

A Moment for the Women of *Heated Rivalry*

BY DAISY JONES
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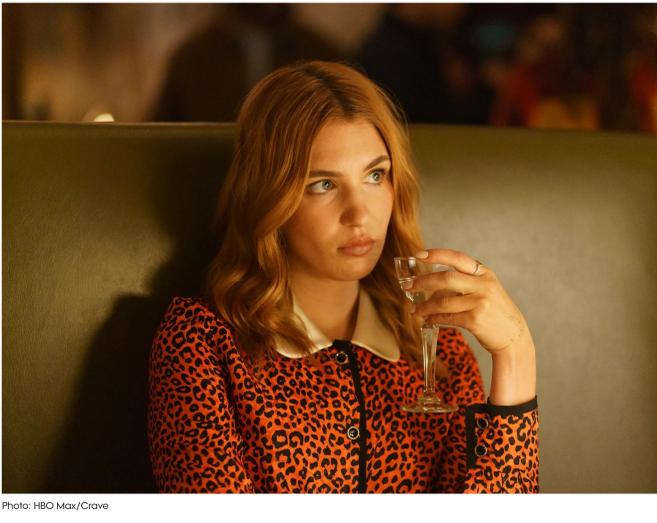


Photo: HBO Max/Crave

Heated Rivalry (still) has women in a chokehold. Yes, it's beloved by gay men, but it also has women—straight, queer, everything else—going absolutely feral for these gay hockey players. It's easy to see why: Ilya Rozanov ([Connor Stoorie](#)) and Shane Hollander ([Hudson Williams](#)) have the sort of love that transcends gender. There are none of the heterosexual dynamics that straight women in particular are so tired of. And, well, they're nice to look at, regardless of which way you swing. Altars could be dedicated to the little crucifix that bangs against Ilya's chest. I, too, have watched that video of Stoorie dancing to "Like a Prayer" no fewer than 35 times.

But there's something else: the women in the show. While it would have been easy to position the women in the two protagonists' lives as watery, one-dimensional plot devices—or even needy, desperate villains getting in the way—they are anything but. The women in *Heated Rivalry* are smart, strong, and supportive. They behave in normal, cool ways. They're also, crucially, quietly important to the story. It's Elena (Nadine Bhabha) who gently pushes Scott (François Arnaud) to prioritize his love for Kip (Robbie Graham-Kuntz). It's Svetlana (Ksenia Kharlamova) who emotionally supports Ilya while harboring a tacit awareness of his love for Shane. It's Rose (Sophie Nélisse) who offers Shane an ear at exactly the moment he needs it.



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Nor are they women who exist purely as shoulders to lean on, without fleshed-out lives of their own. Svetlana is a powerhouse hockey obsessive who wants rather than needs Ilya's love. It's Shane's mother, Yuna (Christina Chang), who appears to control the business side of things when it comes to Shane's career. Rose is a famous actor whom Shane is initially starstruck by, and is often away shooting superhero movies—she's not chasing after a man whose heart she doesn't have. When she suspects Shane's sexuality, she approaches the situation with both kindness and humour ("Like, 70%—actually 80%—of my ex-boyfriends have left me for other guys"). Even Jackie (Kamilla Kowal), the wife of Hayden (Callan Potter), appears to be the one leading the charge in their relationship.

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Too often, in stories that center men, women are subjugated to flattened stereotypes, if they even make an impact at all. It can make such stories boring for women to watch, and sometimes even uncomfortable. (There's a reason that, halfway through *Oppenheimer*, I considered walking out of the theater for the first time in my life.) Of course, women don't need to be main players when it comes to queer love stories about men because they're not about us. But I do think the way women are positioned in *Heated Rivalry* is at least partly responsible for the show's intense, almost cult-like popularity among women as well as gay men.

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As a queer woman, too, I found myself feeling connected to the story rather than isolated from it. I recognized the complicated, messy, euphoric feelings surrounding self-realization. I saw myself in a relationship that exists outside of heteronormative dynamics. I don't think it's a coincidence that the show uses t.A.T.u.'s sapphic anthem "All the Things She Said"—interlaying the original with a cover from British producer Harrison, with a male vocal—in one of its most crucial scenes. Queer yearning is queer yearning. Forbidden love often takes the same shape. The show is expansive and clever in its exploration of these themes.

In real life, queer people and straight women have often stuck together. Our stories and struggles are different, but they also run in tandem and exist on the same plane. And while *Heated Rivalry* is very much about love and sex between two men, the show doesn't feel the need to disempower women in the process. And therein, I think, lies at least some of its mammoth—and likely enduring—appeal.

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Daisy Jones is the acting news and features editor at *British Vogue*. She previously worked as senior editor at *Vice UK*, associate editor at *British GQ*, and music editor at *Dazed*. Her first book, *All The Things She Said*, about the culture of queer women, came out in 2021. You ... [Read More](#)

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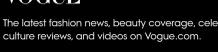
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