



Media: Noah Babai

Queer sex is resistance

The politics of joy and “Heated Rivalry”

By Luna Crone-Barón *The Daily*
Feb. 12, 2026, 8 a.m.



Listen to this article now
Powered by Trinity Audio

00:00

1.0x

06:21

In the past few months, Canadian streaming service Crave’s steamy-sweet hockey romance “Heated Rivalry” has rocketed from a tight-budget streaming pilot to a dominant cultural force. The show has sparked a wide-reaching conversation around queer sex, bodies, and love — a stark cultural juxtaposition to the increasing vitriolic anti-LGBTQIA+ hatred spewed by the United States federal government.

“Heated Rivalry,” created by Canadian actor-director Jacob Tierney and based on the book series by Rachel Reid, mainly follows the years-long, enemies-to-lovers style relationship of two young hockey rivals, the charmingly timid Shane Hollander (Hudson Williams) and the enigmatic yet sensitive Ilya Rozanov (Connor Storrie).

The show is sexy, angst, tender, and fun, with a just-right amount of cheese — a balance of narrative qualities that ignited its skyrocketing viewership, from a mere 30 million viewing minutes in its first week on HBO Max to around 324 million during the week of the season finale, according to the research group Luminata.

Notably, the show’s huge viewership has put a spotlight on a queer love story that explores sexuality, pleasure, tenderness, and joy with nuance and humanity — carving out an unprecedentedly celebratory cultural dialogue of queer sex.

In its many scenes of intimacy, brilliantly choreographed by Chala Hunter, the show portrays sex between two men with deep humanity. The series deliberately makes space for the pulse-pounding and sweaty, and likewise the romantic and tender, not as mutual exclusives, but as complex and valuable parts of an authentic sexual relationship.

This kind of nuance represents a powerful diversion from the too-trodden path of queer sex and relationships in media being portrayed within strict, often stereotypical or tragic confines that make no space for genuine love or humanity.

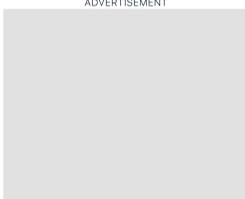
Nicole McNichols, UW professor of human sexuality and author of the upcoming book [You Could Be Having Better Sex](#), is excited by the shifting culture of how queer sex and love are portrayed in mainstream media.

“Queer sex and love are increasingly being portrayed as joyful, complex, and deeply human, not as something niche, tragic, or purely political,” McNichols wrote in an email. “For decades, queer desire was either erased or framed through suffering, secrecy, or risk. What we’re seeing now is a shift toward stories that center pleasure, intimacy, humor, tenderness, and long-term love, the same emotional range afforded to straight relationships.”

McNichols also spoke to the power of authentically positive representation of queer sex.

“From a sexuality science perspective, this matters enormously,” McNichols wrote. “Representation shapes what people believe is possible for themselves. When queer relationships are shown as vibrant and fulfilling, it permits people to imagine fuller, more authentic lives. It also educates the broader public, often more powerfully than textbooks ever could, by normalizing diversity in desire, bodies, and relationships through storytelling rather than argument.”

ADVERTISEMENT



During the run of Heated Rivalry’s first season on HBO Max, coincidentally, the Trump administration doubled down on attacks on trans youth, another step in the regime’s mission to total legal erasure of trans people in this country. Times are terrifying — and thus joy and love are all the more powerful and political. Joyful, genuine representation is an act of political resistance in a time in which hate is the norm.

Alena, a second-year political science and communications student and logistics officer with Peers at UW, spoke to the inherent politicalness of representation and celebration of queer sex and love in the cultural context of violence and erasure.

“These are our voices, representing how we feel, telling our stories to fight the hatred,” Alena said. “This moment shows that there is a community that is fighting.”

McNichols shares this sentiment of joy as resistance.

“Celebration is not a distraction from political struggle, it’s a form of resistance,” McNichols wrote. “Joy, pleasure, and love are powerful counterforces to fear-based narratives.”

This “joy, pleasure, and love” has been an infectious light in these dark times — building diverse communities on the internet, themed queer raves, and already inspiring a hockey player to publicly come out as gay after previously leaving the sport for fear of prejudice.

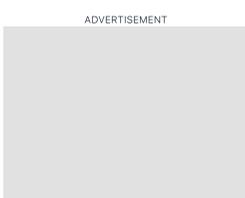
“These kinds of media build community,” Alena said. “We can use this community of film and media to fight this battle that can otherwise feel isolating.”

Not only is the celebratory narrative of “Heated Rivalry” a powerful force of resistance and hope, but its success is also an important step in opening up space for joyful, sexy representation for a diversity of queer and trans voices and bodies.

Beyond the importance of building joy and hope within the LGBTQIA+ community, positive representation creates tangible impacts in changing hearts and minds on a wider level.

“It’s much harder to dehumanize people when audiences have laughed with them, rooted for them, and recognized their own longings in their stories,” McNichols wrote. “When queer and trans people are visible as whole people, capable of deep connection and thriving relationships, it challenges the idea that these identities are dangerous, deviant, or disposable.”

ADVERTISEMENT



Hope is powerful, and joy is vital — authentic images of queer and trans bodies existing, loving, laughing, f--king, and being true to themselves ground our communities in strength and love, and continuously pave a path to the empathy and celebration we need from the wider public.

“Ultimately, I hope this cultural moment creates more empathy, more curiosity, and more protection,” McNichols wrote. “Not just through laws, which matter deeply, but through hearts and minds shifting in ways that make exclusion feel increasingly untenable.”

“Heated Rivalry” is now streaming on HBO Max.

Reach writer Luna Crone-Barón at spcials@dailyuw.com. X: [@lunacronebaron](#). Bluesky: [@lunacronebaron](#).

Like what you’re reading? Support high-quality student journalism by donating [here](#).

Stay up to Date
Subscribe to our weekly newsletters covering the news, arts, and sports.

Email

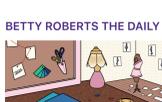
SUBSCRIBE

Newsletters

Regular Newsletter (M, W, F)

Sports (F)

BETTY ROBERTS THE DAILY



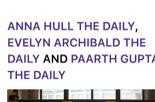
The ‘365 Button Girl’ got New Year’s resolutions right

ANNA HULL THE DAILY



Community cites concerns about ICE presence in U-District, UW reports no knowledge

EVELYN ARCHIBALD THE DAILY AND PAARTH GUPTA THE DAILY



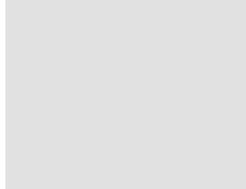
Hundreds rally at Gerberding Hall to continue demanding UW protect students from ICE

EVELYN ARCHIBALD THE DAILY



Board of Regents hears public comment from removed president of ASUW Tacoma

ADVERTISEMENT



READ MORE >



Author Jazz Forrester talks fanfiction, new novel ‘Breaking from Frame’

Chaitna Deshmukh *The Daily* Nov. 26, 2025, 7 a.m.



Review: ‘Fake Skating’

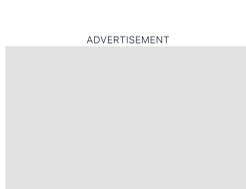
Makaila Mosley *Contributing writer* Nov. 18, 2025, 6:05 a.m.



Geanna Culbertson’s ‘Hallowed’ is a Seattle love-letter in a fantasy binding

Laney Jordan *The Daily* Oct. 29, 2025, 6:05 a.m.

ADVERTISEMENT



SPONSORS

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

SERVICES + ACTIVITIES FEE

STUDENT TECHNOLOGY FEE

TRENDING >

Reclaiming cultural threads: The understated importance of dressing Indian

Neetra Chakraborty *The Daily* Feb. 6, 2026, 7 a.m.

OPINION

The Seahawks are Super Bowl champions. UW should let its students celebrate

Alex Olson *The Daily* Feb. 10, 2026, 7 a.m.

NEWS

Washington leaders condemn ICE actions, move to curb federal immigration enforcement

Ariel Brennan *The Daily* Feb. 6, 2026, 7:45 a.m.

ARTS | RECREATION

Orange Room Sessions: Meldrop

Isabelle Greenberg *The Daily* Feb. 9, 2026, 6 a.m.

ADVERTISEMENT

