Rhona Rapoport and
Robert N. Rapoport

Dual-Career Families

The Evolution of a Concept*

Introduction

The concept of the "dual-career family" was introduced in our research on "Women in Top Jobs" (Rapoport and Rapoport, 1969). This paper presents the core findings of that study together with an overview of subsequent developments.

The original paper saw the dual-career family as a variant pattern on a single norm—the traditional family in which the husband was the sole breadwinner and pursued a career in the outside world, while the wife looked after the children and ran the home. The families described were strategically important as vanguards in a social change process. We did not suggest that they were representative of contemporary families, nor that they should provide the exclusive norm for the family of the future. Rather we thought that in the logic of things their numbers were likely to increase and that the experiences of pioneer families might help others evolve such patterns with less stress and strain.

In the twenty years that have since elapsed their increase has been such as to make the dual-career family a recognized structure among forms the family is now taking in relation to social change.

The original study was based on thirteen functioning dual-career families and three in which the dual-career aspect was given up by the wife breaking off her career. People may drop out for various reasons and for differing amounts of time at different points in their careers—men as well as women. In some situations special provisions are made for career interruptions by women which may obviate the need to drop out in the sense of resigning from a position in an organization. In other situations dropping out may simply mean a slackening of

*A requested overview.

the pace of activity. We use the term drop-out to refer to an indefinite cessation of activity whether in an organizational post or a less formal position.

The couples were chosen to represent a range of occupations for the women. They had to be intact families with at least one child still living at home. The sixteen families were interviewed by a pair of interviewers (one male, one female). There were ordinarily one or two joint interviews (husband and wife interviewed by both interviewers) and interviews with the husband and wife separately by individual interviewers. Each session lasted approximately three hours. Findings were checked in a follow-up interview.

Five foci of stress were identified: dilemmas of overload, personal norm, identity, social network and role cycling. In each area we shall discuss the sources of stress and the ways in which the couples have adapted to the ensuing strains.

Overload Dilemmas

The old folk expression "behind every successful man there is a woman" stands not only for a social psychological situation where the wife gives emotional support, advice, etc., but also for a whole culture complex of activities and relationships within which the wife is a helpmate. One of the couples began the interview by reversing this, stating that "behind every successful woman there is a man," meaning that the man encouraged his wife to cope with problems arising in her work, provided consultation on financial matters, etc. They did not mean that he gave the same sort of backing—shopping, mending, cooking, child-minding, etc.—that would be the obverse of the traditional picture.

In the dual-career families studied there were no reversals of the traditional roles (though they are by no means non-existent). The most usual situation was a rearrangement of the domestic side of their lives. Some household tasks were delegated to others, some reapportioned between husband, wife and children. The degree of overload experienced seemed to have been a function of at least four factors:

- *The degree to which having children and a family life (as distinct from simply being married) is salient.* With the exception of one couple, family life in general and children in particular were highly salient. The couples were very concerned with the possible effects on their children of their both pursuing careers. This implied a limitation in the degree to which the couples were willing to delegate child-care, even assuming the availability of satisfactory resources. There is an element of psychic strain

involved in allowing two major areas of life, so different in their demands and characteristics, to be highly important. The overload, then, is not a simple arithmetical one of increased number of tasks to be accomplished, but one far more difficult to assess, which is related to the duality of emotional commitment and concern.

- *The degree to which the couple aspire to a high standard of domestic living.* Most of the couples aspired to a high standard—pleasant home and garden, cleanliness, good cooking. This made the management of the domestic side of their lives more complex, albeit by choice, than if they had kept to a lower standard. However, the notion of a lower material standard is almost a contradiction in terms to the notion of career success. The process tends to become circular in that once having acquired a taste for the high standards, the impetus to continue working and career development is increased.
- *The degree to which satisfactory arrangements for the re-apportionment of tasks is possible.* Here we found various combinations of conjugal role reorganizations and delegations of parts of the domestic work to children and helpers of various kinds.
- *The degree to which the sheer physical overload of tasks and their apportionment is adumbrated by a social-psychological overload.* This arises from struggling with the following conflicts: normative conflict, sex role identity maintenance, network management and role-cycling. Couples vary enormously in the degree to which these other sources of tension feed into the family system and the degree to which they can manage them.

For all the couples the overload issue was salient. They all emphasized the importance of physical health and energy as a prerequisite for making the dual-career family a possibility. They regarded it as important for their children to be healthy, too. Generally speaking, there was little room for illness in the systems that were evolved.

To deal with the overload issues much thought and effort was spent on arranging a system of domestic help. This had two sides: the availability of different kinds of domestic helpers and the couple's preferences as to which aspects of their domestic roles they wished to delegate. The delegation of the less desirable aspects of domestic labor was both the expected and the observed tendency. Given the low value placed on domestic work in our society, the dual-career couples have all had to devote considerable energy to improvising viable arrangements. A wide range is found: short term and long term; full-time and part-time; live-in and live-out; nannies, au pairs, dailies, students, secretaries-doubling-as-baby-sitters, couples with husband and wife dividing

up the domestic part of the employing couple's household affairs, unmarried mothers and their babies taking over part of the premises, etc. Most of the couples used at least a duplex system; often they would shift from one type to another following a major transition like having a child, the youngest child entering school, etc. Sometimes the shift was associated with a difficult experience with the prior system; sometimes it was based on the couple's conception of a better arrangement for the particular stage, e.g., dropping a nannie and taking on an au pair as the infant reached school age. Simple as the tasks of household maintenance may be, the difficulties in obtaining reliable personnel to whom to delegate them is so great in contemporary British and American society as to call for all sorts of perquisites. Domestic helpers were not only offered the usual salary and private room arrangements (often with TV) but were sometimes given the use of one of the family cars and, in one case, a specially built apartment. Few of the couples used their parents in a major way, though many used them occasionally to look after children while they were away.

The area of childcare presents special problems. While most of our couples valued interaction with their children and felt that their children's welfare and development were of primary importance, they had to delegate at least part of the childcare in order to pursue their careers. Precisely because the children were so important, the issue of how to arrange this contributed heavily to the overload. Most of the families were aware of and concerned with modern conceptions of child development and the importance of parental involvement in it. As one couple put it: "We are all victims of our culture in the Spockean age" (i.e., this child-centered age). While compromises could be, and often were, made in the domestic care areas, none of the couples were willing to adopt a policy which would have meant possible harm to their children's physical or psychological development. It was not possible to assess the effects of the dual-career couples' child-rearing practices on their children. However, in detailed interviews it was striking how low the level of reported disturbance appeared to be. Although the couples were quite aware of potential negative effects, they also pointed to some of the positive affects of their pattern of life: fostering independence and responsibility, e.g., in getting children to help with household chores; fathers spending more time with their children; providing a student companion for the children. Most of the families interviewed had read or heard about the relevant research work and were concerned with the issue of potentially harmful "maternal deprivation."

The majority of the couples took precautions against placing complete reliance on any one helping figure and they tended to monitor carefully the interaction between children and domestic helpers. One mother describes the degree to which she had to rely on help and how distasteful it was to a strong and independent-minded person to feel dependent:

> I had no one, so I had to go from hand to mouth. I never knew when I could make appointments ahead. It was such a strain that I got, not ill, but terribly upset—unable to cope, you know, and I put a high value on being able to cope . . .

The vulnerability of the woman, in particular, to malfunctioning in the domestic help area is expressed by Mrs. Y, who said that even when she is working or travelling, there is a "little corner of my mind somewhere that is thinking and worrying about the management of the children." Mr. Y, in contrast, reserves the comparable "little corner" in the back of his mind for forward planning of their work and the family's finances.

The general tendency was to place high value on having children and developing a close relationship with them. Even in the rare instances where children were sent to boarding school this was not, with one possible exception, to unload the care of the children onto an institution but because of tradition (father and grandfather had gone to that school) or the child's own wishes.

Most of the couples thought that the main consequence of their both working was that there was "very little slack left in the system." Several indicated that they were both "whacked" by the time they got home and that they had very little energy left over for extra activities, particularly on weeknights.

While leisure activities tend to be sacrificed first under the impact of overload, the repercussions may spill over into the work lives of one or both of the partners and couples vary in the degree to which they protect this as a higher priority than other areas like activities with the children. Mr. S illustrates part of this pattern of spillover into work in discussing how he concerns himself with his wife's business problems:

> one takes up time during the day thinking over these problems instead of perhaps dining with someone one ought to dine with for one's own business career . . . or, one comes home to commiserate, to work out a problem, or even to have a quiet evening and one can't because the wife is really worn out and exhausted and can't cope with it. . . .

Characteristic patterns of coping with these strains are:

- Deliberately to "work" at leisure—to discipline oneself to take vacations, weekends in the country to unwind, etc. To conserve health and energy deliberately as a human resource.
- To delegate as much as possible of the less desired domestic chores and to provide adequate care for child-rearing—"suitable mothering" influences and other relevant companionship needed by the growing child.

Strategies to provide the child with the best possible environments—home, school, etc.—consume major proportions of time.

- To modify one's work involvements in such a way as to be compatible with the other partner's and to diminish the strain of "overspill," e.g., from an excessively demanding work situation. Most of the couples avoided unnecessary travel and complex relationships at work so as to optimize participation in work and family spheres.

Dilemmas Arising from the Discrepancy Between Personal Norms and Social Norms

The women have found ways to continue their careers even after childbirth, stopping work only for a minimal period which did not interfere with their career development. In doing so they have had to deal with dilemmas arising from the clash between their personal norms—what they felt was right and proper behavior for themselves; and social norms—those they felt were held by the people around them.

These dilemmas arise because most women, even highly qualified ones, tend to drop their careers to fulfil traditional domestic roles even if this is accompanied by personal frustration. It is accepted as the right and proper thing to do by the majority of people in our society, and is supported from birth by a pervasive set of cultural symbols and manifestations: the importance attributed to mothering (assumed to be always the biological mother except in abnormal cases), the sanctity of the home and the housewife role, etc. The men and women in our study have deliberately adopted a variant pattern, extending the universalistic elements of their educational experience (where boys and girls were presumed to have similarly valuable potentials and were assumed equally to be able to realize them in work). For various reasons and under various circumstances they arrive at this pattern and the dilemma for them becomes resolved and dormant.

Under some circumstances, however, the dilemmas become reactivated. For example:

- at critical points in the family life cycle (particularly birth of the first child)
- at critical transition points in the career (or occupation) life cycle of either partner (role enlargement or contraction)
- at critical events in the life space of the children (illness, school problems, etc.)

A critical point in the family life cycle that reactivates these dilemmas is the birth of the first child. For example, when Mrs. O's baby was born, she had to

overcome the feeling of distress when well meaning neighbors made such remarks as, "Oh, well, I suppose you won't mind when your baby doesn't recognize you as its mother." It took her some time to overcome the heightening of conflict aroused by such remarks before she assumed her preferred pattern of pursuing both career and family interests.

These remarks are manifestations of a larger set of cultural norms related to child-rearing practices. Most of the couples studied experienced pressure from these norms. All the dual-career families made similar resolutions but two of the three drop-outs resolved this dilemma in favor of the traditional norms at the point of the birth of the first baby. The third drop-out was occasioned by a crisis in the area of the children's life space (breakdown of care facilities accompanied by incipient signs of disturbance in the child).

Mrs. O, a civil servant with a social science degree, sums up how she resolved her dilemma:

> When I first went back to work there were the women who quoted [a noted child-psychiatrist] to me. I got so fed up with this man. I got all his books out before I went back permanently. Really it made me feel like a criminal . . . but I came to the conclusion that he was taking for his examples children who had been in institutions and comparing them with the kind of children who were in an ordinary mother's care . . . and it seemed to me to be such a long way off from what I was going to do . . . I think a lot of mothers have gripped onto him to justify staying at home. I went to see a number of friends of mine who have combined both and whose children are, in the main, older and who have turned out well-adjusted, independent, happy, thoroughly sort of normal children who seem to have a perfectly normal relationship with their parents, as far as one could judge. I was a bit unconvinced.

An example of how a critical transition in the occupational situation can reactivate this dilemma is seen with the Ss. Mrs. S, a clothing designer, discussed how she had been thrown into conflict (which immediately became a family conflict) when an offer was received to take over her firm and promote her products in a really big way. Mrs. S says that this conflict was exacerbated by its timing, coming at a period of her life (age about 40) when she was reviewing her personal norms and values. She felt that before she realized it, the children would have grown up and left home. In attempting to resolve this, Mr. and Mrs. S each played devil's advocate. Mr. S, arguing in favor of maximizing familial values, would say it was bad enough that the father could not spend more time with the children but to also have mother away so much was "terrible." Mrs. S would counter this with how a more senior position would enable her to be more flexible with her work hours, have more assistance and how they would have more and better vacations and be able to remove financial worries about the children's future. Then, when she took the position

that she should stay at home, spend more time with the children, pursue mutual interests and so on, Mr. S would argue that it would be doing something to her which they would both regret later as she had so much invested in her career and derived so much satisfaction from it. They indicated that this was a period of "brinksmanship" in which each pushed the other over the brink until they had worked their way through the feelings of both of them about a new resolution to the dilemma. The resolution finally adopted was one in which she agreed to the take-over but with a number of provisions for more time with the family and contractual safeguards against her being drawn too deeply into the firm's business involvements.

There are several instances reported of events in the children's life space reactivating this dilemma. This may occur around a major focussed crisis, e.g., the child's disturbance or poor performance at school. More usually, it is aroused by small occurrences. Most of the working mothers cite the feelings aroused when they see other mothers wheeling their prams in the park, but they tend to put down these feelings relatively easily, saying that probably many of these mothers would rather be going to work. Occasionally, however, the dilemma is made more acute as when the child "uses" the fact that the mother works for "playing up" the mother's guilt by saying, for example, that she prefers her granny's house or the house of a non-working mum of a school friend. In continuing their work, most of these mothers emphasized the positive elements of the situation with which the children are reported by and large to have agreed. For example, having a happier and more interesting mum, having a mum who designs things—in one case the child's school uniform; having a mum who is on TV; etc.

Dilemmas of Identity

We are concerned here with dilemmas arising within the person about the very fundamental characteristics of the self—whether one is a "good" person, a "good" man or woman and so on. This is at a deeper level and more internally generated than the conflicts arising over specific behavioral patterns and stems from the socio-cultural definitions of work and family as intrinsically masculine and feminine. The quintessence of masculinity is still, in our culture, centered on work and competing successfully in the breadwinning roles. The quintessence of femininity is still centered on the domestic scene. While there are some occupations which have come to be defined as acceptable for women—such as nursing, primary school teaching and social work—these tend to be seen as temporary, part-time or for unmarried women. Conversely, where men enter these occupations it is probable that they encounter internal dilemmas of identity stemming from the same source of social stereotyping. In

analyzing the dilemmas observed in this area it is important that we consider them to be a product of our contemporary socio-cultural situation.

Taking the specifically sexual component of the identity dilemmas, i.e., whether the individual feels "good" or a "real" man or woman, there seem to be at least three levels at which the issues are discussed in the literature—the physical, the psychological and the socio-cultural. Some observers assume that confusion arising at one level will necessarily be reflected in confusion at other levels. Thus we were told by one psychiatric colleague that men and women who cross sex lines socio-culturally (as have all the women in our study to some extent) would be characterized by a psychological confusion of sexual identity as well. The assumption, furthermore, was that women who wanted to enter the male world of competition would be highly motivated by competitiveness with men and, as a consequence, would emasculate their husbands and there would tend to ensue a sex life characterized by impotence and frigidity. This would be enhanced by their tendency to choose mates who fit into their needs in this regard.

While we did not focus on the sex lives of the couples in detail, the data seem to indicate that although these stereotyped conceptions may be present in some cases (doubtless the types of cases most seen in clinical practice), this is not by any means the universal picture. We find that, while competitiveness with men may be a prominent motive among some of the women, it is only one of many that seem important. Most are involved (to the extent that they are fighting battles in relation to this) in issues relating to financial security; the need to be creative (in ways that are difficult for them if focussed on the household); and the desire to be effective as an individual person. While autonomy—financial, psychological and otherwise—is a prominent part, it is coupled with, rather than exclusive of, the wish to be interdependent with their husbands. The occupational world is used by all the wives as the area in which they develop their separate personal identities. This makes it possible for husband and wife to relate as two individuals, each having a separate identity as a person. To the extent that each has a clear personal sexual identity associated with his physical make-up, physical relationships may even be enhanced. But it would take a more focussed and detailed study to investigate this.

What seems to happen is that they are able to go a certain way toward the establishment of ideal individual identities which are independent of socio-cultural definitions but indications of discomfort arise at a certain point. They seem to say, "this is as far as I go in experimenting with a new definition of sex roles without having it 'spill over' into my own psychological sense of self-esteem and possibly my physical capacity to carry on in this relationship." This point represents a limit to which an individual's psychological defenses are felt to be effective and in each of the couples one or more points seem to have

evolved beyond which each knew it was dangerous to push the other. We have called these points identity tension lines.

In the O family, the matter of income is a crucial point. Mr. O encourages his wife to pursue her career and to be successful and effective in her work, but the amount of her income relative to his is a point of some tension between them. With the Xs the central issue is authority. Mr. X wanted his wife to follow her profession and to achieve the security that she wished in it. He even welcomed her earning more than himself and stabilizing the family income so that he could get on with what he valued more highly—creative designing work. However, he did not wish to have her in authority over jobs on which he himself was working.

Manifestations of the sex identity tension line are sometimes seen in subtle, often unrecognized, undercutting behavior by the husband toward the wife. This seems to be an indication of strain and a defensive manifestation rather than the preferred mode as it occurs in couples where the husbands make such statements as:

> My wife has at least as good an education as I have; she earns as much as I do. I don't see any reason why we shouldn't regard ourselves as equal partners, and that is what we do.
>
> We see our family as a collection of individuals, each with different skills and interests and as having evolved the capacity to live together.
>
> Our marriage is a form of partnership, and has to be understood in terms of the characteristics of partnerships.

Clearly, these are statements of fundamental ideals on which the dual-career family is based. In actually observed or reported interactions, when the tension point was approached the men tended to undercut their wives. Some cut across their wives in the interview situation, not allowing them to answer fully, as though to say, "I'm really better at this than you, dear." One actually prefaced his interruptions with statements of that type. Another, describing his wife's business practices, tended to make a bit of a joke of them, not expecting her to deal with her management role as "for real" as he did himself. He expressed surprise when a larger firm thought his wife's business worth a take-over bid but was reassured when they offered a ridiculously low sum. It must be emphasized, however, that these manifestations were subordinated to the more dominant aspect of their relationship, which was that the husband did in fact support, sponsor, encourage and otherwise facilitate his wife's career. It is to be expected that there would be some "backwash" of other feelings involved stemming from the sacrifices and threats that the pattern involved. These

processes of *undercutting* and *supporting* are also present on the woman's side of the symbiotic relationship.

Where the dual-career situation persists, as it has in the couples studied, a balance is achieved which constitutes a resolution of the dilemma. In the families which are also a professional partnership (as with the Ys) these processes are accentuated. Where the working partnership is conducted at home there must be developed a way to soften the cut-and-thrust of critical competitive work modes lest it erode the husband/wife relationship. The Ys recognize that criticism is important for the maintenance of work standards and to stimulate creativity. Mr. Y says,

> It is important if one is to preserve this kind of relationship, to learn to criticize with love; and to accept criticism in work matters as different from attacks on the person.

The Ys themselves recognize that this is easier said than done and have learned to accept a good deal more overt conflict in their relationship than, for example, their parents were accustomed to.

Some of the wives developed a distinctive way of handling their dilemmas in relation to the sex-role identity issue. Where their occupational roles called for patterns of behavior sharply inconsistent with their conceptions of the wifely role, they more or less consciously segregated the two sets of roles. One wife said,

> When I'm at work I'm very authoritarian. I wear a white coat at work and I try to hang up my working personality with it when I leave the office.

To this was added her husband's view:

> I once visited my wife's company on business and by chance I saw her there. She was so different. I hardly recognized her. She seemed like someone else—some sort of tycoon—certainly not my wife.

Other wives presented their careers as a series of improvisations which allowed them to do something interesting rather than as a series of steps taken toward a career ambition or goal.

A given couple may have more than one tension line operating and the tension lines may shift through time. When either individual is pushed into a pattern too discrepant with his or her sense of personal (and sexual) identity defensive behavior begins to develop. The form this takes—attack, withdrawal of support, etc.—varies according to the couple's constellation.

Social Network Dilemmas

Each of the couples relates to its social environment through a network of relationships. The social network is variously composed of kin, friends, neighbors, work associates, service relationships, etc. The networks vary in size, multidimensionality and interconnectedness. Network composition is affected by personal preferences, convenience, obligations and pressures of various kinds. Family phase and occupation affiliation are of central importance in determining the composition and the quality of relationships. At different stages in the life cycle people may be added or dropped from the active network. For example, when a woman works, some of her work relationships may be important for the family in a way similar to those of her husband. When a couple have children they may enter into relationships with service personnel relating to children's care and activities and they may form relationships with families of their children's friends. As well as quantity of relationships, there is the matter of quality, some being kept rather superficial and others deeper; some relating only to one interest sector and others being more general.

The population with which we are concerned comprises very busy people committed to very demanding occupations. They have families whom they value highly. As these families are at the stage where there are growing children at home, this creates yet another very demanding situation. Because of the heavy demands in these immediate spheres, the couples tend to have a relatively smaller amount of active involvement with kin and friends than other professional middle class families. While some of the couples in our sample interacted frequently with relatives and some kin were drawn on to help with children occasionally, the more general pattern was for difficulties to appear in this area because of the divergence of the dual-career family from expected norms of kin behavior. This is one of the areas in which network dilemmas tended to arise. The second is that of friendship formation. Both areas involve difficulties as there is both a wish to sustain a relationship and a wish to protect oneself from it because of the criticism that is usually entailed in the reactions to a career wife and mother.

This kind of dilemma is illustrated in Mrs. O's experience. Because her husband was very close to his widowed mother, who lived with his spinster sister, she wished to be as nice to them as possible. On the other hand, they found it difficult to accept that she was not only a working wife but one with a very demanding schedule. Mrs. O described a characteristic incident:

> She (mother-in-law) will call up and ask if she can just drop around for a visit. I've got her pretty well trained now to realize that I cannot just have a chat with her or prepare things for her. . . . Early on, even my husband didn't realize what

> a problem this was. When she telephoned once, I heard him say, "Yes, she'll be home on Thursday, drop in anytime in the afternoon." He didn't realize how precious that afternoon was for me . . . how many things I'd saved and planned to get done on that day. I couldn't spend it chatting with his mother. I've got her trained now to accept every third week-end.

Mrs. S describes similar difficulties with her husband's mother. Although Mr. S had four brothers, it was he who had always been close to her and in later years carried the burden. This was a recurrent source of conflict of loyalties in relation to his wife and family and a high level of tension developed when his mother developed a long terminal illness. Mrs. S says

> This was the first time I felt that my marriage might break up. He would return late at night and be so disturbed that we couldn't get any rest. This was when there were very heavy demands being made on me to keep my business going. Even when none of the others in the family would lift a finger and on doctors' advice he put her into a home, he felt so guilty that it disturbed our own relationship.

The dilemma over friendship is less a matter of obligations being modified in the light of the wife's career demands than of deviating from the usual choice patterns for friends. There seems to have been established, particularly among professionals and executives, a pattern of friendship based on the male's occupational associates. Typically, however, they are married to women who do not themselves pursue careers. The women in our study tended to report discomfort with social situations in which the other wives were not working or at least positively oriented towards the idea. Problems ranged from a lack of shared interests to awkward situations arising from expressions of criticism.

In dual-career families friendships are likely to be formed in ways different from those in mono-career families. Neighborhood is less important because casual visiting patterns are impossible. In only one family was the neighborhood a source of friends and in this case it was in a suburb with people of the same type. A striking feature of the dual-career families in this study is the tendency to form friendships on a couple basis. Because of the sharp difference in outlook and situation between career and non-career wives, most of our families associate primarily with other couples like themselves. This produces a situation in which it is the wife who has a determining role in the selection of friends though the end product is a couple-based relationship. There is a greater range of couples acceptable from the man's point of view so that the selection process can center on the wife's sense of comfort and acceptance. As the overload falls most heavily on the wife it is up to her to indicate whether she can handle friendships which are both gratifying and demanding.

Role Cycling Dilemmas

There is a good deal of literature on the life cycle and on cycles within specific spheres of life, e.g., the family life cycle. The family goes through phases which are named in the culture—engagement, marriage, honeymoon, parenthood. Each culture distinguishes different sub-phases, and not all possible phases are named and identified as separate. In ordinary usage in our own culture we do not have a designation for the cycle before having children or that in which children leave home. We call them all "parenthood," referring not to the whole family situation but only to roles of the marital partners. In other spheres there is a plethora of terms. For example, in the occupational sphere we have training, apprenticeship (internship, residency), establishment, etc., to retirement. Sociologists have evolved a more precise terminology. Alice Rossi (1968) indicates the utility of thinking in terms of role cycles. On marriage a young man enters the role of husband and has a cycle of experiences in the husband role. When he takes the additional role of father, he has another set of experiences which has its own cycle. In earlier work we outlined the critical importance of events at the transition points from one role to another, discussing the processes of unorganization, disorganization and restructuring that occur to accommodate the shifts in role. The life cycle of the larger units—families, careers, organizations—is seen as punctuated by these points of reorganization, which tend to be accompanied by a certain degree of turbulence and conflict. Put into a more general framework, the role cycle may be seen as having an *anticipatory* or preparatory phase; an *establishment* phase (called the "honeymoon" stage by Rossi) in which efforts are directed at stabilizing ways of managing the role, usually accompanied by heightened interest and involvement; a *plateau* (or steady-state) stage during which "the role is fully exercised"; followed eventually by a stage of *disengagement* when the role is given up voluntarily or under force of circumstances.

The couples in this study were mostly in the stage of familial roles that would be termed the plateau, in that they were married, had children and were functioning as parents in a family that was established, with children still at home. In three instances there were new first babies so that they had barely entered the plateau stage. In all the others it was well established. Our data indicate two basic types of role cycling conflicts: between the occupational roles of husband and wife and their family roles; and between the occupational role of the husband and that of the wife. Two potential conflicts will be discussed: the career-family cycling dilemmas and the dual-career cycling dilemmas.

In the former the parental role is one into which women are to some extent pushed by cultural expectations. The woman is particularly vulnerable as, even with modern methods of birth control, she may be catapulted into parenthood

accidentally. The parental role is largely irrevocable and is one for which parents tend to be relatively poorly prepared. While none of our couples reported unplanned pregnancies, it is clear that the pressures to become parents were more keenly felt by the women. In several couples the decision to have the first child was pressed by the woman with the man acquiescing. The timing of this step in relation to the career role cycle was something that received considerable attention and two points of view were expressed.

Some stressed the importance of having been occupationally established before having children. They had a high income, a secure position with flexibility and perquisites of one kind or another, and could afford a great deal of domestic help. They were able to take time off to see that things worked out well. Their commitment to work was, by this time, so well established that dropping out seemed unthinkable.

One of the drop-out couples argued, in contrast, that as they had both reached the plateau stage of their careers, there was no need for the wife to work any longer. Her husband's earnings would be high and they had accumulated savings. They felt that for those in the establishment phase, struggling to make the grade, the pressure on women to continue working after becoming a mother was greater. As Mrs. K had previously established herself, they felt she could return whenever she wished. Had she become a parent earlier she might not have had sufficient status and contacts to make this possible.

None of the couples expressed strong feelings about the degree to which women had to curtail career involvements in favor of family demands as compared with men. This might have been more pronounced had we studied captive housewives. For the most part the women felt fortunate to have had as full a career as they had managed to achieve. They tended to accept as inevitable for the present that women would have to bear the main brunt of child care and domestic organization, so that there would naturally be more strain on the wife's career-family cycling problems than on the husband's. They were thankful for small mercies—having a husband who did not invite guests home to dinner at the last minute or who did not mind running a vacuum cleaner over the carpets. There were only a few who were very outspoken about their views that jointness and equality in the marital relationship should be equality in the degree to which each must curtail the demands of career in favor of joint familial commitments.

The second type of role cycling conflict—between demands of the two careers—was expressed by most couples. When Mrs. O wished to diminish the demands of her career so that she could spend more time with her growing children while continuing in a senior professional job, she considered taking a post in a remote part of the country. Mr. O, however, could not find a job in that area comparable to the one he held. So Mrs. O had to give up that opportunity.

When Mr. P was offered a promotion with his firm if he would move to the north of England, he turned it down because there was no possibility of a job for his wife comparable to the one she held in the London area.

In all these instances there was stress—both within the individual making the career sacrifice and to some extent between the pair. However, in all cases resolutions were made on the basis of recognition of joint interest in optimizing family-career decisions so as to keep the role systems functioning with minimal tension.

Subsequent Conceptual Developments

Our 1971 report was entitled *Dual-Career Families*. The pluralization indicated an appreciation of variations even among those representing this specialized type. The conceptual framework was in terms of the creativity involved in developing a new pattern. It was suggested that if this pattern were to become a realistic option for more people there would have to be a reorganization of domestic roles, improvements in child care facilities, and a more facilitative orientation on the part of planners and policy makers. Notwithstanding the critiques of a number of reviewers, the book did not call for a replacement of the conventional family norm by that of the dual-career family. On the contrary, the final paragraphs of the book read:

> For the much greater number of potential readers who are neither dual-career families, even prospectively, nor are planners, industrialists, educators or social scientists, but ordinary people interested in how other people in their society live and feel about the way they live, this book aims to secure a degree of tolerance and understanding of others that contributes to a more humane society. The particular type of integration of work and family life, independence and interdependence among family members will vary from one family to another. However, it is important to recognize the need for interdependence and the different balances in this as each couple and family work out what is best for them.
>
> Only in a society where such sympathetic insights are prevalent can a multiplicity of ways of achieving self-realization be achieved.

A second edition entitled *Dual-Career Families Re-Examined* appeared in 1976. By this time a considerable literature had emerged with detailed empirical studies adding to the data base. The sub-title of the second edition (Rapoport and Rapoport, 1976) was *New Integrations of Work and Family,* reflecting changes that were apparent in the interim. There was less emphasis on innovation and creativity. A dual-career family structure was no longer seen as so extraordinary a variant. More emphasis was placed on it as an option among a range of family types in which husbands and wives worked outside the home.

Research developments during the 1970s put the topic into the context of *social change*. There was a normalization of the idea of both parents working outside the home, and the larger category of dual-worker families was becoming a statistical as well as a value norm for advanced industrial societies. Other changes contributing to the breakdown in stereotyping between a single conception of the "normal" family and all other "deviants" included an increase in single-parent and reconstituted families.

A *conception of diversity and options* was beginning to emerge, together with a recognition that this involves stress, but that coping with stress is a process with which all families are faced. The tension lines for each type of family vary, but stress is always present, albeit in different degrees and forms.

A more relevant concept for the family relationship between men and women seemed to be equity rather than equality. The important point for family well-being was that the arrangements chosen were felt to be fair—rather than necessarily providing a specific resolution such as identical patterns for men and women (Rapoport and Rapoport, 1975).

The change process involved shifting bottlenecks. Initially, the principal bottleneck was assumed to be access to the workplace and to center on discriminatory stereotypes. With increasing qualifications of women to do the same kinds of jobs as men, and with their demonstrated competence, access to a wider range of jobs was achieved. It took some time before it became apparent that there was another workplace bottleneck—impeding advancement of women into senior positions. Then the bottlenecks in the home became more salient. Gross inequities were apparent in the domestic division of labor, making it impracticable for most women to pursue regular employment careers, even when they were competent and job opportunities were available.

In 1978 we edited a book reporting on twelve studies of working couples. This allowed for an expansion of the available data base encompassing different kinds of occupations and socio-cultural contexts and formulated conceptual advances. There was a further move toward an *appreciation of diversity* and its concomitants. There were different types of family structure which might be adaptable to the modern situation (rather than one adaptive type and a number of deviant types). What might be adaptive for a given family was likely to vary *at different stages of the family cycle*. We suggested the concept of the protean family:

> The kind of family that we envision as best suited to be a model for the future is not exclusively the dual-worker family. This is one option among many. Nor is the symmetrical family or any other family the model. Rather, we suggest as a guiding concept the protean family.
>
> The protean family is not a single type at all, but an idea of variation and change in family structure to suit, on the one hand, the makeup of the individuals

> and, on the other, the situation they confront—in their internal life, in their occupational and community life, and in different phases of their life cycle (Rapoport and Rapoport, 1978).

The protean family was depicted as an enabling, problem-solving type of family competent to cope flexibly with specific stresses and to achieve optimal solutions for all its members.

There were two additional sets of edited papers seeking to integrate advances in this developing field: one edited by Pepitone-Rockwell (1980), the other by Joan Aldous (1982). For each we prepared integrative essays. In the 1980 volume, we called our paper "Three Generations of Dual-Career Family Research." We noted that two relevant shifts—statistical and normative—were apparent in the intervening decade. The statistical shift was in the proportion of households containing two earners (at the head-of-household level). In Britain this went from 30 percent in 1960 to 40 percent in 1970; in the United States from 25 percent in 1940 to 44 percent in 1980. Secondly, the pattern of married women working outside the home had become legitimated and many women indicated that they would work even if there were no financial need. They no longer felt like pioneers or deviants.

There was also a development of the research field. Originally research had focussed on women at work and had conceptualized family problems as "her" problems. When the concept of dual-career family was coined, family issues were conceptualized as jointly the concerns of husband and wife. Ultimately, in the third generation of studies the issues were conceptualized as inter-institutional—work-and-family.

Seventeen studies undertaken in the 1970s were analyzed and their degree of convergence was taken to be an indication of the robustness of the concept. In addition, it was noted that the concept had been fruitfully applied to counselling and to social policy, particularly in management. Gaps noted were in relation to the children of dual-career families, not only on how to provide for their care (a fairly well worked-over field) but on their personal development in this type of family structure as compared to others. Implications for social values and social planning were indicated.

In the Aldous volume we noted seven areas for further research. Some of the suggestions centered on elements not present when the early studies were done, e.g., the impact of new micro-technologies on family/work patterns, and some of the recent macro-economic developments. There was a further call for dynamic concepts to encompass life-cycle processes—rather than the more static notion that a family is of one type or another and stays that way. This links to the growing distinction between structure and process as family determinants of personal development. Also noted was a need to study social supports for dual-career families and how they might be enlarged and im-

proved; and to learn more about how bottlenecks in the way of change toward greater gender-equity might be alleviated. We suggested that "we (should) focus explicitly on the linkages between work and family rather than focussing on first one set of bottlenecks and then on the other."

Other book-length studies expressing the work/family conceptualization and drawing on the field of work associated with the dual-career families concept were: Kanter's (1977) *Work and Family in the United States;* Hall and Hall's (1979) *The Two-Career Couple;* Piotrkowski's (1979) *Work and the Family System;* Rice's (1979) *Dual-Career Marriage;* Derr's (1980) *Work, Family and Career;* Moss and Fonda's (1980) *Work and the Family;* Voydanof's (1983) *Work and Family;* Hertz's (1986) *More Equal than Others;* and Sekaran's (1986) *Dual-Career Families*. The literature in professional journals has mushroomed (Piotrkowski, Rapoport and Rapoport, 1987).

Policy Concerns

Aside from conceptual domain, the work has contributed to several areas of policy concern. Sekaran (1986) notes that though to a certain extent dual-career couples bear a direct responsibility for their choice, they do better in achieving their cost-benefit balance if there is a work environment which adopts supportive policies. She calls this a "family friendly" type of organization. Researchers and practitioners have a role to play in creating family friendly policies and services which support the pattern.

The *work/family interface* has recently become a focus of attention of the Ford Foundation in its human rights program area and a conference on the topic was convened in 1988 by the Conference Board. A forthcoming Ford Foundation discussion paper put it thus:

> In shaping work and family policies for the future, it is necessary to address the fact that most families in the United States will have women as well as men supporting them and that most children now have and will continue to have, working mothers as well as working fathers. While families, out of necessity, have had to adapt in order to earn a living and care for their children, institutions in general, and employers in particular—both private sector and public sector—have not yet responded to these shifts in family patterns.

One recent development that may arguably have been affected by dual-career family research is the formulation that families—and children, in particular—require a secure base for healthy functioning and development. This supersedes the emphasis on a series of piecemeal specific measures such as child care services, maternal (later parental) leave, etc. The challenge is how to

provide an array of services to facilitate the maintenance of stable bases in a diversity of families while ensuring reliable functioning in the workplace. This requires re-structuring of work organizations as well as families.

The term dual-career family has passed into the vernacular, being used in the press without customary academic acknowledgement. Articles in the *Wall Street Journal* and in various glossy magazines use the term in various ways—presenting vignettes expressing anxieties about how the new phenomenon would affect marital stability, sexual functioning, child mental health and so on. On the other hand, publications like *MS* have tended to use the term with more positive connotations—as an expression of gender equality. While many more pessimistic analyses, in both the professional and popular press, have derided the phenomenon as too stressful, too elitist, too greedy, there has been a trend toward seeing it as logically inevitable, and in some ways valuable. A new glossy magazine entitled *New Woman* aims to supersede the individualistic stance of *Vogue, Cosmopolitan* and other "women's" magazines and to present women in their three roles—as workers, wives and mothers.

The concept of dual-career families emerged in a social context of concern with the place of women as human resources in our society. It represented a social structural model of change rather than, as previously, regarding the issues as individual problems of women—as expressed in such publications as Myrdal and Klein's *Woman's Two Roles* (1956).

Initial responses to the concept were ambivalent: that it represented a temporary, even freakish phenomenon growing out of wartime needs; that it was an elitist concept not available to families unable to employ domestic help; that it was too stressful to be sustained and would lead to a variety of undesirable outcomes—from sexual impotence/frigidity to child disturbance and family dissolution.

Skolnick and Skolnick (1974), however, recognized it as a radical concept encompassing a fundamental change phenomenon rather than merely an account of an "alternative family pattern." Emery and Trist (1973) saw it as an adaptive manifestation of the transition from industrial to post-industrial society.

Many of the initially outlined dilemmas and bottlenecks have shifted. There is increased acknowledgement of the legitimacy—often the necessity—of sustaining dual-worker family structures. Emphasis has, therefore, moved to issues of how these may be supported. Such support is now often seen as the joint responsibility of families and other social institutions, rather than as a purely private matter.

In the work that lies ahead—both research and action—advances will come through an abandonment of earlier either/or approaches and a recognition of this interdependence. Men and women will need to learn more about the tension lines that emerge as they work at restructuring their interpersonal

relationships; families will need to learn more about the management of expectable structural dilemmas; and work organizations and other social institutions will have to learn more about how to translate their expressed values of social responsibility from the level of platitudinous sentiments to viable policies and practices. These are all interdependent and need to be worked on simultaneously. In the past, attention has focussed on one bottleneck after another—the individual and his motivation; the organization and its discriminatory practices; the family and its iniquitous division of labor. When the original work on dual-career families was conceived the focal issue was how to combine family and work career so that women as well as men could contribute their trained skills to the economy. The dual-career family was identified as a new type of family that was accomplishing this objective. However, it was found (and subsequently replicated in other studies) that though such families existed and are increasingly prevalent, they do not necessarily practice in the domestic setting what they support in the workplace. That is to say, women and men seldom share equally in the tasks of housekeeping, child rearing and domestic organization. Focal attention is now beginning to be given to how more sharing in these areas could be achieved (Ehrensaft, 1987). What is needed is a new culture and set of values which will apply to personal, familial and occupational life—rather than the multiple standards that prevail today.

Massive collaborative-interactive cooperation between funders, researchers and those with the power to implement the implications of knowledge, is required to support those individuals who value gender equality in all spheres of life.

References

Aldous, J. (Editor) 1982. *Two Paychecks: Life in Dual Earner Families.* Beverly Hills, Ca.: Sage.

Derr, C.B. (Editor) 1980. *Work, Family and Career.* New York: Praeger.

Emery, F. and E.L. Trist. 1973. *Towards a Social Ecology.* London and New York: Plenum.

Ehrensaft, D. 1987. *Parenting Together.* New York: Free Press.

Hall, F. and D. Hall. 1979. *The Two-Career Couple.* Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley.

Hertz, R. 1986. *More Equal than Others: Women and Men in Dual-Career Marriage.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kanter, R. 1977. *Work and Family in the United States.* New York: Russell Sage.

Moss, P. and N. Fonda. (Editors) 1980. *Work and the Family.* London: Temple-Smith.

Myrdal, A. and V. Klein. 1956. *Woman's Two Roles; Home and Work.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Pepitone-Rockwell, F. (Editor) 1980. *Dual-Career Couples.* Beverly Hills, Ca.: Sage.

Piotrkowski, C. 1979. *Work and the Family System.* New York: Macmillan.

Piotrkowski, C., R.N. Rapoport and R. Rapoport. 1987. "Families and Work." In

Handbook of Marriage and the Family, edited by M. Sussman and S.K. Steinmetz, New York: Plenum.
Rapoport, R. and R.N. Rapoport. 1969. "The Dual-Career Family: A Variant Pattern and Social Change." *Human Relations,* 22:3–30.
———. 1971. *Dual-Career Families.* London and Baltimore: Penguin.
———. 1975. "Men, Women and Equity." *The Family Coordinator,* 24:421–32.
———. 1976. *Dual-Career Families Re-Examined: New Integrations of Work and Family.* London: Martin Robertson; New York: Harper & Row.
———. (Editors) 1978. *Working Couples.* New York and London: Harper & Row.
Rice, D. 1979. *Dual-Career Marriage.* Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press.
Rossi, A. 1968. "Transition to Parenthood." *Journal of Marriage and the Family,* 30:26–39.
Sekaran, U. 1986. *Dual-Career Families.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
Skolnick, A. and J. Skolnick. 1974. *Intimacy, Family and Society.* Boston: Little, Brown.
Voydanof, P. (Editor) 1983. *Work and Family: Changing Roles of Men and Women in Dual-Career Marriages.* Palo Alto, Ca.: Mayfield.