

Swift's modern-day Mr Darcy helps change record on frustrated romance

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Gen Z women are going #boysober. Dating app revenues are plunging. This has been the summer of heterofatalism. The phenomenon, which describes a generation of straight women losing faith in love, has been the subject of numerous editorials across the English-speaking world. Over the last fortnight alone, writers in the *New York Times* have mused about “the trouble with wanting men,” and the questionable returns offered by the disappointing, energy-sapping endeavour of “mankeeping”.

A growing sense of jaundiced resignation is taking hold among the straight single population — especially those who are female.

YouTuber Amelia Dimoldenberg, whose smash-hit show *Chicken Shop Date* is an extended riff on her search for love, put her finger on the vibe in her most recent episode, when she complained to her guest, the drag queen Trixie Mattel, that: “The issue is I’m attracted to straight men. That’s the problem.”

Straight men, the pair concluded, are “flop”.

And last week we bade farewell

to *Sex and the City* sequel *And Just Like That*. In an elegiac conclusion to her decades-spanning search for love, Carrie Bradshaw, pop culture’s most indefatigable romantic hopeful, signed off by announcing her acceptance that her own happy ever after was resigning herself to the single life.

Taylor Swift has long been the poster girl for heterosexual romantic disenchantment. Her last album, *The Tortured Poets Department*, was an epic, multi-installment exploration of the unreliability of love. Last year, during the US presidential election, as a return to a traditional version of femininity based on fecundity and domestic labour loomed into cultural prominence, she willingly embraced the Republican slur of the “childless cat lady”.

This title — the trad wife’s foil and shadow self — was popularised by JD Vance as a description of a generation of financially solvent, highly educated women choosing to renounce marriage and motherhood in favour of pursuing personal fulfilment through same-sex friendship and the market economy.

But last week, in an unexpected move, Swift turned all of that on its



● Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce’s relationship appears stronger than ever

head. To announce her new album, she made an appearance on the sports and pop culture podcast *New Heights*, hosted by her boyfriend, the American football player Travis Kelce, and his brother Jason.

Swift chose her fella’s turf as the symbolic territory from which to unveil the new cover image, track list and release date of *The Life of A Showgirl*, which will be released in October. But it was also there that she and Kelce embarked on an elaborate performance of emotional connection and mutual support, which seemed to deliberately set out to reanimate her generation’s faith in romantic love.

It’s not as if the Swift/Kelce pairing wasn’t already in the public domain — she has appeared in front of the world’s press repeatedly as his number one supporter at crucial NFL games. And last year, during her Eras tour, he donned a tuxedo and made a surprise cameo on stage at Wembley Stadium, to the rapturous delight of fans. But the extended podcast chat, which gave the couple ample airtime in which to demonstrate their relationship dynamic, was unprecedented.

Ostensibly, the main goal of the podcast was an exercise in mutual promotion of the pair’s professional interests. Swift’s album announcement dominated the news worldwide, while Kelce, a star player who is set for retirement soon and is diversifying his career, increased subscribers to his podcast by half a million at the most recent count.

More than this, though, the core messaging of the appearance went be-

yond marketing, and seemed to lean heavily on modelling a progressive dynamic within an intimate partner relationship — one reshaped to adapt to the current generation of women whose expectations have been heavily formed by feminism. There was something pointed, even strategic, about this in the context of Trump’s America and the traditionalist backlash that is under way there.

Swift set up the story from the beginning, framing her romantic history with Kelce as a nod to a nostalgic, throwback version of romance. She described his bid to win her heart as feeling like “I was in an ’80s John Hughes movie and he was outside my window with a boombox just being like, ‘I want to date you!’”.

The conversation was peppered with an examination of relationship “green flags” that they identified as early signs that the match had the potential to be an emotionally healthy, mutually beneficial partnership.

More telling than what either of them said was Kelce’s behaviour during the recording. In his (un) self-conscious display of total devotion and admiration, his attentive way of listening to her, and his supreme comfort in offering the floor to his ambitious girlfriend who eclipses him many times over in fame — without it ever coming at a cost to his masculinity — Kelce showed he is a Mr Darcy for our times.

Around the world, millions of Swifties who still harbour battered hopes of finding fulfilling heterosexual love, will be hoping their male counterparts were listening.