

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Kevin McKeever

I am househusband, hear me roar!

Status symbol for the alpha woman? Hey, I'm a necessity, not a luxury item

Kevin McKeever

From Monday's Globe and Mail

People have called me many things over the years. Some are even repeatable. My favourites include: wordsmith, Next in Line and, of course, Beaver – the last a nickname I acquired because it rhymes with my last name. If I don't ease off the pizza soon, it may also reflect the size of my tail.

Then came the fall fashion issue of Marie Claire magazine. This bastion of hemline and hairstyle trends declares that stay-at-home husbands, like me, are “the ultimate status symbol for the successful professional woman.”

Really? I'm the Jeffersonian “deluxe apartment in the sky” of spouses? Wheee-ZZY!

As Diane Sollee, director of the Coalition for Marriage, Family, and Couples Education, told the magazine, “In a way, it's almost like bragging for a woman to say she has a stay-at-home husband. Not only is she the breadwinner with a great job, but she's also got this highly evolved male person – a feminist, father and husband who doesn't care what the gender roles are.”

Nice, although I still feel somewhat like that chihuahua peering out of Paris Hilton's handbag.

Ms. Solle finished her statement by saying, “It's really an elevated life form.”

“It's”? “Life form”? Did she just compare me to E.T.? (Note to self: Also lay off the Reese's Pieces.)

Forget this third-party analysis. I need a primary source: my wife of 13 years. She's the definition of the “alpha woman”: VP of an international Fortune 50 company, volunteer chair of a national U.S. non-profit organization, collector of a paycheque that lets me buy brand-name rice and two-ply TP almost at will.

As she was on a business trip in Puerto Rico this week, I rang to ask if I'm on par with her Volvo convertible.

Me: Would you say that being an at-home husband makes me the ultimate status symbol of your success?

Her: What? Where are the kids?

Me: Who? C'mon, answer the question. Do you brag to colleagues about my ability to bring home the bacon (that you pay for, of course) and fry it up in a pan?

Her: What are you getting at?

Me: I need a lifestyle upgrade. My wardrobe consists of beer company T-shirts and clearance-sale sneakers. I own a pay-as-you-go cellphone and drive a four-year-old minivan.

Her: But you chose all those things. And you love the minivan.

Me: Don't confuse me with facts, MBA-wielding oppressor! As a trophy husband, by the power vested in me by a mainstream media outlet, I demand you primp and pamper me to befit my elevated station!

Her: Hey, if you don't like it, you can get a full-time paying job and I'll hire a chiselled male nanny to run the house.

Me: (Pause.) What would you like me to make tomorrow for dinner, dear?

Later, as usual, my level-headed wife made a point. My at-home status was a mutual decision, one we both know I embrace and enjoy, and – she'll admit – one that I'm far better suited for than she is, in temperament and skill (with the serious exception of folding laundry). "You are always there when the kids or I or even the dog need you," she said. "That's not just being a status symbol."

So, Marie Claire, what am I, this toy with a broken X chromosome, to make of this ... and of you, for that matter? Exactly three fall fashion issues ago, you extolled the benefits of owning a "starter husband." You remember that, don't you? Your writer described these temporary life partners as being like a first job "where you learn some skill and polish your résumé before going after the position you really want."

Oh, Marie Claire. I'd say you're a gold-digging tramp, but that would imply I have money. I think you'll wear this label better: My glue-bound lady, you are a soul-sucking vamp.

I am not a luxury. For our family, I am a necessity.

I am househusband, hear me roar!