

itv

# POP THEORY



## THE (TENTATIVELY) HOPEFUL EDITION

**Diamond geezers, the death of doom scrolling and comedy's big comeback**

Welcome back to Pop Theory's April edition! As always we love a chat, so pop us an email at [lucy.irving@itv.com](mailto:lucy.irving@itv.com) if you'd like to hear more about our proprietary research.

## DIAMOND GEEZERS & DEANOS

**How Essex's 'hard men' are becoming an unlikely antidote to toxic manosphere thinking**

You might not have heard of live streamer Gymskin, he's not garnered the headlines of HS TikkyTokky (the subject of Louis Theroux's Manosphere doc) or toxic influencers like Andrew Tate. But thanks to a [viral live stream clip featuring a questionable shoulder shuffle](#) he's quietly shifting the narrative around British masculinity.

Described as 'delightfully ITV' in the Screenrot podcast and the 'The type of guy who would have had an early season of Big Brother in a chokehold' by Huck magazine. Gymskin's happy go lucky persona and hard man gym credibility has been winning over an audience of teenage boys, who now pull up on their lime bikes to gatecrash his live streams for the chance to 'drop the shoulder' with him.



His influence has now extended to the point where now Madonna's 'into the groove' hit number 18 in the UK singles charts this month, for the first time since 1985, with the likes of [Cruz Beckham](#), [the RSPB](#) and [model Calum Harper](#) recreating the clip.

His love of Costa Coffee (even if they occasionally ['burn the bean'](#)), [appreciation of plants](#) and [kindness to strangers](#) is seeing him [be lauded as an antidote to the manosphere](#) - albeit the bar is set relatively low!

But Gymskin is just the latest in a stream of geezers quietly dispelling the manosphere myth that masculinity is synonymous with violence, domination and exploitation.

Big John, insta-famous lover of Chinese takeaways and father to British heavyweight boxer Johnny Fisher, has been praised by [GQ](#) as 'the male role model we're missing: unaffected, unabashedly principled, committed to the (right) old fashioned values of respect and compassion. In an era of toxic influencers, podcast bros and political division'. His recent video of himself [ordering at a restaurant in Dubai](#), saw him described as a 'master of the craft' with the video reaching 26 million views on X.



But it's not just online personalities that are challenging the manosphere. Infamous 'tough man' Danny Dyer publicly criticised the rise of manosphere thinking in [Rolling Stone](#), saying "Misogyny, sexism, homophobia and racism are

all on the rise again. We've regressed as human beings, so we need some sort of reset, don't we?"

For brands looking to challenge the growth in manosphere thinking, perhaps looking to the east end might just be the solution! Brands have won out before by subverting expectations of the Essex/East End hard man including [Vinnie Jones in the British Heart Foundations CPR demonstration](#), or Danny Dyer as an unlikely Casino empresario for [Paddy Power](#). So perhaps it's time brands brought in the big guns to tackle toxic masculinity in its own back garden.

## NOT SO NIHILIST NOW

### Gen Z are fighting doomscrolling doomspirals with kindness and empathy

When it comes to the mood of the nation it might at first glance appear to be all doom and gloom. In our recent [What Unites A Kingdom 2026](#) report we found that we are erring on the side of introversion and insularity, with Brits more likely to agree than disagree with the statement "My family and friends are the only community I care about" and almost 1/2 of Brits agreeing we should 'protect our own' rather than 'look after everyone'.

This chimes with recent findings in the Financial Times which cites a decline in conscientiousness and extraversion within the UK population. Gen Z have long been dubbed 'generation me', accused of introverted tendencies, selfishness and but they aren't behind this turn towards insularity and individualism.

In [What Unites A Kingdom 2026](#) we found that Gen Z are more than twice as likely to say that inclusivity should be a national priority than Baby Boomers. And when asked to select the values most important to them Gen Z and Millennials were twice as likely to choose 'Kindness' than those born before 1964 (Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation).

There are also signs that Gen Z are slowly beginning to ditch doomscrolling in favour of real connections. According to the Financial Times

mentioned in [The Guardian](#), time spent on social media worldwide peaked back in 2022, and had fallen by almost 10% by the end of 2024. In What Unites A Kingdom 2026, the majority of gen Z (44%) said they were actively trying to reduce the amount they shared online vs just under a quarter who weren't.

Similarly online dating is in decline with the value of shares in Match Group, the owners of Tinder and Hinge, have dropped by nearly 80% since the pandemic. With Match acknowledging that younger people were seeking "a lower-pressure, more authentic way to find connections".

For brands and content makers, this serves as a reminder that no matter how bleak the headlines, the future is much brighter than we'd like to think. Perhaps playing to Gen Z's optimistic nature can pay dividends.

## THE COMEDY REVOLUTION WILL BE TELEVISED

### UK Comedy is making a triumphant return to broadcast

Back in the summer of 2024 [The Rest is Entertainment boldly proclaimed the 'death of TV comedy'](#). But if the first few months of 2026 are anything to go by, it seems that comedy on broadcast TV has well and truly risen from the grave.

SNL UK, based on the iconic US sketch show broadcast on Sky, doubled its live viewership to half a million by its second episode this month, with its Prince Andrew cold open skit already reaching over 2 million views on YouTube. On the other side of the comedy spectrum, [Mackenzie Crook's off-beat sitcom 'Small Prophets' was the BBC's biggest comedy launch since 2024](#) - reaching 7.7million viewers (28 day viewing window). Motherland spinoff Amandaland is set to return to screens this year, with its 2025 Christmas special being the second most viewed show on Christmas day (7.4 million) just behind The Scarecrows' Wedding (8.7 million).

ITV's newly launched comedy prank show Celebrity Sabotage [ranked as the number one primetime show for 16-24s](#) for two consecutive weeks this month.



2026 is also due to see Twenty Twenty Six (an update of W1A and Twenty Twelve) a new satire focused on the logistics of the 2026 football World Cup. And the return of Changing Ends, Alan Carr's biopic sitcom, for season 4 on ITV alongside a third series of G'Wed.

But it's not just telly where viewers renewed appetites for comedy are manifesting. Live comedy has seen a boom with one in five Brits are choosing to take their date to a live comedy show, a huge shift from only 2% in 2014, [according to Ticketmaster](#). In a time where the majority of Brits describe themselves as feeling 'exhausted' (ITV What Unites A Kingdom 2026), we are seeking out moments of laughter and levity. In fact google searches for 'whimsy' have increased significantly since 2021.

Google search data for 'Whimsy' 2021-2026

