# British comedies from past decades spark mixed reactions from Gen Z viewers



British comedies from past decades continue to spark debate as younger viewers reassess their humour and cultural relevance. A recent exploration by the Daily Mail introduced members of Generation Z to some of the UK's classic and once-beloved television comedies, revealing mixed reactions to shows that are now considered outdated or controversial in today’s social climate.

The inquiry included well-known series and films such as the long-running Carry On films, the 1970s sitcom Till Death Us Do Part, the BBC’s Are You Being Served?, the 1990s ITV show Men Behaving Badly, and the early 2000s sketch series Little Britain. Viewers aged between 23 and 25 watched clips to judge whether these comedies have stood the test of time.

The 1960s film Carry On Doctor, part of the extensive Carry On series, was met with some approval for its camp humour and playful take on hospital life. The film features sexual innuendos and flirtatious nurses, which prompted comments such as “Oh wow, very sexy” from one viewer. Emily Cooper, one of the group, said she enjoyed the campness and found it funny “because it was clearly a joke,” though she acknowledged that such content likely wouldn’t appear on modern television. Some lines, however, such as a reference to liking to touch young girls’ “yo-yos,” caused unease and confusion among the viewers.

In stark contrast, Till Death Us Do Part, which portrayed the Garnett family including the outspoken and often racist patriarch Alf Garnett, was described as uncomfortable viewing. The show, popular in the 1960s and 70s and known as a satire of bigoted views, included repeated racial slurs that shocked the young audience. Poppy Gibson commented on the racial language saying “Jesus Christ that is so racist,” while Poppy James noted its unsettling effect, especially “with the laughter” accompanying the remarks. Emily Cooper remarked, “I can't believe this is the 1970s - this feels way older,” expressing discomfort with the overtly racist content.

The 1970s and 80s sitcom Are You Being Served?, set in a department store and known for sexual innuendos and slapstick, was viewed as outdated and laden with “boob jokes and pussy puns that weren’t funny,” according to the young viewers. Poppy Gibson described the humour as “hyper-sexualised” and “a bit on the nose,” whereas Emily Cooper found the jokes “cheap gags” that felt “sad” rather than amusing. The female characters were seen as stereotypes, often playing hypersexualised roles, which prompted Emily to note the lack of character diversity among women in the show.

By contrast, the 1990s series Men Behaving Badly drew positive responses. The show’s physical comedy and gentle ribbing at its male characters were regarded as “harmless and light” with “timeless gags.” Emily Cooper named it her favourite era so far, appreciating that “women aren't the butt of these jokes,” while the group found the comedic timing effective and enjoyable.

Little Britain, which debuted in the early 2000s and gained significant popularity, provoked a mixed response. The Gen Z viewers recalled enjoying its characters such as Vicky Pollard and praised the range played by writers and performers Matt Lucas and David Walliams. However, they acknowledged that some portrayals would prompt backlash today for insensitivity, especially characters representing minority groups. Emily Cooper said, “I think if it was on today there would probably be backlash about them playing minority characters that they don’t identify with.” Poppy James noted that while many still find the show funny, “people do look at you differently for liking it and it just couldn't happen today.” Poppy Gibson added, “I don’t think sketch shows can be made like this anymore because people are more aware of the offence they can cause.”

Throughout the viewing, the three young women noted a recurring trend across decades: a decline in the nuanced portrayal of women, with female characters often reduced to sex symbols or sidelined altogether. Emily Cooper expressed surprise that she preferred the 1960s comedy Carry On Doctor over more recent shows, stating, “I preferred the 60s one which is odd – I would've thought as it got more up to date I would like it more, but no.”

These reflections highlight how comedic tastes and standards evolve over time, influenced by shifts in social attitudes and heightened awareness of representation and respect. While some classic comedies are seen as relics of their time with humour that remains enjoyable to some, others are regarded as awkward reminders of outdated social norms. The Daily Mail’s session with Gen Z viewers provides insight into how Britain’s comedic heritage is being reassessed by a new generation.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)