Ingrid Buchwald

COM 75-964

**Analysis Paper**

**Masculinity**

Because *Heated Rivalry* follows two hockey players, most scenes, whether they be hockey related or not, are permeated with excessive masculinity. Due to the show's focus on masculinity and what it means for both Shane and Ilya, most of the sexual scenes follow the homonorm of having one dominant and one submissive partner. The focus on sexual roles is necessary to allow both characters to exist in a masculine space outside of their sexuality. Furthermore, because *Heated Rivalry* follows two gay male characters, making both characters hyper-masculine hockey players allows Tierney to further explore their sexuality while still making the show digestible for a popular audience.

***Episode Four 2:43- 3:10: Opening Montage***

Episode four opens a short montage of individual clips of Shane and Ilya living their alternative lifestyles independently. This is followed by a montage of hockey game scenes and sex scenes between Shane and Ilya. The scenes cut quickly back and forth creating a fast-paced and sexual atmosphere. The game scenes consist of Shane and Ilya fighting on the ice and then cut to scenes of Shane and Ilya having rough sex. The scenes then pivot to scenes of Shane scoring, receiving oral sex, and then winning the hockey cup.

The second cut that happens between hockey clips and sex, we see Shane being held down while laying on his stomach as Ilya penetrates from behind (2:47). While this clip serves as

a reference to them being secret rivals who are engaging in a sexual affair, it also reaffirms masculine ideals. Because Shane and Ilya are both very masculine characters, we would expect



them to have rough masculine sex, which is exactly what this scene offers us. By playing into the audience's assumptions about masculinity, the audience feels more involved in the relationship and feels privy to the choices that are being made. Furthermore, these assumptions reaffirm the stereotypes associated with masculinity and gay men. Because characters that break gender-norms are less easily accepted (Herek 2002), ensuring that hyper-masculine characters like Shane and Ilya fall into these assigned sex roles allows *Heated RivalryI* to be more easily interpellated in popular media.

*"My Moon My Man" by Feist*

The song that plays during this compilation, "My Moon My Man" by Feist, changes the pacing and what the different clips mean. The cuts between scenes align with the beats in the song leading to a more intense pacing of the montage. When looking more critically at the lyrics, a different meaning can be found for playing the song during this montage. The lyrics, "Take it slow, take it easy on me'" contrast what is happening in the sex scenes and reaffirm the idea of a rivalry between Shane and Ilya. Similarly before the sex scenes begin in this montage, one of the first lines from the song we hear is "It's the dirtiest clean I know." By using this song to refer to Shane and Ilya's relationship as the "dirtiest clean," Tierney positions the audience as voyeurs of a "dirty" relationship. Subsequently then, we are not expected to believe that they are in love, but

rather that they are in love with the secrecy and messiness of their relationship. When the show cuts to a scene of Shane and Ilya having rough anal intercourse, the audience is now positioned to subconsciously believe that their sex is somehow "dirty."

Additionally, in a later cut (3:03), we hear the line "shed some light on me, please" while



Shane is receiving oral sex. Overlaying this scene with a song highlights the yearning for openness that both Shane and Ilya feel. By highlighting their feelings for openness while they are engaging in sexual acts, the push and pull between Shane and Ilya's desire and reality is exposed. They do not want to hide their relationships, but because of the masculine and homophobic world they live in, both Shane and Ilya feel as though they are unable to reveal their relationship to others. Because the world that Shane and Ilya live in is hyper-masculine and heteronormative, their relationship must also follow these same rules. The desire that specifically Shane has for their relationship is one of homonormativity; he wants to be with Ilya romantically, sexually, and socially in the same way that heterosexual couples are. The homonormativity that can be seen in Shane's idealizations for his relationship with Ilya propels their relationship and is what eventually allows them to fall in love. Without homonormativity, Shane and Ilya's relationship would not exist, because the pillars of their relationship are formed on masculinity, the media's presentation of their relationship, and what is "allowed".

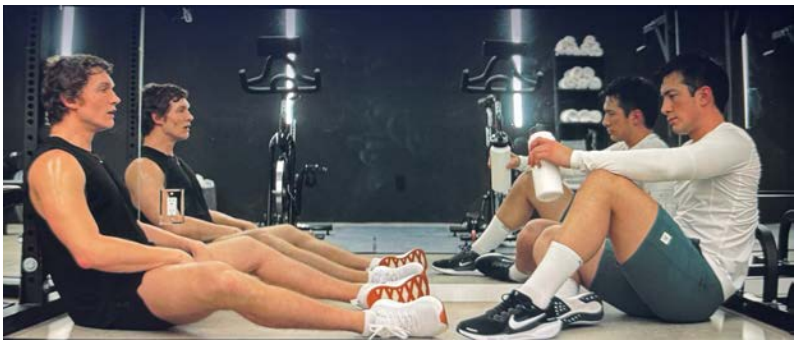
***Episode One 5:30-9:13: Gym Scene***

In episode one, one of the most notable scenes happens between Shane and Ilya in their hotel gym. The scene begins with only Shane riding the bike in the gym and quickly fosters a competitive edge when Ilya enters. The pair then competes to ride his bike the hardest, fastest, and longest. Following this brief competition, Shane and Ilya sit on the ground across from each other panting and engaging in some brief conversation before sharing a water bottle sensually.

While this scene does not contain any overt sexual content, there is sensuality and lust oozing from it. During the scene, the audio between them is reminiscent of audio during a sex scene. There is panting and light moaning that increases in pace as they bike until eventually it slows when they finish their workout. As they start to pick up their pace on the bikes, the audio turns distinctly sexual (6:33). The sexual tension that is already present in the scene is strengthened by the direct sonic reference to sexual activities. In turn, Shane and Ilya's masculinity is also then sexualized. In order for the audience to see Shane and Ilya as sexual creatures, they must be shown in such a way that societal beauty standards are realized. By showcasing Shane and Ilya as sweaty and in a gym, the popular audience can hold a greater appreciation for their attractiveness or sexual nature. Without this masculinity, it would be more difficult to garner support for their relationship from the popular audience. When the scene cuts to them sitting on the floor, they are still panting and out of breath when Ilya lets out a small cheer (7:10). This cut is similar to one that happens after a sex scene with Ilya's cheer acting as a signifier for their resolution, in the same way that one might moan when having an orgasm. By highlighting how this masculine activity (working out together) may have sexual undertones, we are better able to understand how masculinity plays a role in Shane and Ilya's sex later on.

Sharing the water bottle is the first time that the idea of Ilya being dominant and Shane being submissive comes into play. In this portion of the scene (8:25), Ilya offers his water bottle

to Shane who initially rejects it until Ilya pushes harder. This dominant pressure that Ilya places on Shane is one that is seen throughout the entire series. This scene offers an introduction to



Shane and Ilya's homonormative dynamic and how it may play out later in the series. With Ilya going so far as to whisper "more" while Shane is drinking water (8:48), his dominance and Shane's submission to him is quickly established. Because this scene establishes Ilya as dominant and Shane as submissive, moving forward, the audience expects certain things when they are having sex. In line with homonormativity, the audience would expect social dominance and submission to translate to sexual dominance and submission, meaning that they expect Ilya to penetrate Shane during anal intercourse. By assigning these sexual roles, Tierney is giving Shane and Ilya space for them both to be masculine entities outside of their sexual personas while still submitting to homonormativity in a way that the audience expects.

**The Unwilling Witness**

Hayden, Shane's teammate, is consistently an unknowing witness to Shane and Ilya's decade-long relationship. He acts as a reference point for the "public" as it applies to Shane. Every time that Hayden is too close to seeing something or finding something out about Shane's relationship with Ilya, Shane internalizes this as the public potentially finding out something about his relationship with Ilya. The proximity to Shane and Ilya's relationship that Hayden is forced into offers an interesting area of study regarding exhibitionism.

***Episode Two 3:15- 3:30: Dick Pic***

This scene is the first of many that picture Hayden and Shane together/ interacting while Ilya performs or insinuates sexual acts with Shane. Near the beginning of episode two, Shane



and Hayden are sharing a hotel room when Ilya starts sexting Shane. Mere feet away in the other bed, Hayden is unaware that is he now acting as a unwilling witness to Shane and Ilya's sexual relations. When Shane startles upon receiving a photo of genitals and puts his phone down, Hayden looks over shocked and confused, but no words are exchanged. Then Shane picks his phone up and the two return to how they were at the beginning before the scene cuts to black.

This scene is very short, but is packed with nuance about Shane and Hayden's relationship and what that means for Shane. The distance between Shane and Hayden represents the proximity that Shane feels to the media and general public. The closer Hayden is to Shane when he is texting Ilya, the more Shane feels like his secret relationship will be exposed. After Shane throws his phone onto the bed, Hayden gives him a confused but knowing glance (3:25). This further demonstrates how Shane feels like everyone knows his secret.

Notably, Ilya sending this nude (3:23) is the only instance of genital nudity in the series, so Tierney's choice to place it in a scene with Hayden must be intentional. Hayden being in the room when Shane receives this photo from Ilya, positions him as an unsuspecting witness to Shane and Ilya's sexual relationship. When thinking of Hayden as such, it is important to recognize that Shane and Ilya may be engaging in exhibitionism. Ilya knows Shane is sharing a hotel room with Hayden and chooses to arouse him and send him nude photos anyways. This

behavior from Ilya plays into the classic stereotype of the excessively sexual gay man. By promoting these stereotypes of non-traditional and non-consensual sexual preferences, *Heated Rivalry* breaks the homonorm in a way that can be detrimental to the audience's perception of real-world gay relationships.

***Episode Four 5:05- 5:09: Sexting While Running***

In a later episode, while on a run with Hayden, Shane receives sexually explicit text messages from Ilya. Similar to what happened in episode two, Hayden looks over to Shane and acknowledges that he got a message. When Shane opens his phone to check his message he smiles at his phone until Hayden nudges him in the arm. Once Shane realizes there is a witness to his feelings and his relationship, he quickly puts his phone away and stops smiling. This demonstrates, again, how Hayden getting too close to Shane and Ilya's relationship gives Ilya a thrill while reminding Shane he needs to be more secretive about it.

***Episode Six 19:40- 22:34: The Phone Call***

In the final episode, Shane and Ilya spend a week together in Shane's isolated cottage in the woods. During this time, they are unafraid to be honest with each other and are not worried about their secret being exposed. Near the end of their stay, Shane receives an unexpected call from Hayden. Previously, Shane and Ilya had been playing video games and the scene had a rather boyish energy emanating from it. Once Shane answers Hayden's call, Ilya decides that this is an opportunity to engage in sexual activity. Rather than shut him down, Shane playfully tells him to stop but then leans into exhibitionism and ends up having an orgasm with Hayden on the phone.

This is the only time that Shane plays into the exhibitionism that Ilya craves and when he realizes nothing bad has happened, he even admits that he thought it was hot (22:34). This is the most obvious display of exhibitionism and, yet again, Hayden is an unwilling witness to it. By preceding this scene with various other milder forms of exhibitionism, Tierney positions the audience to be expecting more to come, so when this scene occurs the audience feels satisfied. Even if they do feel satisfied, the popular audience judges the choices that were made and sympathize with Hayden as a victim. A scenario in which someone can be a victim of gay sex creates a polarizing scene for the popular audience, making them side with either the exhibitionist gay couple or the non-consensual witness to their exhibitionism.

**Loveless Sex**

*Heated Rivalry* claims to tell the story of a pair of young hockey players who fall in love unexpectedly. This love affair is often shown through secret post-game hookups that Shane and Ilya engage in. When engaging with this material critically, the lack of love in Shane and Ilya's sexual relationship can be found. Two of the most impactful examples of their "loveless" sex happen in episode five and episode two. The sex scene in episode two is especially notable due to the audience's reaction to the following scene that references the sex scene, in which Shane almost texts Ilya "We didn't even kiss" before deleting it (Episode 2, 41:56), proving that Shane is yearning for more intimacy in their relationship than Ilya is providing.

***Episode Five 28:21- 29:55: Video Call Sex***

Shortly after Ilya's father's death, he travels to Russia and stays there for a few days. During this time, Shane calls him repeatedly with no answer. When Ilya eventually calls Shane back, he opens by flirting until Shane gently asks if his father is dead. Upon revealing this, Ilya

asks about what the media is saying and joking with Shane about their scoring competition. Then, Shane offers that he is there to help if Ilya needs anything to which Ilya responds “Take off your clothes” (29:30). It is then insinuated that they have sex over the video call. This scene does not contain any explicit sexual content, but it acts as a sort of foreplay to show us what will happen once the camera cuts. By setting up the scene prior to cutting it off, the audience can understand what the sexual dynamics will be even if they are not able to watch Shane and Ilya have sex.

When Shane answers the phone call from Ilya, he is obviously concerned and asks if everything is okay (28:26), before the mood shifts to Ilya flirting with him (28:39). This shift is representative of the general lack of emotionality within Shane and Ilya’s relationship and how Shane always desires more emotionality. Highlighting this dynamic prior to revealing Ilya’s father is dead clues the audience in the fact that Ilya seems to view Shane as a distraction. Ilya is using Shane and his emotional connection as a means to cope with the great loss that he is facing. The way that Ilya speaks to Shane in this scene also reaffirms the dominant and submissive social and sexual roles that they exhibit. These dynamics are further supported by the lack of emotionality that the dominant partner, Ilya, has and the emotional side that the submissive partner, Shane, has.

Generally, Ilya is portrayed as a more sexual character than Shane is, but this scene creates a false narrative in which sexual gay men only think about sex. Because Ilya revealed that his father died and then immediately suggests they have sex over the phone (29:40), harmful stereotypes about gay male sexuality are being promoted. The audience is put in a position in which they are exposed to two men, Shane and Ilya, one who is more sexual than the other. This more sexual man, Ilya, proceeds to frequently sext Shane, engage in phone sex after his father

dies, and is not as emotional as his counterpart. For the audience, this seems like just another gay man and they internalize this into schemas about how gay men act and live their lives. Because the audience does not critically engage with these scenes, they are liable to promote these harmful stereotypes in their own lives.

***Episode Two 34:52- 39:01: The Cuck Chair***

As the longest sex scene in the series at almost 3 full minutes of sexual activity, this scene best explores Shane and Ilya's sexual dynamics outside of their emotional relationship. The scene begins with Ilya telling Shane to take off his clothes and Ilya watching as he does so. The pair then move to the bedroom where Ilya pulls up a chair directly across from the bed and tells Shane to sit on the bed and touch himself. During this, Shane says "I need you" to Ilya which then leads to them having anal intercourse (38:18). This is shown quickly and roughly before cutting to the aftermath of the sex.

This scene shows one of the least emotional interactions that Shane and Ilya have during the series. This emotional distance is seen physically in the framing of this scene. With Ilya sitting in a chair at the end of the bed and Shane sitting at the headboard, the lack of closeness in this scene is portrayed physically (37:50). This distance persists throughout the scene with Ilya not being shown in bed with Shane until their intercourse is over (39:02), and then still they are sitting upright on either corner of the headboard. Choosing to highlight this scene allows us to put their emotionality in perspective; most viewers do not think anything is wrong with this sex scene between them until it concludes and Shane almost texts him. Only then do most viewers realize how little intimacy there was between Shane and Ilya in this scene. The audience is expected to be ignorant to the lack of intimacy because, generally, queer sex is presented with

very little intimacy. If the audience is watching this scene and enjoying it until they realize something is wrong after the fact, then they are becoming desensitized to the concept of gay love not being intimate. This is only the case because *Heated Rivalry* is advertised as a gay love story, but we see very little intimacy between them until the very last episode of the series. If *Heated Rivalry* is said to be a gay love story from its onset, then we would expect more love to continuously be seen between Shane and Ilya, rather than having one final episode in which their love for each other is made obvious.



Works Cited

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