

Gabrielle Union, Dwyane Wade, and the ‘split everything 50/50’ debate



By Haniyah Philogene | THE GRIO

Editor’s note: The following article is an op-ed, and the views expressed are the author’s own.

(TheGrio) - Destiny’s Child once said, “always 50/50 in relationships.” Apparently, Gabrielle Union carried a similar ethos into her marriage with Dwyane Wade. In an interview reposted by the Black Millionaires Twitter account, Union revealed she and her retired NBA star husband evenly divide their finances.

“It’s weird to say I’m head of household because, in this household, we split everything fifty-fifty,” said Union, per People magazine. “But in the other households that each of us have to support, there’s always this like, gorilla on your back, that’s like, ‘You better work, b—, you better work. Oh, you’re going to sleep in?’ You know, somebody might not eat.”

When news broke about the couple’s handling of bills, many social media users, especially women, were left scratching their heads. Some who participated in the conversation recalled Wade’s past infidelity, resulting in him having another child before the couple married in 2014. Similarly, rumors surrounding Wade’s net worth — estimated at over \$150 million compared to Union’s reported \$45 million — only added fuel to the fire, as people questioned their decision to split expenses evenly. Considering the former basketball player’s financial position and the fact that he came into their relationship with children left many users wondering: How fair is this for Union?

In addition to the sea of users in disbelief that the couple split the bills, many were shocked by Union’s public disclosure. But before you judgmentally shake your head and whisper, “That couldn’t be me,” it’s worth considering the deeper context that might inform Union’s personal choices.

Gabrielle Union has been building a name and brand as an actress and entrepreneur for decades. From cheering with the Clovers in the hit film “Bring It On” to girl-bossing in the series “Being Mary Jane” to her many clothing collections with New York & Company, Union’s résumé is extensive, expansive, and impressive. As a now glowing 50-year-old woman, Union has lived many lives, including a prior marriage to former NFL player Chris Howard. According to the award-winning actress, the five-year marriage was “dysfunctional” and riddled with infidelity by both partners.

“In that first marriage, neither one of us felt that our marriage should get in the way of our dating,” said Union, who admitted feeling entitled to cheating to match her unfaithful ex-husband’s energy. “I was paying all the bills. I was working my ass off. And I felt that’s what comes, the spoils of riches.”

Union has been in a marriage where she admittedly felt exploited, as opposed to feeling loved and cared for in the way society traditionally envisions marriage. Similarly, the star has previously shared her truth as a sexual assault survivor, a crime predicated on control. Understanding the emotional trauma that often accompanies these situations, it’s little surprise Union doesn’t wholly lean on her hus-



Dwyane Wade and Gabrielle Union attend the 2023 Vanity Fair Oscar Party Hosted By Radhika Jones at the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts on March 12, 2023 in Beverly Hills, California. (Photo by Jemal Countess/GA/The Hollywood Reporter via Getty Images)

band for financial support.

“Hyper independence is a trauma response,” one user tweeted in response to the now-viral video clip of Union’s interview. “What Gabrielle Union is describing is poverty trauma and/or her inability to trust anyone else, which makes sense since the man she’s married to had a whole baby with someone.”

“Women are terrified of 50/50 because the unpaid [labor] is rarely 50/50 — so women end up being exploited...” posted another user.

In addition to sharing how the Union-Wade household manages their bills, the actress also got candid about her money mindset. Like many successful Black people, Union struggles with a “scarcity mindset,” which stems from her early days trying to break into Hollywood.

“I struggle with that, still,” she said. “I think I just have more responsibilities for my money. I get nervous like, ‘Oh God, that movie didn’t open; you know, what does that mean? Do I — Am I ... Am I going to have enough to hold everybody up?’ “

From the sound of it, Union’s biggest concern is providing for other family members she supports, not how her husband provides for her. Despite the traditional discourse that husbands should lead the household’s financial responsibility, as a multimillionaire herself, it stands to reason Union does not need to be taken care of in that way.

The online discussion and the ensuing debate prompted some to compare Union to LeBron James’ wife, Savannah James. Despite her husband’s stardom, James recently told “The Cut” she chose to keep a low profile and focus on being a mother and wife instead of building a brand. Since Union and James are both married to prominent NBA stars, several social media users juxtaposed the two, using loaded (and lowkey shady) language to explain that they are “two very different types of women.” But is the comparison even justified?

“This is no shade, but Savannah James is not an actor or established like Gabrielle Union is. Gabrielle Union was Gabrielle Union before D Wade. Again, no shade. The comparison here is bizarre,” one user tweeted in response.

Another user shared, “Some people are Gabrielle Union, some people are Savannah James; it’s ok to be either, as long as you are being yourself and happy.”

As Black women, it feels like we’re perpetually damned if we do and damned if we don’t. On the one hand, many of us celebrate our independence — educational achievements, career strides up the corporate ladder, and continuous ability to defeat the odds stacked against us. As a result, many of us neither want nor feel comfortable being en-

tirely dependent on a man, even in a committed relationship. We believe in a partnership where responsibilities are shared rather than wholly placed on one partner’s shoulders.

At the same time, the “soft-girl era” trend has motivated many Black women to release the “do it all on my own” mentality. There are still those among us who long for a traditional dynamic, desiring to be fully taken care of by our partners in ways reminiscent of earlier times. They seek to be pampered and not worry about how bills will be paid once they embark on a relationship.

It’s a reasonable desire, since, historically, Black women have often been forced to do things on their own. While it has always been a societal norm to protect and assist women and children above all, the dehumanization of Black people during slavery has frequently excluded Black women from that conversation. Activist Sojourner Truth addressed this phenomenon in her famed 1851 speech, “Ain’t I A Woman?”

“That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages and lifted over ditches and to have the best place everywhere,” Truth said, referring to a member of her mixed-race audience. “Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain’t I a woman?”

Remnants of this live on today, as research indicates “roughly three-in-10 Black people (31%) live in households whose household head is female, and 5% live in male-headed households.” It’s not irregular in the Black community to see a woman leading a household independently, regardless of her relationship status, and that’s not an easy task. With that in mind, for many Black women, the “soft life” is not a call to gender norms but rather an essential discussion on the importance of ease, rest, and softness as it relates to Black women.

With millions at her disposal, the soft life isn’t inaccessible to Gabrielle Union. Just as some find it mindblowing to hear that she splits the bill with her much wealthier husband, to others, it might seem equally confusing to hear someone like Savannah James put all her financial trust in her husband. Ultimately, as Black women, we should ideally have the choice of how much or how little financial responsibility we want to claim in a relationship. And regardless of the decision, our partners should be supporting and loving us in that.

Whether you’re in your soft-girl era, your girl-boss era, or somewhere in between, the beauty of healthy relationships is there’s no one “right” way to handle things. I don’t know how many social media debates it will take before people realize that.

City still needs more 911 operators

BY JO CLIFTON | AUSTIN MONITOR

(AUSTIN, TX) - Although the city has stepped up recruiting efforts considerably for filling vacancies in its 911 call center, there are still 49 vacancies among the 104 positions, according to Maria Calagna, director of emergency communications for the Austin Police Department.

Calagna told the Public Safety Commission Monday that the city also still needs to add two supervisors, four lower-level supervisors and 16 dispatchers.

Only 59 of 75 dispatcher positions are currently filled, she said.

Commissioner John Kiracofe requested the briefing because of complaints the city has received about long wait times for 911 callers caused by inadequate staffing. Calagna said she could not tell the commission how long it takes on average for a 911 call to be answered. That’s because the number varies from day to day, she said.

Austin, like many

other cities around the country, has had a hard time recruiting, not only in the 911 call center, but in other city positions.

However, Calagna said APD is currently receiving three to four times as many applicants for 911 positions as they did in the past. One reason there are more applicants is that the city has increased pay considerably. Starting pay has increased an average of 28 percent, she said, and is now about \$23 per hour.

In addition, the city has expedited its hiring process for 911 workers. In the past it has taken an average of 14 weeks to hire a new employee. That process now takes about 10 weeks, she said.

In order to encourage employees to volunteer for overtime, pay for working overtime before 5 p.m. is 1.5 times the regular hourly pay. After 5 p.m., Calagna said employees are paid double their usual wage. That extra pay increase started on March 1.



Photo credit: Marsha Halper for NPR