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January 2019

**LOVE EUROCLYDON**  
THE FOREVER LOVE  
OF CORONATION STREET'S  
CARLA & PETER





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# That 'Carla Connor' Thing

**Joya Smith, Zora Jimenez, and Lee Clark, with Shantella Sherman**

*On August 14, the writers of the beloved, long-running British soap opera Coronation Street, sent viewers reeling by reigniting the famously doomed couple Carla Connor and Peter Barlow. Like the real-life impassioned romance of Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor, the Connor-Barlow duo, played brilliantly by actors Alison King and Chris Gascoyne, have allowed booze, infidelity, competing careers, and the prying eyes of outsiders to prick sensitive areas of their union to blood loss. The couple initiated a romance with Peter already in a committed relationship to LeAnne Battersby and Carla juggling an affair with her business partner Frank Foster with a crush on Peter. The relationship would survive Carla's rape, both of their drunken binges, Peter's infidelity with their child minder, an embittered custody battle for Peter's son, Simon; and Carla's miscarriage. When the marriage finally ended, in 2015, Carla and Peter were believed over and done for good; however, her return December 2017, immediately hinted to a continued spark between the two. A recent snogging session proved the chemistry remained top shelf, but is a rekindled romance in the works? As part of Acumen's Love Euroclydon lecture series, we take a closer examination of Carla Connor and all the men she's loved.*



## Walking into Frame

Carla Connor came into view initially as the demanding, high-maintenance wife of Paul Connor, the eldest sibling of a trio of Irish supplants to Weatherfield. It was in 2010, while on my 40th birthday excursion to London that the claws of Coronation Street character Carla Connor first sank into my system. Like only a few other television characters – especially on daily soap dramas, the character proved simultaneously alluring and tiring. Portrayed brilliantly by actress Alison King, Connor entered the frame as a tough-as-nails factory boss, who grafted her way out of humble beginnings.

The character exudes a runabout charm that feigns slapstick but borders on cruelty. Pretty Mean Girls comes to mind, except, Connor is rarely ever

mean. Like some juvenile delinquent, she drops zingers and jibes into serious conversations almost on impulse, but just as seamlessly champions the positions of the neighborhood underdogs (like Roy, a local café owner). Perhaps that is the “thing” that makes Carla Connor priceless – she confuses the hell out of viewers, forcing them to look at her, even when they don’t like her.

For as powerful and liberating as Carla Connor appears, she is all the more vulnerable, insecure, and reckless. Connor is the Sue Ellen Ewing of a new generation, replete with fits of passion, a squadron of men enfeebled by her beauty and charm, and a textbook drinking problem that works as an Achilles heel to her arrogance.

There is a particular vulnerability when one analyzes Carla Connor more fully. In fact, the super snotty, glam-boss, when the

layers are slowly peeled away, represents one of the best multi-dimensional soap characters ever. Born into the Donovan family on a London council estate – to an alcoholic mother, Sharon, a rebellious younger brother, Rob, and an abusive stepdad, George – Carla married into the Connor family and refused to look back. The Connors, comprised of Michelle, (Carla’s best friend), and Michelle’s two brothers Paul and Liam, served as social anchors to the abused, neglected, and oft-taunted Carla.

In 2012, Carla’s desire to distance herself from her family takes shape with the introduction of her younger brother, fresh from a prison stint. Carla stops short of welcoming Rob and refuses to offer him lodging or even the basic niceties afforded family. When she later hires Rob to work at Underworld, he is caught stealing silk fabric and attempting to flog it to

her competition.

“It’s not my fault you were the smelly girl with one pair of shoes! It was Mom’s fault, Dad’s, the Bacardi, but it wasn’t me!” Rob shouts her down after she threatens to have him arrested. The comment is a stinging blow that reminds her that Rob knows who she is beneath the designer clothing and sophisticated posturing. She subsequently decides against his arrest.

In a heartbreaking 2014 scene Carla is mortified to find she is pregnant, paralyzed by the thought that she lacked a natural affinity for mothering. She confirms her pregnancy just as news arrives that her step-dad, George, has died of a sudden heart attack. With the harshness of her own childhood flooded back, the prospects of becoming a mother, are all the more sobering to Carla.

Initially her comments to Michelle, who has seen her through confirming the pregnancy, sound selfish and coy. “My marriage and my factory are the only things that are important to me; they’re the reason I get out of bed for every morning and what I climb into bed for every night. I can’t jeopardize that!” But under Michelle’s pressure, Carla admits tearfully, that her own mother was a disaster and she could not expect to be much more.

What viewers identify, if they look close enough, is a woman whose beauty, “is off the scales,” but who wrestles with the insecurities that come when that beauty (coupled with her tenacity) don’t cause the world around her to yield to her desires. Carla Connor is used to getting her way, period.

This is seen initially with husband Paul – when he spends the money set aside for her to begin her own children’s clothing line. The stomping and pouting give way to her moving into his offices, taking over his brother, Liam’s desk, and conning a hand-



But unlike Paul, Liam, Trevor or Tony, the alcoholic bookie Peter Barlow would not give in – leading her straight to the bottle.

Elders often comment on the unsightliness of drunken women; however, Carla shines in drunkenness. (That reads oddly, but it is the case). Carla tosses one-liners, crashes her backside onto the cobblestones beneath her feet, and wallows in the catastrophe of not getting her way. Sobering usually requires her gaining a “moment of clarity,” and asking for help – whether from a sobriety group or Peter. Carla’s penchant for drink does eventually lead to the breakdown of Peter’s resolve and clears a pathway to his bed. They become each other’s support and literally

ful of his factory employees into working for her after hours as overtime. Paul gives in only because he cannot face the continued sulking. Later, when she falls in love with the married Peter, she is unfazed by his resistance, and resorts to brazen trickery in several attempts at seducing him.



*The Nine Lives of Carla Connor — First husband Paul Connor, followed by his brother Liam Connor, businessman Tony Gordan, the diabolical Frank Foster, Nick Tilsley (with whom she was wed — only a few hours), Daniel Barlow, Alex Connor, and Trevor Dean — the lovable bin man. But it has been Peter Barlow who made the greatest impact on Carla Connor's heart. / Photos courtesy of ITV.*

her attempts to win Peter were nil, he falls off the wagon, and heads to her. There is no judgment as Peter stumbles into her furniture, dropping cigarette ash all over the place. When he asks about showering, she smiles and says, “Be my guest, and there’s a towel on the rack, you may want to brush your teeth.” It is in these moments, after nearly three years of cat-and-mouse flirtation, that Peter determines Carla is the woman for him.

But be clear, the drunken “old soak” Carla, proves less a master manipulator, than a gauge of the

character’s emotional where-withal. In fact, King shines as both the lush and the in-love — both of which serve as elixirs to Peter, who enjoys rescuing distressed women. Note: Peter was arrested for bigamy after two of his wives met and confronted him in 2003. The desire to be rescued, plays just as well for Carla. With each lover before and after Peter, Carla seemed happy being adored and coddled after. Scenes with Peter, though, document a fierce desire to cover herself with him — lassoed about his neck, fastened to his shoul-

ders, leaned into or on top of him. It represented a chemistry beyond lust or even love. This posturing mimics that of a little girl to a father or favored brother or uncle. She is comfortable in and comforted by Peter’s presence, showing honest emotion, whether anger, tears or laughter. And at times, Carla is clearly annoyed by the intrusion of others — including Peter’s school-aged son Simon and her best friend Michelle — into her alone time with Peter. If we are honest, this is the way lovers truly love.

Despite the vitriol that the two become toxic as a couple, Corrie has them working the factory together. Given their passions for each other, history seems certain to repeat itself. Fans of the couple can only watch and wait.

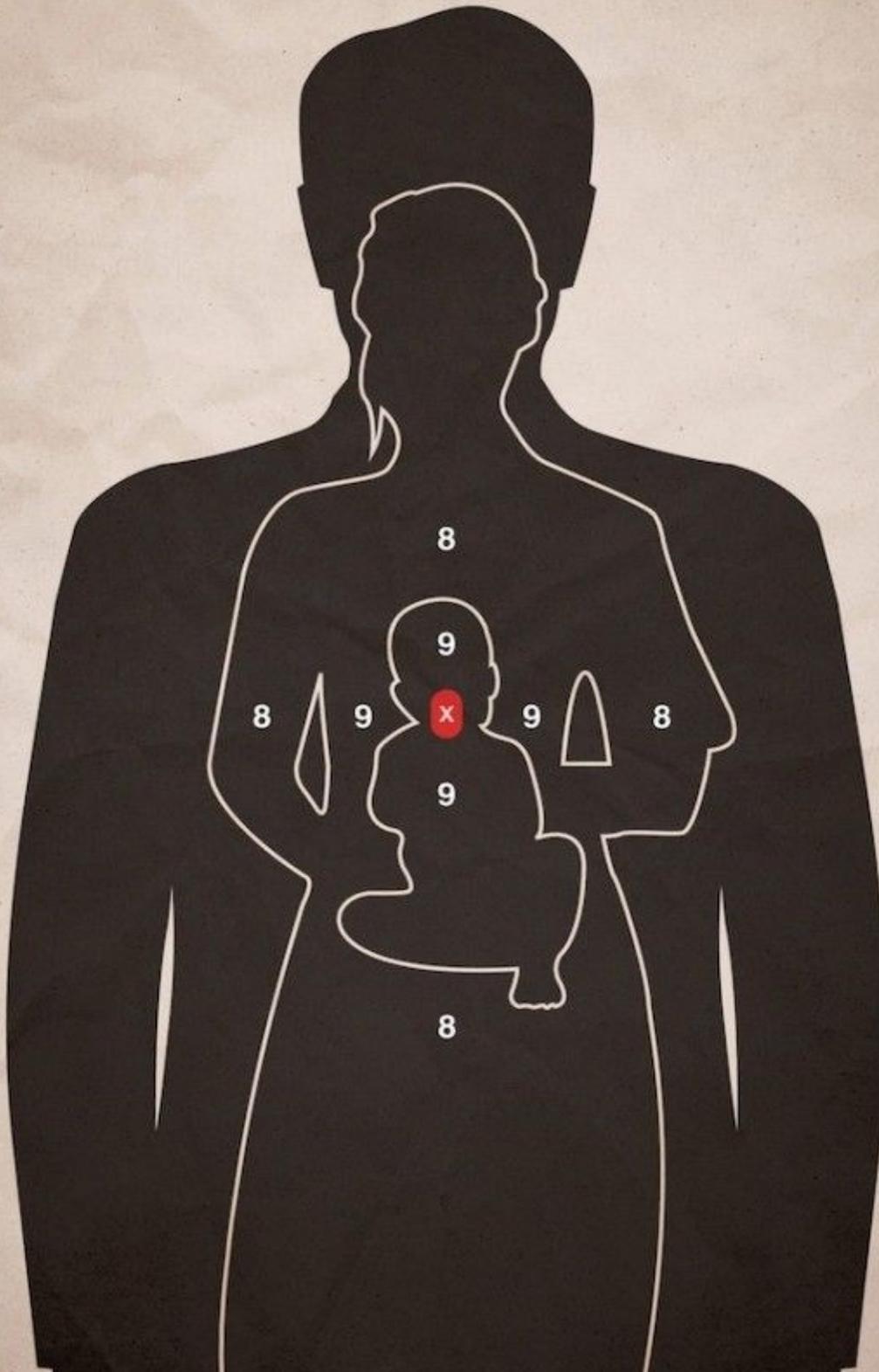
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Songs in  
the Key of  
#Carla

## The five songs that best reflect Carla & Peter's love

We had a tremendous time listening to songs we thought best told Peter and Carla's story. In the end, we narrowed it to these five, but would love to know what you would add...

### Wild is the Wind

Nina Simone  
This song is hauntingly passionate and speaks to the haplessness and helplessness the two feel in each other's company sometimes.



### Little Girl

Patti LaBelle  
This song epitomized Carla Connor, who we still think looks to Peter as a caretaker, provider, and confidante, as well as lover.



### I Don't Need You

Kenny Rogers  
This pair loves to pretend that they don't need each other and fool no one in the process. Kenny Rogers has their number!



### I Want To Know What Love Is

Foreigner  
We found that longing for home in the lyrics of this song. We think it fits.



### If Only For One Night

Luther Vandross  
Such a classic song of hoped-for passion. We think it would play great against Carla & Peter.





## Corrie's Alison King and Chris Gascoyne Dish the Dirt on Carla & Peter's Undying Love

By Zora Jimenez and Sophia Sparks with Shantella Y. Sherman

**T**here's a quiet beauty about Alison King that so separates her from the Carla Connor character she portrays on ITV's *Coronation Street* that it makes one take pause. King moves to welcome the *Acumen* magazine team with an embrace and kiss, and her uncanny resemblance to a young Sophia Loren is duly noted.

With little effort, King complements the fun-loving antics of her character's other half, Chris Gascoyne, who we don't mind reporting is seriously "DDG" (Drop Dead Gorgeous), seated in jeans and black tee. King and Gascoyne's on-screen romance represents a return for American viewers to long

-suffering but determined passion in scripted television; and opens a world of analytical content analyses for students whose majors run the gamut from psychology and social work to history and journalism.

Even more, the on-again / off-again romance of Carla Connor and Peter Barlow, demonstrates the power of popular culture to impact the everyday lives of everyday people.

As the pair sat down with *Acumen* magazine to offer insight into the complexities of their characters, we found a genuine affection between them -- one that lends itself

to their onscreen magic, which we term the **Forever Love of Carla and Peter**.

The seemingly ill-fated love affair between Carla Connor and Peter Barlow has been resuscitated several times since 2010, and to the delight of audiences seems to be headed for another miraculous return.

According to King, the energy fans believe lingers, actually does. "Will it ever be truly over between Carla and Peter? If one of us dies, maybe. Something will always be there. Even if they're with someone else or not, they've got a link that's



*“We’re starting a really exciting and grown-up chapter which begins with quite an extravagant Christmas present from Carla to Peter. It’s unusual and initially he can’t work it out, but then... And there’s a fabulous New Year’s Eve for the two of them.”*

*— Chris Gascoyne on what viewers can expect from Carla Connor and Peter Barlow in future Corrie episodes*

almost like family that pulls them together,” King said. “It actually runs a lot deeper than that, but they are as linked as two people can be. So, if they are in the bar, they can be with someone else and there’s a look they give each other, or they notice each other because they can’t ignore each other. It’s that deep.”

Gascoyne concurs, saying the feelings between the two are so deeply ingrained it’s impossible to ignore.

“Carla understands Peter, and I don’t think you get very many people in your life that give you unconditional love. I think it’s just that, really, that she genuinely does understand him,” Gascoyne said. “Even though they are not good for each other. Maybe

they’re really similar.”

Gascoyne said that at the core of the couple’s love are childhoods he describes as ‘train wrecks,’ which make them unlikely allies, as well as lovers.

Through the years, King said the resiliency of Carla and Peter’s relationship, which has weathered alcoholism, infidelity, and their individual demons, owes a lot to their unflinching support of each other.

“Carla has got a really good way of testing men’s patience and strengths and she’ll push a man to stretch his trust. She wants to see how far they’ll go to stay with her. She’ll push their buttons as much as they will let her and if they disappear, then that’s what she’s used to and that’s fine,” King said. “But Peter doesn’t go anywhere. He’s not a

flake – he can be flaky, but not when it comes to her. She knows that she can always rely on him. Whoever he’s with and wherever he is, Peter will be on Carla’s side.”

This was seen most recently with Carla’s kidney disease and Peter finding his girlfriend Toyah had lied about the paternity of his daughter. In what both actors say will quickly signal “a new and more mature” relationship, Carla and Peter will face some hard truths about their pasts, beginning with an upcoming episode dedicated entirely to the Barlow clan. Gascoyne told Acumen magazine that Peter will examine his life choices — including Carla — against his upbringing.

“I think Peter’s getting closer to working out something about himself and the people in his life, including Carla,” Gascoyne said. “He’s always in love with Carla, but I don’t think he necessarily always likes her.”

Like an old, married couple, King chimes in, “That’s because he doesn’t like himself.”

“No,” Gascoyne laughs. “Well, Ali, you’re right, but I don’t think she always likes herself either, so it’s like Peter constantly having a mirror in front of him. When Carla does something that Peter would do, he can quite quickly see it and visa versa. She can quickly see what he’s doing and that’s the problem as well.”

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*Euroclydon—a perfect storm that destroys all in its path, until it eventually destroys itself. When applied to love, a euroclydon proves intense, passionate, relentless, and devastating.*

## *The Forever Love of Carla & Peter*

*By Sophia Sparks and Stacey Palmer with Shantella Sherman*



*I*n early 2018 when Coronation Street writers signaled a possible return of love and lust between fan-favorites Carla Connor and Peter Barlow, most viewers expressed excitement at the possibilities. Though a healthy bid toward the hopeless romantics of the world, the belief that love would conquer all and reunite the pair, has been side-eyed by most residents of the Cobbles. Others, including Carla's best mate and former sister-in-law, Michelle, have openly shouted against a reunion. With a confirmation by Carla and Peter that "that spark is still there," Acumen magazine decided to pry a bit into how it may feel to tread old ground as wiser, perhaps more mature characters.



“There was really this three- to four-year gap where we were not together on the show. We’ve now gone through all wonderful shapes and sizes, the two of us – literally – we’ve gone through everything together, haven’t we, Chris?” King said, jokingly noting that Gascoyne has had more faces and haircuts than she has during their screen time.

In addition to the changes in his hair and her lippy, the characters have grown, according to fans, more likeable and relatable.

Still, in classic Carla Connor form, what was to be the frailty of kidney failure, the suicide of her brother, and the loss of her business, instead lead to the reactionary *cougaring* of two of Corrie’s youngest leading men.

For King, while evoking a bit of Anne Bancroft’s Mrs. Robinson (*The Graduate*), signaled Carla’s entre into middle-age, it was a development the Leicester-born actress took in characteristic stride.

“It’s embarrassing isn’t it? I come back off of a two-year break and they’re telling me, ‘you’re old’ and all of the punters are in the Rovers going ‘she’s too old for [Daniel]’. I felt like a right nump-ty!” King ribbed. “They put you

“

**Carla and Peter are constantly trying to be really cool in each other’s company. And then they’ll make idiots of themselves all the time, so they play that game also.**

”

— Chris Gascoyne on the Forever Love of Carla & Peter

with the youngest boy in town and you just have to get on with it. He was shaking with nerves... and so was I. It’s harsh to be on this open set and to have [directors] go “kiss.” And everyone’s going, ‘Oh, bless him.’ And I’m like ‘Bless him?’ What about me?”

Still, King shies away from the thought of having an ‘it’ factor that makes Carla Connor believable as the gorgeous lady-boss, who can cougar with the best of them and has driven not a few men to great destruction.

“The age group of the girls who watch and identify with Carla Con-

nor in the UK may believe she has that type of appeal. She’s a strong character,” King said. “Viewers tend to see Carla’s weaknesses as her strengths because she always seems to pull herself out of things. I guess, I also pull some inspiration for Carla’s character from my mum, who is a very strong woman.”

Oddly enough, as King’s character strengthens in one way, Gascoyne’s Peter Barlow has shifted into a softer, but far more powerful portrayal. In addition to heart-warming scenes with the wee characters Susie and Oliver, Gascoyne has nailed emotionally-charged scenes following Peter’s loss of paternity and the more recent Barlow episode with William Roache and Rob Mallard.

“Sometimes actors don’t want to be seen as weak. But I think those things – I’m 50 – I’m not afraid to let my emotions out whatever they are because that’s a positive thing. To be able to show a character’s more vulnerable side, is really important rather than having to hold it all in and play a one-dimensional macho character,” Gascoyne told Acumen magazine. “We all have many facets to our personalities and I think as I’ve gotten older, I’ve become braver in

what I will do and show. I like that side of Peter.”

So, how will all of the personal growth and development of Carla and Peter potentially impact their relationship?

For one, disagreements between the two resemble schoolyard tantrums, usually ending with one or the other stomping off, rather than past yelling matches. Even this, the pair said, points to the fondness of the characters for each other.

“They are both like children, and well, Peter is exceptionally childish...” King begins.

“He *really is* childish,” Gascoyne interjects. “I think it’s because of his relationship with Ken and his upbringing. Peter is stuck in many ways at a certain age. But then, Carla is also stuck.”

As if stumbling upon a eureka! moment, King adds, “Maybe that’s why Carla likes you, because her family was so much of a mess up and her mum and false dad – they all left her. But they were as rough as you are, Chris, so she went after someone who is like that, but who she knows won’t leave her.”

On being stuck together in a perpetually shifting space, King and Gascoyne claim, it may be just the thing that makes Carla and Peter fun amid the ‘will-they or won’t they’ holding pattern.

“Carla and Peter are constantly trying to be really cool in each other’s company,” Gascoyne said. “And then they’ll make idiots of themselves all the time. We did one scene where at the end of it, I said something to Ali and I touched her nose and went ‘beep-beep,’ and it wasn’t written into the script, but it was kept in. I think for me it’s the everyday touches that make it work between our characters.”

King agrees.

“Like the scene we shot today with the Indian takeaway,” King said. “Carla’s teasing him with the menu, but it was nice. It’s those tiny things that are organic that grow with the show and the characters and add a kind of nuance to their scenes together.”

The two said they are afforded the stage luxury of talking over one another at times, which allows the camera to capture their bond, unfiltered. At the core of that bond is the confidence shared between two performers who respect each other’s work.



“Some of what you see is just that trust in each other as actors that Chris and I have. That’s us being comfortable and knowing each other so well that we’re confident things will be alright, that we’re safe and that we’re going to deliver some good work,” King said.

But as for whether these tremendous vibes will lead to a happily ever after for Carla Connor

and Peter Barlow, the two only offer hints and riddles.

“That’s the thing with Carla and Peter, they say one thing and then they do another. They say, ‘no, no, no,’ and then they do something that’s confusing that actually means something other than ‘no,’ Gascoyne said. “In the end, they do still love each other and they are able to laugh at themselves and each other. And that is just the best.”



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# Rhyme & Reason

## The Research Beneath The Forever Love of Carla and Peter

*Content Analysis-Driven Theory and Research Conducted by the College Interns of The Acumen Group*



In addition to learning methods of deconstructing media (television, film, and music), Acumen students work to extrapolate themes, dissect characters, and document trends. The raw data collected through Likert scale surveys and viewing intensives, help them document the symbiotic relationship between life and art, as well as the power media holds in shaping viewers' lives, loves, and the people around them. Areas of analysis have included Tropes of Masculinity / Womanhood, Interpretations of "Outsiders," Identification of Racial and Gender Stereotypes, and Problems in Character Dimensions.

The **Love Euroclydon** series sought to document love, romantic, and sexual trends in scripted television series. Each group of students (25, divided into working groups of 5) developed hypotheses about how different series approached love relationships. Groups chose their own series and determined within each series which couples to investigate. Soap operas quickly took center stage, and UK soaps, *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders*, became staples among Acumen students, with Corrie character, Carla Connor taking on an almost cultish favor among them. For instance, since 2014, students have presented research on everything from the character's clothing ("The Cobble Couture & Lady Bossism of Carla Connor") to her steady stream of romances ("The 9 Lives Lovers of Carla Connor"). This year, the stellar research of Sophia Sparks, Andrea Currie, Jeff Canady, Stacey Palmer, and Robert Edwards, in dissecting the relationship between Carla Connor and Peter Barlow, warranted a trip to the Cobbles and interviews with actors Alison King and Chris Gascoyne by Acumen historian and publisher, Shantella Sherman.

The series ***The Forever Love of Carla and Peter*** took shape once Sherman's interview was transcribed and assessed by students, who listened for nuances between the actors as well as the responses they provided. Students also charted how close their hypotheses came to King's and Gascoyne's theories of Carla and Peter's relationship.

**Lead Researchers:** Sophia Sparks, Jeff Canady, Andrea Currie, Stacey Palmer, and Robert Edwards

**Associate and Student Researchers:** Giselle Bailey, Queshia Bradley, Jason Browder, Richard Hollister, Kenshi Lewis, Shayla Trimble, and Kalenda Weller



### Group Statement

For our content analysis, we chose ITV's nearly 60-year-old soap opera *Coronation Street*, and for this session, our group focused on the relationship of Carla Connor and Peter Barlow. Initially, Sparks and Currie were attracted to the depth of the Connor character and placed actress Alison King's delivery against that of Viola Davis' role as Annalise Keating in the U.S. ABC drama *How to Get Away with Murder*.

Eventually, our readings of the Connor character found more nuance when teamed with her on-screen love interest Peter Barlow (played by actor Chris Gascoyne). This led to a unanimous decision to

examine Carla Connor and Peter Barlow's relationship using some of the same filters and questions as the Connor-Keating assessment, but with a more directed focus on unrequited or forbidden love, childhood longing, and sexual intimacy as emotional comfort.

Originally we worked within the hypothesis that Connor and Keating, despite professional success and exceptional physical attractiveness, found themselves longing for "home." That hypothesis would later incorporate two of Connor's lovers Tony Gordon and Peter Barlow; and include Keating only as a reference point comparison. The term "home" is taken from Maya Angelou's concept of a



vey respondents described as both “nurturing,” and “sensual.”

Jeff Canady, an award-winning educator and social scientist along with attorney Robert Edwards, examined the data set from the perspective of eugenic taint – or inherent (genetic) dysfunction in the characters Carla Connor and Peter Barlow. Eugenic theories on corrupt genes posit social behaviors including immorality, alcohol abuse, and poor impulse control, develop as germ plasm (transmittable material) just like eye color, hair texture, and height within DNA. Believing society could predict the likelihood of children becoming criminals or burdens to society based on their parents’ behaviors, eugenics mandated the testing and classification of populations. Those deemed “socially unfit” were segregated from fit populations in asylums, homes for the wayward, or industrial schools, until the end of their reproductive

years or released from care following surgical sterilization which ensured they did not reproduce offspring of similar defective stock. Canady and Edwards’ interest in Carla and Peter grew from episodes where one or both characters linked their behaviors to genetics or early childhood neglect.

“The number of times Peter says, ‘it’s in my genes,’ or alludes to his dad, Ken, as the real culprit to his infidelity or drinking, sent research alarms blaring.” Canady said. “When Carla described the miscarried child of she and Peter as a “monster,” in one episode, it was a decidedly eugenic stream that set aside the physical attractiveness, mental aptitude, financial stability, and overall health of the parents and instead spoke directly to their inherent genetic fitness. It was chilling, and critically so,” Edwards added.

Andrea Currie, a senior international affairs executive and Stacey Palmer, a graduate journalism / digital media student, used the Coronation Street data set for Carla Connor and Peter

physical, social – even sexual need to belong that “allows [one] to ignore the obvious and to create real places or even illusory places, befitting [ones] imagination.” Additionally, we found that both Carla Connor and Annalise Keating suffered from a longing for home, that in the case of Connor, found satiation through lover (later husband) Peter Barlow, who was similarly longing. This expanded our inquiry and we then sought to identify that longing in Connor, but to also document and project long-term, the trajectory of a relationship with two equally yearning people.

Following our collective Content Analysis results, we worked the results into individual papers within our academic fields. When placed together, the works read as one interdisciplinary essay, but they may also be taken individually to support our theories.

Sophia Sparks, as a physical scientist specializing in the body’s chemical reactions to stress and loneliness,

wanted to know how alcohol and intimacy impacted Carla Connor and Peter Barlow. “I wanted to chart their relationships as an additional variable to their stress levels and drinking. How often did sexual contact and alcohol work as ready solutions to loneliness or stress? When both characters realized they were abusing drink, did sex or some other vice take its place? Did having a partner with an alcohol addiction complicate or support their sobriety?” Sparks offers. “Connor proved a fabulous character to assess, and when the Barlow character was added, we had several brilliant moments when the theories of our hypothesis came together like puzzle pieces.” Thesis: It is a desire to belong to someone – preferably one another – and unconditionally so – that drives Connor’s and Barlow’s affections. This is an emotional / chemical response to childhood longing for parental affection. This is evidenced (and documented in this work) by their interactions, which sur-

Barlow to examine romantic love in what they describe as an age of *microwave affairs* — where everything is quick, easy, and forgettable. This relationship, according to Currie and Palmer works against that trend, as Connor and Barlow’s relationship developed over a substantial period of time and despite a considerable number of obstacles.

Peter Barlow has a reputation for being the consummate ‘bad boy’ who is charming as hell, but consistently witless with women. Possessing a Deniro-esque quality (little guy, big personality, great lover), Barlow maintains a different type of passion for Carla Connor — one that Currie said shows off his kinder, gentler side. In what Gascoyne would later describe as shared childhood neglect, the couple also share a bit of longing, according to Palmer. In a scene Currie and Palmer said supported their hypothesis, Connor shows up unexpectedly at her then-husband Paul’s Christmas party only to find none of his employees know her or that Paul is married.

“Carla Connor has grown into herself after years of rejection, self-discovery, and a considerable amount of mischief,” Palmer said. “With each relationship, except that with Barlow, Connor seems to be crying out for someone to take her seriously... acknowledge more than her beauty.”

Carla Connor and Peter Barlow give credence to Zora Neale Hurston’s concept of *hitting a straight lick with a crooked stick* — or operating in life through masked gestures and concealed meaning. With the exception of one another, no one really knows either of them. Their ability to play chameleon and hide in plain view, allows both to recreate themselves and survive. It also makes them willing and welcomed accomplices to each other’s mischief. **The Forever Love of Carla & Peter** interview with King and Gascoyne was conducted after our survey, and as the actors confirmed many of our theories, we count this research a proven success.

#### METHODOLOGY

Acumen researchers watched episodes of *Coronation Street* between the years 2010-2014, and 2018, specifically charting the friendship and later romantic relationship between Carla Connor and Peter Barlow. They then devised questions that sought to unlock the nature of the relationship — its strengths, weaknesses, fault-lines, and potential for continued growth. A total of 50 Likert Scale questions were created that required responses of Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither, Disagree or Strongly Disagree.



#### SAMPLE LIKERT SCALE SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. **Carla Connor and Peter Barlow are both manipulative**  
Strongly Agree - Agree - Neither - Disagree - Strongly Disagree
2. **Carla Connor and Peter Barlow are products of their upbringing or environment**  
Strongly Agree - Agree - Neither - Disagree - Strongly Disagree
3. **Carla Connor and Peter Barlow's behavior both individually and as a couple point to genetic or innate dysfunction**  
Strongly Agree - Agree - Neither - Disagree - Strongly Disagree
4. **Carla Connor is a physically attractive character**  
Strongly Agree - Agree - Neither - Disagree - Strongly Disagree
5. **Peter Barlow is a physically attractive character**  
Strongly Agree - Agree - Neither - Disagree - Strongly Disagree
6. **Carla Connor and Peter Barlow's relationship is immoral**  
Strongly Agree - Agree - Neither - Disagree - Strongly Disagree
7. **Relationships between troubled people always fail**  
Strongly Agree - Agree - Neither - Disagree - Strongly Disagree
8. **Despite the alcoholism and the extra-marital affair, I wanted to see Carla and Peter together**  
Strongly Agree - Agree - Neither - Disagree - Strongly Disagree
9. **Leanne drove Peter to the affair with Carla?**  
Strongly Agree - Agree - Neither - Disagree - Strongly Disagree
10. **Carla and Peter's relationship is true to life**  
Strongly Agree - Agree - Neither - Disagree - Strongly Disagree



See sampling on previous page. Each student chose random respondents by approaching those exiting one of five Metro subway lines in the D.C. metropolitan area—which includes Southern Maryland and Northern Virginia. Stations used were Shaw—Howard University, Foggy Bottom—George Washington University, Tenleytown—American University, Pentagon City, and Silver Spring. In addition to affording the survey the largest range in population demographics (high school and college students, business professionals, market merchants, tourists, and retirees), these areas catered to those who had at least 30 minutes to view clips, engage with Acumen, and complete surveys.

Each respondent was shown a series of 12 clips believed to best document Carla and Peter's relationship, before answering the 50 Likert scale questions and 10 additional short response questions.

Acumen tabulated the results and paired them alongside the King and Gascoyne interview to produce a full assessment of the characters.

#### **SURVEY RESULTS**

Surveys were conducted over a 30-day period, with subjects ranging in age from 19 to 78. The median age was 30. The 252 participants were made up of 118 males, 134 females, and 7 individuals who self-identified as transgender.

Overall, there was tremendous support for the relationship between Carla Connor and Peter Barlow, with an overwhelming 91 percent of respondents reporting that they would like to see the couple together, despite the initial manner in which the relationship developed. An additional 3 percent responded Neither, and only 1 percent believed the couple was doomed and should steer clear of one another.

To the question of Carla and Peter's personal and relational dys-

function being a product of genetics, environment, or simply the luck of the draw, the majority of respondents (79 percent) believed unresolved childhood emotions or environment created Peter's propensity toward infidelity and drinking, as well as Carla's need to control and sometimes manipulate men and situations. Still, a fair number (18 percent) believed some genetic components operate in the behaviors of Carla and Peter which count more as generational.

Both King and Gascoyne were celebrated by Acumen's survey responders as physically attractive or sexually appealing, (98 percent), the remaining respondents — six married couples, thought it best not to answer in the company of their spouses. (That translates to 100 percent, by our calculations!) Additional highlights (from the sample questions) include:

Nearly 60 percent of those surveyed Strongly Agreed that both Carla Connor and Peter Barlow are manipulative, and in short follow-up respons-



## ASSESSMENTS

### ANDREA

I think at the beginning of their relationship Carla and Peter genuinely cared for each other. Carla appears to always be honest regarding her feelings for Peter and her desire to have another large glass of wine. I believe she simply wants to not feel the pain of life's sorrows by numbing herself through alcohol. Peter, most respondents believe, cares for Carla, still. But he also cared for Leanne, Tina, and any woman who showed him attention. Peter does not understand what it means to be truly committed; however, Carla represents his best chance of getting it right. This is what keeps Peter's ex-wife Leanne shooting daggers at Carla years after her marriage to Peter ended. I believe King and Gascoyne are very good actors and have developed the characters well. No matter the circumstances, I enjoy seeing Carla and Peter together.

It may be that Peter and Carla's problems are caused by undesirable DNA, but more likely that their cultural surroundings and lifestyles materially influence their behavior.

### ROBERT

It's obvious from their interactions that Carla Connor and Peter Barlow are drawn to each other by aesthetics and what is clearly a symbiotic, codependent relationship. This, again, is not genetic.

I believe these characters have long since given up on the possibility that their relationship is dangerous to them; however, for those outsiders who wander into the quagmire that is Peter and Carla, suffering and death are a real possibility. That said, I, like most of those I surveyed still believe this couple works. Against all odds and logic, we are cheering for Carla and Peter's relationship to succeed.

This isn't a genetics issue, though, it's cultural. The program is set in an environment where public houses are central to all things community. In the United States, no one airs their dirty

es, noted each was rather "childish." (See [The Forever Love of Carla & Peter](#) interviews for King and Gascoyne's comments on the characters' childishness.) Immorality did not factor wildly in the opinions of those surveyed, when asked about the nature of Carla and Peter's relationship. Nearly 75 percent Strongly Disagreed to the relationship being immoral. Many acknowledged the fight Peter initially put up in resisting Carla and his then-wife, Leanne, having engaged in an affair with Nick within their reasoning.

The majority of respondents (92 per-cent) Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed that relationships between troubled individuals tended to fail. In fact, one of the strengths of *Coronation Street* (and its writers) for the

Acumen team was its strong push to reunite characters.

"You look at Ken and Deirdre Barlow, Vera and Jack Duckworth or even Liz and Jim McDonald — they are heavily flawed and over long periods of time fight, break up, leave town, reunite, and remarry, but they never give up on one another," Palmer said. "This was apparent to many of the people we surveyed — and it was a good thing."

These responses lent themselves to Carla and Peter being viewed, not as star-crossed lovers, but certainly two people who deserved a second (third, or fourth) chance at getting it right. More than 90 percent wanted to see the couple try again in 2019 and saw the relationship as "true to life."

laundry in a local Starbucks. It may be less a real issue of alcoholism than a culture that centers liquor amid all of life's happenings. Notice, Carla and Peter flourished in Los Angeles.

### SOPHIA

While I did not like the fact that Peter committed adultery, I understand why and how his need to be a hero to Carla helped initiate their relationship. Carla and Peter will always seek comfort in familiar terrain — each other, because they are two sides of the same coin.

Instead of judgement, Carla and Peter seem to stand at the ready to support one another, without casting judgement. In 2018 episodes, their conversations with each other are far more transparent, and they seem to have discovered that they can be brutally honest with each other, and not risk rejection. When Carla tells Peter “maybe you’re not quite the toxic, cheating, disaster area of yesteryear,” in a July 2018 episode, his reaction made me think she’d just handed him the greatest compliment on earth. Also, the scenes between King and Gascoyne following the break up of Peter’s relationship with Toyah, serve as romantic tinder. The actors found a way of teasing out old feelings, hurts and all, to create truly caring and loving scenes — without overt sexual content.

The arrival of Johnny Connor onto the Cobbles as Carla’s biological father, may have ended that euphoric need to be “cared for” by Peter. Still, Peter moves to rescue or protect Carla as soon as financial troubles arise with her purchasing the Underworld factory. I, and the respondents I surveyed for Acumen actually enjoy Peter playing the “knight in shining armor,” even if he’s being manipulative in the process. Following the betrayal Peter suffered at Toyah’s hands, and Carla’s recent brush with death, the couple may have matured to a point that they can freely love again.



### JEFF

I wanted desperately to find a genetic component to the dysfunction that previously plagued the relationship between Carla and Peter; however, it simply was not there. Even though they are among the most intense couples we’ve seen in scripted television in some years, Carla Connor and Peter Barlow make sense. They are the underdog, everyday lovers who fight against the naysayers and their own baggage, to love. The trajectory of the relationship, when watching years of cat-and-mouse games between them, seemed dire. But from the start, there existed a level of compassion within their passion that made them likeable. This came across to those I surveyed, who ignored the comments by both Peter and Carla that somehow his father and her mother predisposed them to their poor choices and habits. If anything, the pair have an understanding of each other now that would make for a decent marriage.

### STACEY

It took weeks for Carla Connor and Peter Barlow to grow on me — LOL! I was the last to complete my assignments, but once I started my screenings, I was hooked! In fact, the reason why I delayed everyone else, is because I started binge watching the entire Carla / Peter saga a third time. Okay, that aside, my theory about these two working against the trend of microwave relationships, held up. I also found through conversations with those surveyed that most relationships are deeper than those around understand. This became apparent in the 2018 episodes when every person near Carla and Peter sensed that the two were becoming too friendly and began actively chiming in to offer their opinions. Michelle, Roy, LeAnne, Johnny, Simon... The question is not will Carla and Peter reunite, but how will they cope with the fallout of their reunion among friends and family? We cannot confirm with this printing exactly what will happen with Carla & Peter, but we’re pretty certain love is just around the Cobble corners.

**See more content analysis research for  
The Forever Love of Carla & Peter at  
[www.theacumengroup.org](http://www.theacumengroup.org)**



**Kids don't come  
with turn signals.**

**Slow down and watch for pedestrians.**

The ACUMEN Magazine

# SPEED ROUND



The Acumen magazine team usually ask a series of short-response questions, known as the Speed Round, to end celebrity interviews. The function of the Speed Round is to determine whether or not we've made the subjects comfortable enough to divulge more candid information about themselves or their beliefs. None of the questions are particularly risqué or controversial, but do offer insight into the performers, rather than the characters they portray. For Ali King and Chris Gascoyne, who portray Coronation Street's Carla Connor and Peter Barlow, Acumen decided to have them do the Speed Round, together. In addition to their marvelous ability to complete each other's thoughts, (they really are like an old, married couple), I was curious about how well they knew each other off-set. To our delight, King and Gascoyne brought humor and fun to their responses. Enjoy!



**Name the last book you read?**

**Chris:** *People of the Abyss* by Jack London which is a great book. I read a lot. I've started to try and paint now, but I'm useless. I need to know how to build up the canvass.

**Ali:** Well, we can paint together.

**Chris:** Well, we could try. I'm not

very good at it.

**Ali:** I'll show you how, Chris. As for what I've been reading, (pulling the book from her tote) *The Year She Stole* by Jonathan Harvey, who's one of the *Coronation Street* writers. It's very good.

**If you weren't acting, what would you do for a living?**

**Ali:** Massage...I'm good at massage. I'd like to own a little coffee shop with those lovely chairs that you can sit in and lean forward. That would be a nice, calm place for people to meet and have coffee and get a massage. I'd love to get qualified for it and it's one of my favorite things to



do. So, if I ever retired, that's what I'd like to do.

**Chris:** I'd like to...

**Ali:** Work at my massage shop?

**Chris:** I think I'd like to have a little coffee shop with you!

### Tattoos and Piercings?

**Chris:** All of my tattoos are real; most I got when I was pretty young. No piercings though.

**Ali:** No tattoos as yet, and only the ears pierced. Oh, I used to have a bellybutton ring, but that's gone now.

### What advice would you give your 21-year-old self today knowing what you know now about life?

**Ali:** Know how beautiful and young you are and embrace your spirit and go do whatever you want to do because *you can do it*. Don't

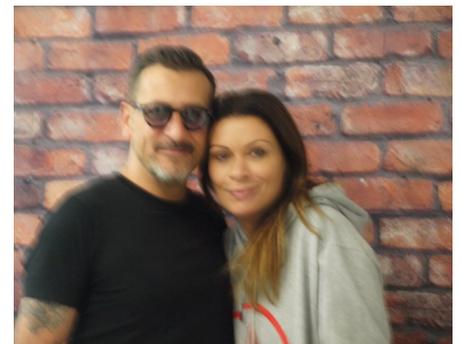
be scared of getting out there or of asking for help. Appreciate the body you're in; and hang around nice people who are kind to you because kindness is so underrated.

**Chris:** I agree with that. And just don't be scared to do things because it's all over one day. It doesn't feel like it, but one day you've gotten old and you're like 'What am I doing?' I guess, above all else, have fun. And I don't mean fun in the sense of drinking and going mad, but in the sense of happiness and laughing a lot, and not caring about the judgements of other people.

### Name your one guilty pleasure

**Ali:** Playing pool and having a pint.

**Chris:** Watching *I'm A Celebrity Get Me Out of Here...* (laughing).



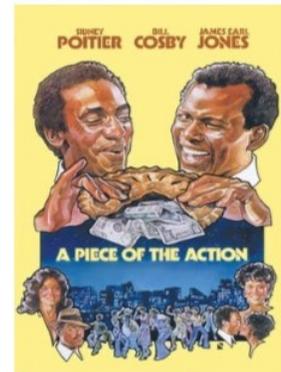
I hate all that, but it's the one thing I do watch, and I find it fascinating. I couldn't do it and I admire the fact that these people are doing it, but also wonder *what* they're doing at the same time. I love that I get slightly excited when it's not so far away and the line up is coming out. Yeah Ali, you never knew that about me, did you?

**Ali:** No, I never would have said that in a million years, so it really is a guilty pleasure.



# POP-EU

A FILM SERIES EXAMINING POPULAR EUGENICS  
IN BLACK TELEVISION & FILM



Popular scientific theories of the 18th and early 19th century held that black-skinned people represented a subhuman and inferior species of beings. Though disproven, the belief continues to permeate popular culture along with stereotypes of blackness as animalistic, degenerate, criminal, immoral and socially inept. The Acumen Group's Pop Eu (Eugenics) Series examines the images of African-Americans, Black British, Africans and West Indians in Western television series and film. In analyzing Tropes of Masculinity, Civility & Respectability among Black Women, and Dysgenic Youth, viewers learn how to deconstruct bias, and work against it. Please join historian Dr. Shantella Sherman for our week-long film series. Check the Acumen website for more information and schedule.