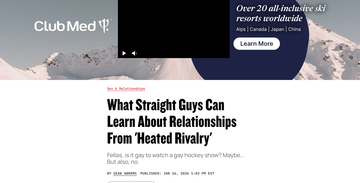

Sex & Relationships

What Straight Guys Can Learn About Relationships From 'Heated Rivalry'

Fellas, is it gay to watch a gay hockey show? Maybe... But also, no.

BY SEAN ABRAMS · PUBLISHED: JAN 16, 2026 3:03 PM EST

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PHOTO CREDIT: SAMUEL LANTZ

The following story contains minor spoilers for *Heated Rivalry*. Though at this point, how could you not know.

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The premise of *Heated Rivalry* might sound pretty... particular. *Pro hockey! Rivalries! Gay hookups!* **Jacked dudes** that look much longer? But there's a real argument to be made that the reason people won't STFU about the Crave/HBO Max breakout show that revolves around its with its softcore shock-and-awe. Instead, it's how it portrays the slow, sometimes devastating, truth of intimacy between its characters. The real story here is not "fellas, is it gay to watch a gay hockey show?"—but what you might be able to learn if you do.

For the uninitiated (which, at this point, is very few of you), *Heated Rivalry* centers on Shane (**Hudson Williams**) and Scott (**Connor Storrie**), two rival hockey stars whose secret relationship is both explosive and immediate. But theirs is not the only love story we see onscreen.

Episode three cuts away to focus on closeted hockey star Scott Hunter (François Arnaud) and ultra-charming smoothie barista Kip (Robbie G.K.). They fall in love, have a bunch of sex, and commiserate about their lives. Scott's story but break up by the end of the episode. Scott—hyperaware of what the hockey world expects out of a star captain—is too scared of what he could lose if he comes out. Kip, meanwhile, is secure enough in his identity to love someone without shrinking himself in the process.

By the end of episode five, however, we're led to believe that it's Kip's kindness that gives Scott the confidence to come out to the world so epic it left the show's largely female fanbase swooning (if you're wondering why your girl has been listening to a lot of Wolf Parade recently, here's your clue.)

SAMUEL LANTZ
François Arnaud (left) and Robbie G.K. (right) as Scott Hunter and Kip Grady in episode five of *Heated Rivalry*.

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Robbie G.K. has watched that reaction play out in countless social media posts, but he's also caught plenty of straight husbands watching episode three, getting giddy as Kip and Scott first meet—hookup smoothies. G.K. was also just on *Empty Nesters*, a popular hockey podcast hosted by two (straight) brothers, where co-host Dan Severs applauded the way G.K. and Arnaud managed to portray such deep trust and authentic intimacy with limited screen time.

Straight men? Interested in the emotional stakes of gay men? Who know? It's a reaction that seems surprising...until you remember that love is universal, even when it's not "for" you.

"In my mind, regardless of what your own sexual orientation is, you should be able to identify with two people who really care for each other and love each other," Robbie G.K. told *Men's Health*. "It's easy to inflate the sexual orientation difference and say, 'Well, we're not the same because of this thing.' But I think everyone has at some point felt longing for somebody."

Men's Health spoke with the *Heated Rivalry* star about why Kip and Scott resonate so strongly with audiences, what the show gets right about intimacy, and what anyone can take away from a relationship that might not seem like it was written for them, but still hits like it was.

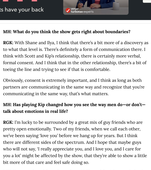
MEN'S HEALTH: Scott is closeted, and Kip is trying to love someone who can't fully show up. What can people learn from that tension about being patient without abandoning themselves?

ROBBIE G.K.: Kip came out of the closet at some point and crossed that bridge, and I could imagine that that would've been a big journey for him, considering his dad and all the rest of it. I think he got to a checkpoint in life where he was trying to help Scott cross that bridge as well and join him.

There's a sense of pride to Kip...he's on the other side of that hill and has seen how green the grass is in his life. And I would like to think that he doesn't want to go back over there, and if it means that he loses out on this relationship, I think that he's made the decision that that's worth it for him. I've always seen it as he's not really waiting but he's more so hoping for Scott... to see the sun on the other side of the hill and join him there.

MH: What's a quality of Kip's you think more men should steal for their own relationships?

ROB: To have a good group of girl friends and a good group of guy friends. I think, as we see in the show, the women are really what orchestrate all these relationships happening. I know in my own personal life, I love my group of girl friends here, and I also love my group of guy friends, and I think those two are great forces in my life.



SAMUEL LANTZ
Robbie G.K. as Kip Grady in episode three of *Heated Rivalry*.

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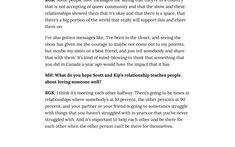

MH: What do you think the show gets right about boundaries?

ROG: With Shane and Ilya, I think that there's a bit more of a discovery as to what that level is. There's definitely a form of communication there. I think with Scott and Kip's relationship, there's certainly more verbal, formal consent. And I think that is the other relationship, there's a bit of tasting the line and trying to see if that is comfortable.

Obviously, consent is extremely important, and I think as long as both partners are communicating in the same way and recognize that you're communicating in the same way, that's what matters.

MH: Has playing Kip changed how you see the way men do—or don't—talk about emotions in real life?

ROB: I'm lucky to be surrounded by a great mix of gay friends who are pretty open emotionally. Two of my friends don't talk about their sex life; we've been saying 'love you' before we hang up for years. But I think there are different sides of the spectrum. And I hope that straight guys who will not say, 'I really appreciate you, and I love you, and I care for you a lot' might be affected by the show, that they're able to show a little bit more of that care and feel safe doing so.

MH: Have you heard from fans who said Kip and Scott's story helped them think about their own relationships differently?

ROB: Some people have messaged me saying that they're in a country that is not accepting of queer community and that the show and these relationships showed them that it's okay and that there is a space, that there's a big portion of the world that really will support this and cheer them on.

I've also gotten messages like, 'I've been in the closet, and seeing the show has given me the courage to maybe not come out to my parents, but maybe my sister or a best friend, and just tell somebody and share that with them.' It's kind of mind-blowing to think that something that you did in Canada a year ago would have the impact that it has.

MH: What do you hope Scott and Kip's relationship teaches people about loving someone well?

ROG: I think it's meeting each other halfway. There's going to be times in relationships where somebody's at 10 percent, the other person's at 90 percent, and your partner or your friend is going to sometimes struggle with things that you haven't struggled with in years or that you've never struggled with. And it's important to help each other and be there for each other when the other person can't be there for themselves.

SAMUEL LANTZ
François Arnaud (left) as Scott Hunter and Robbie G.K. (right) as Kip Grady in episode three of *Heated Rivalry*.

MH: Has playing Kip shifted your definition of what it means to be a good man or a good partner?

ROG: It's been clear to me how much people like how nice Kip is. With the whole series, ... I think he's regarded as maybe the sweetest and the most gentle character. But I think that really does have a positive effect on people.

When I was in Los Angeles going to my first Golden Globes party and red carpet stuff, I said, 'People think I'm Kip, and I'm okay with being just a nice person to all these people. I don't have an ego attitude. I don't need to try to impress anybody. I can just be a kind person.' And I think that that is something that Kip taught me.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

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