



# Carol

Director: Todd Haynes

Ratings info: infrequent strong sex

15

## Synopsis

*Carol* is a US drama set in the 1950s about the relationship between a shop girl and a glamorous older woman.

## About the film

Todd Haynes returns to the melodrama genre in his 2015 adaptation of Patricia Highsmith's novel, *The Price of Salt*. Much like the novel on which it is based, *Carol* explores themes of love and desire set against a backdrop of social and legal discrimination.

## BBFC age rating and about the film



*Carol* is rated **15 for infrequent strong sex**.

The film arrived for classification with a 15 category request. Although we don't have to award a film the same rating as that which the distributor has requested, it does help us get an idea of what strength of material a film may contain before we view it, and it also gives us an indication as to what audience the film is aimed at and/or going to be marketed at by the distributor.

In the case of *Carol*, the film is directed by a notable auteur filmmaker who - at this point in his career - had predominantly made dramas aimed at adults. The film is a period piece with two adults as its main characters. As such, the 15 category suggested that the film was going to be marketed predominantly at adult audiences.

### Classification Issues

In terms of classification issues, the film's rating is predominantly a result of a single issue that occurs in a single scene in the film: the sex scene.

At 12A our Guidelines states that 'Sexual activity may be briefly and discreetly portrayed'. Although the scene is sensitively shot and has strong narrative justification, the scene is too visually detailed and prolonged to be acceptable at the 12A level. In particular, the inclusion of breast nudity, which is quite frequent during the scene, and the strong implication of oral sex imbues the scene with a strong level of detail that requires a 15 rating. However, as it's only an isolated scene we decided to describe it as 'infrequent strong sex' in the ratings info.

We often get asked if we classify depictions of LGBTQIA+ sex scenes differently. The answer is a firm no. We apply BBFC guidelines to the same standard regardless of sexual orientation.

The film's portrayal of homophobia is sensitively handled, clearly critiqued by the film's narrative and reflects the social context of the 1950s in which the film is set. This issue would have been acceptable at a lower rating.

Equally, the film's two uses of strong language would have been acceptable at 12A, as would some of the verbal moderate sex references.

Brief scenes of gun threat are not intense and don't affect the film's rating.


The film also contains lots of scenes of smoking. Although smoking is a classification consideration, it tends to only be an issue at the junior categories (U and PG); it could possibly be a category defining issue at a higher rating, but only if smoking is glamorised or directly made to look appealing to children. In the case of *Carol*, smoking reflects the social culture of the time and is not a main classification consideration.

## Discussion Points

- The film is rated 15. Do you agree or disagree with the rating? What are your reasons for this?
- One of the key tropes of film melodrama is that they portray heightened emotional states. This can be achieved through narrative, performance or through the film form itself, such as through use of colour or mise-en-scène. In what ways does Todd Hayne's express the characters' emotions through film form in Carol?
- Carol and Therese are at different stages in their lives when they meet. In what ways do the two women compare and contrast?
- In what ways does the film reflect the social politics of the 1950s? Consider the way in which the film highlights the role of women and attitudes towards homosexuality.
- Did the film end the way in which you expected? Why is it significant that the film has a positive resolution and what impact do you think this has on the reading of the film's social politics?

## Further viewing

*Far From Heaven* (Todd Haynes, 2002) 

*All That Heaven Allows* (Douglas Sirk, 1955) 

*Volver* (Pedro Almodovar, 2006) 