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This dynamic was once taboo for fear it might emasculate men.

image



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: ASHLEY LINNANE; JULIO CORTEZ/ AP; LAYLA JANBAZ Travis Kelce is among the country's top 1% of earners, but his income doesn't approach the wealth of Taylor Swift.



Cassandra Muscara has outearned her husband for most of their seven-year marriage.



Layla Janbaz with her husband, Hasib Nazir.

Women Who Outearn Husbands Are Finding New Role Models

Men and women alike are getting accustomed to such situations given advances in the workplace

BY JOSEPH PISANI

Cassandra Muscara gasped with excitement when Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce announced their engagement last month—and not just because she is a fan of the pop superstar.

“It’s amazing that my daughter gets to grow up and see somebody that she loves that is also the breadwinner and making so much money,” said the mom of a 4-year-old.

Swift’s engagement to the football star was long anticipated by her diehard fans, who for years studied her lyrics about heartbreak and the patriarchy. Many who have followed the celebrity love story can’t help but point out that she is the higher earner in the power couple.

That dynamic was taboo for generations of Americans who feared it might emasculate men and ruin couples’ romantic lives. Now more men and women alike are getting accustomed to such situations given women’s advances in the workplace.

The share of women in heterosexual marriages who significantly outearn their husbands has climbed from 3% in the early 1970s to 10%, according to a 2023 study by Pew Research Center, while women who are the sole breadwinners in their households has gone from 2% to 6%. Note

The share of heterosexual couples where the husband and wife earn roughly the same—meaning each brings in between 40% and 60% of their combined income—has climbed 6 percentage points to 29% in the past decade alone.

Muscara, 37, who lives in the San Francisco Bay Area, said she had out-earned her husband for most of their seven-year marriage, until recently leaving a corporate job to start a coaching business for women executives. She thinks she will surpass him again—an achievement both she and her husband, a certified public accountant, would be comfortable with.

“It’s a very playful game with us to be like, ‘Who’s going to take the lead next?’” she said.

Kelce is easily among the country’s 1% of earners, with his many endorsements, a more than \$100 million podcast deal with his brother and a stake in a \$200 million beer brand. That is on top of a two-year contract with the Kansas City Chiefs worth more than \$34 million. Yet all that doesn’t approach the wealth of Swift, who achieved billionaire status in 2023 after her blockbuster “Eras” tour, according to Forbes.

Stacey Champagne, a 32-yearold from Arlington, Va., said she wondered whether the celebrity couple got a prenup when she first heard about the engagement. Champagne earns about twice what her husband makes and recalled feeling like she had to protect her money before they got married.

"I've learned that sort of mindset is limiting," she said. Champagne said she pulls in more than \$200,000 a year from her job in cybersecurity, a side business coaching other women and rental income from two homes.

She and her husband now put their paychecks into one checking account, which they use to pay their bills. They each take out an equal amount—\$500 a month—to spend on whatever they want.

Her husband, Jesse Sciuto, works in radio communications in the U.S. Navy and says he is used to female breadwinners—his mom was one. "It certainly shaped my views in that it's perfectly acceptable for the woman to earn more," said Sciuto, 35.

Kelce has also noted the example his mother set. In a recent interview with GQ, he recalled watching her work her way up from a bank teller to a banking executive.

"I've seen Taylor do the exact same thing of setting goals for herself and exceeding the expectations and really captivating the world in that regard," he said. The person who makes the most money is more likely to steer big family decisions, such as which house to buy or whether to send their children to private school, said Christin L. Munsch, an associate professor of sociology at the University of Connecticut.

Women are also more likely to seek a divorce if they are unhappy and are financially independent, Munsch said. One possible source of domestic tension: Women often still handle more of the housework and child care, even when they are breadwinners.

In some circles, shifting marriage roles are helping fuel a nostalgia for a time when men and women stuck to gender norms. On social media, for instance, "trad wives" or traditional wives are embracing being homemakers, while their husbands provide for the family.

Layla Janbaz has also seen firsthand that not everyone accepts the idea of women earning more than their male partners.

The 29-year-old makes more than \$175,000 a year from her job as a traveling nurse and her side gig as an online content creator. Her husband, who was laid off during the pandemic, packs her lunch, drives her to work and cleans the house. It is a setup that works for them. But when they post videos of their relationship online the negative comments flood in. Some say he must be cheating, or that they wouldn't want a man like that.

Her husband, Hasib Nazir, 30, said he likes supporting his wife. "I know she would do the same for me if the roles were reversed," he said.

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