiting tables. Now instead of reading specials, I'm reading nominations." And if their appearance (accompanied by UFC-level security guards because of their popularity) on last night's Golden Globes showed us anything, it's that the *Heated Rivalry* boys are now at the center of a feeding frenzy by the same Hollywood elites who never would have cast them in the first place.

You can't make it up.

And the fever's only spreading. There are giddy watch parties from Miami to Manila, Ph.D.-level discourse on Ilya and Shane's attachment styles, too many steamy TikTok edits of our Romeos to count. And remember, large swaths of Europe and Latin America are still breathlessly counting the days until *Heated Rivalry* becomes available in their neck of the woods. In other words: Buckle up.



And sure, watching Storrie and Williams get the Hollywood ending they so richly deserve is thrilling, but it doesn't entirely explain why we've all fallen under this *Heated Rivalry* spell. Why this love story? Why now? And why so many women?

Cynics would say it's about the sex. That would be an oversimplification. I mean, of course, it's about the sex. (And Ilya's butt, which deservedly spawned its own online fandom.) But it's not just about the sex.

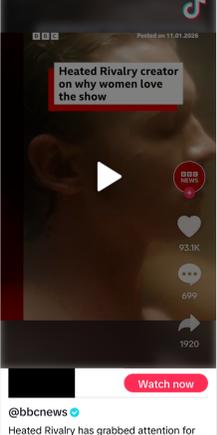
It's also about the yearning — carnal and otherwise. It's about the deeply human desire to know another person and be known — a risky proposition on a good day, no less these days. And it's about the romance. Not cotton candy, sugar high, rom-com. Actual romance. To paraphrase the show's creator and director Jacob Tierney, inherent misogyny in the industry means Hollywood hasn't been particularly interested in producing things that interest women. And women are interested in romance. Period.

Enter *Heated Rivalry*.



Against the backdrop of non-stop naval gazing about masculinity and the bogeyman that is the Male Loneliness Crisis, *Heated Rivalry* does something radical. It dares to depict — as author [Liz Plank](#) so aptly [observed](#) — "masculinity as a project that doesn't require women to be accomplished...[where] women are not doing any of the emotional labor required from the men in the show to grow, to learn about themselves, to overcome emotional obstacles and be vulnerable."

Put it in my veins.



In between sexually explicit bedroom scenes, *Heated Rivalry* delivers a masterclass in whatever the opposite of toxic masculinity is. It's why so many straight women are saying — only half-joking — that their new litmus test for potential suitors is whether the guy has watched, liked, and really "gets" *Heated Rivalry*.

Here's the thing. The dirtiest little secret about *Heated Rivalry* isn't the sex. It's that Ilya and Shane remind women that real intimacy and connection are possible. Not in some fairytale bullshit way. In a slow burn, hard-earned, messy, life-altering way. For a long time now, a lot of women — maybe every woman you know — has wondered if modern love is broken. We're all just out here trying to survive a world on fire and a dating landscape that can feel like guerrilla warfare. So who could blame a girl for giving up? Except lately, when my female friends wax poetic about *Heated Rivalry*, the very next thing they tell me is that they're going on a date. Or they went back on the dating apps. They're putting themselves out there. Asking someone out. Because you know what? Your Ilya or Shane is out there. And if Ilya can come to the cottage, you can too.

And so can you, Katie Couric.

Lisa Ferri is a journalist in New York. She covers politics, culture, and all things modern life and love.

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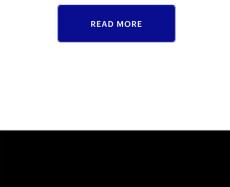
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