'Heated Rivalry' is breaking the internet — relationship expert Esther Perel explains the appeal

Created with not many lead actors or a big budget, this series bagged fans across the globe for heartwarming reasons.

By Angelina C Dsouza
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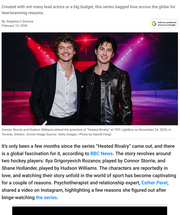


Connor Storrie and Hudson Williams pictured in a scene of 'Heated Rivalry' at TIFF LightBox on November 24, 2025, in Toronto, Ontario. Simon Hayes Source: Getty Images | Photo by Gerald Herbert

It's only been a few months since the series "Heated Rivalry" came out, and there is a global fascination for it, according to BBC News. The story revolves around two hockey players: Ilya Grigoryevich Rozanov, played by Connor Storrie, and Shane Hollander, played by Hudson Williams. The characters are reluctantly in love, and watching their story unfold in the world of sport has become captivating for a couple of reasons. Psychotherapist and relationship expert, Esther Perel, shared a video on Instagram, highlighting a few reasons she figured out after binge-watching the series.

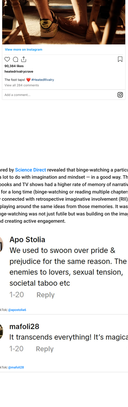
Williams and Storrie received a lot of love for their character. The former recalled how one of their agents revealed, "Connor and I have had to learn what a lot of actors get in five years, in like 30 days." The series was reportedly made within a normal budget, not over the top, under a time crunch, and with debutants or not too many famous leads. Yet, different scenes, characters, and twists have a different fanbase, and it's not just because of queer love but a deeper dive into the idea of love and relationships. Perel shared three particular reasons why she believes people are loving the watch. The first she noted was "beautiful corrective experience."

@estherperel_official Replying to @Emily ♡ original sound - Esther Perel

She mentioned how many scenes capture a lot of responses that many would "wish" to have. Sharing instances, she recorded how "you talk to your mum, and instead of being scolded when you're coming out to her, she's wondering what she did to make it so hard for you to share the truth." The psychotherapist explained that her friend had watched the series a couple of times already, and after the first time, you're basically rewatching it for the corrective experience. You're getting a chance to witness how you "wish" you'd experience the many relatable scenarios, so watching the same validating shot feels like "stroking a teddy bear."

@estherperel_official Replying to @lickhumam original sound - Esther Perel

Perel pointed out that for many, the series has become an "antidote" to the harsh reality of the world they're currently facing. The second reason highlighted was "understanding female sexual desire" from how women have perceived the series. In a video on TikTok, she explained how straight women and even lesbians are thrilled with watching the series because it comes without conditions. There is no set stereotype or genre; it's freeing for audiences with any sexuality. Thirdly, "The presentation of masculine representation and the arc of emotions and behaviors that cover masculine expressions."



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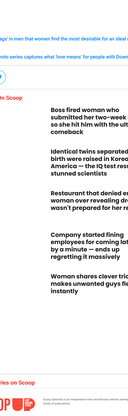
In another clip on TikTok, she revealed how the masculine characters are portrayed as "fierce and bulky," men who get into fights but at the same time can also turn off and become tender. Perel pointed out that the series has received much love because it accurately covers the "whole arc" of masculinity. The machismo, as well as the vulnerability, the physicality, and the emotionality. The vivid expressions are something not many media sources showcase when it comes to men, and so the expert mentioned that it feels validating to get the complete idea of not just gay men but even men in general.



A study shared by Science Direct revealed that binge-watching a particular TV series has a lot to do with imagination and mindset — in a good way. The study noted that books and TV shows had a higher rate of memory of narrative when focused on for a long time (binge-watching or reading multiple chapters). This was closely connected with retrospective imaginative involvement (RII), i.e., building or playing around the same ideas from those memories. It was suggested that this binge watching was not just fuelle but was building on the imagination of a person and creating active engagement.

The findings pointed out "consecutive narrative use gives individuals the opportunity to construct richer and meaningful mental models through bridging and elaboration." So it's not just the romance that's enticing the crowd, it's a bit of healing, a bit of love in its truest sense, irrespective of gender and sexuality, and its reality delivered with a soothing balm. @bucksmithson8007 wrote, "Vulnerability, consent, passion, and love. We need more of this in our media." @mchamingkim4 added, "I called them feel-good TV, but what I really craved were the relationships, language, and scenarios that modeled healing where I experienced harm."

You can follow Esther Perel (@estherperelofficial) on Instagram and TikTok (@estherperel_official)for more content on relationships and lifestyle.

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