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# The real reason people are so passionate about Heated Rivalry

It's not just the smut. It's about a deeper desire.

by **Jonquilyn Hill**  
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Hudson Williams and Connor Storrie attend the premiere of Heated Rivalry at TIFF Lightbox on November 24, 2025 in Toronto. Harold Feng/Getty Images

*Jonquilyn Hill is the host of Explain It to Me, your hotline for all your unanswered questions. She joined Vox in 2022 as a senior producer and then as host of The Weeds, Vox's policy podcast.*

*Heated Rivalry*, the Canadian series streaming on HBO Max based on the bestselling romance novels by Rachel Reid, has taken over group chats, algorithms, and brains. For those who have not watched, it follows queer, closeted professional ice hockey players as they navigate falling in love and all the angst that comes with it. There's also a lot of sex. So. Much. Sex.

But for all the talk of gay hockey smut, the show at its core is very sweet.

Emma Glassman-Hughes is a writer, reporter, and editor at Popsugar, and she doesn't think *Heated Rivalry* is an anomaly. She says the show is successful because it taps into a universal experience: yearning. "I think the people are yearning every which way," she told Vox. "In a more classic sense, we've seen the success of *Heated Rivalry* and *The Summer I Turned Pretty*. Both those have blown up and really are good examples of how everyone is just excited right now about the burn of a true crush."

On the latest episode of *Explain It to Me*, Vox's weekly call-in podcast, we spoke with Glassman-Hughes about pining in pop culture and what it says about us.

Below is an excerpt of our conversation, edited for length and clarity. You can listen to the full episode on [Apple Podcasts](#), [Spotify](#), or wherever you get podcasts. If you'd like to submit a question, send an email to [askvox@vox.com](mailto:askvox@vox.com) or call 1-800-618-8545.

### Are you seeing this yearning anywhere else, even beyond TV and movies?

Yeah, I think of yearning in a pretty broad sense around the Mamdani campaign in New York. My feeds were full of energy and enthusiasm and true yearning and aching for a better future for some new options. I've also seen this New Year's resolution trend on TikTok, where people are aiming to receive 1,000 rejections in 2026. That means putting yourself out there at least a thousand times and proving to yourself that you're willing to try and be vulnerable and face the prospect of failure. That's big yearner energy. Along the way in between the thousand rejections, you're bound to get some yeses, whether that's romantic partners or jobs or community organizing or whatever it is that you're chasing.

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### I think that's so interesting, to think of yearning beyond just the romantic.

If we look around, it's really hard to exist in the world right now, and we're being inundated with distressing news event after news event. I think yearning could be seen as a distraction from that, but I actually think it's a grounding force.

Yearning is this deeply bodily human experience to despair over not having what you want and to feel the pain of being so close yet so far. We're all familiar with the concept of exquisite pain, and I think yearning can provide this sort of masochistic joy too — and we all need more joy in our lives right now.

### Crushes are fun, but they can be excruciating. At the same time, they're kind of great. It's hard to describe how it's both painful and enjoyable.

When I think of yearning, the phrase that comes up is *all-consuming*. Going back to the romance factor, I'm in a long-term relationship right now, so it's been a long time since I've had a true crush, but I actually really miss that feeling. There's a nostalgic quality to some person sort of taking over your entire world for however long. It's [reminiscent] of a simpler time, when you're 13 and that's all you can think about, and nothing really matters beyond that.

### If I open up my phone right now, I'll probably see several text messages about Heated Rivalry. It's everywhere.

It's definitely a huge topic of conversation on the Popsugar team. I'm queer, and all of my queer female friends are very taken with this show and very drawn to these more vulnerable depictions of masculinity that we don't really get to see very much of.

### I want to talk about who yearns. Heated Rivalry is special because it's about queer men.

I argue in [my essay](#) that women are frequently the objects of yearning, but we see fewer depictions of female yearning out there. I think we see a lot of depictions of women passively wishing or hoping for something, but to me, that's not true yearning.

I've been thinking about this a lot since Popsugar posted about the essay on our Instagram. Someone actually commented something that has stuck with me: They were saying that we're always seeing depictions of women who want and never receive, and that really made me think. I think there is a difference between the passive wishing and the real gut-level yearning, and the latter is what I want to see more of from women and queer people this year. Not just wistful stuff, but the tornadoes and the storms and the shattered glass of it all.

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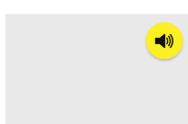
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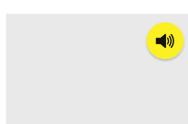
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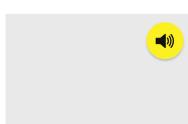
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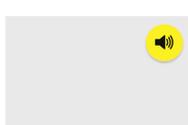
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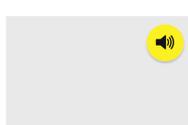
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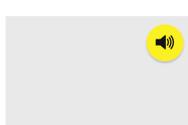
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