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**AUTHOR** Chambliss, Catherine A.; Hartl, Alan  
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**ABSTRACT**

Dual wage families are becoming the norm. Increased maternal participation in the workplace has transformed the lives of families and these dramatic changes have created an urgent need for strategies to assist families with two working parents. Most individuals pursuing this lifestyle are eager to learn how to cope more effectively with various common sources of conflict. Helping these families requires an understanding of their conflicts and stressors, and the application of appropriately conceived interventions. Four factors have been found to characterize successful dual earner couples. These couple-attitudes are commitment to an egalitarian lifestyle; assumption of a high degree of personal responsibility and recognition of choices; self-perception as generally competent; and demonstration of a high degree of mutual trust and respect. An intervention which has been successfully used with a diverse group of dual wage family members focuses on building stress-resistance strategies by building an orientation of hardiness. In the 1980s it seems that more couples would like a more truly egalitarian lifestyle, one in which both husband and wife, each equally committed to family and work, aspire to integrate their two roles as parent and worker and to view family and work as complementary, rather than adversarial segments of life experience. (ABL)

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# Dual Wage Families: Optimizing Mutual Growth

Catherine Chambliss

Alan Hartl

Presented at the fourth Annual Eastern Symposium on Building Family Strengths, University Park, PA, April 5-7 1988

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Dual wage families are becoming the norm. The "traditional" family with the sole-breadwinner father and the "at home" mother is rapidly vanishing; it is estimated that by 1990, only 14% of American households will live in this family pattern. Increased maternal participation in the workplace has transformed the lives of millions of wives, husbands, and children, and these dramatic changes have created an urgent need for strategies to assist families with two working parents. Although eventually broad institutional reforms may help to address the new problems of these families more fully, for the time being most individuals pursuing this lifestyle are eager to learn how to cope more effectively with various common sources of conflict. As psychologists and educators, we're very interested in helping these families explore the rich potential of their chosen lifestyle. Helping them requires an understanding of their conflicts and stressors, and the application of appropriately conceived interventions.

Dual earner families and the problems they face have been of great interest to us, both personally and professionally. In our work as clinical psychologists, the majority of our clients are struggling in one way or another with this social trend... either struggling to make their own two worker household function more smoothly, or struggling to affirm and validate their decision to pursue a "traditional" marriage where the wife does not work outside the home. Based on a combination of research and clinical findings derived from over ten years of work, we've identified some key issues which we find very helpful in working with dual earner couples. The following is a brief summary of what we've found to help dual wage families make their lifestyle function more optimally for all family members.

Dual earner couples, especially those with young children, frequently feel overwhelmed by their lifestyle... regardless of whether both are pursuing chosen careers or working because of sheer economic necessity. Though arbitrary, the former might be referred to as dual-career couples and the latter as dual-wage couples. It's helpful to differentiate between the two general sources of their distress, internal and external.

## External and Internal Sources of Difficulty

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The external demands of the workplace, children's needs, and household responsibilities compete for limited time, creating obvious stress on the dual earner couple. In a national survey of workers, 35% of the men and women said that family life and job interfere with each other somewhat or a lot (Crosby 1982). Men complain of overwork and limited leisure time, women of scheduling problems and exhaustion.

The workplace has been slow to accommodate the needs of dual wage families. Inflexible and overly demanding work schedules are common. Many employees also must deal with excessive and unpredictable travel and relocation demands. Parents struggle with problems caused by insufficient and inadequate day care facilities for infants and preschoolers, lacking afterschool programs for older children, and deficient provisions for the care of sick children and elderly family members. Erratic school and recreation program schedules and inadequate school transportation mechanisms further complicate the lives of dual earner parents.

Although these external sources of difficulty are certainly real, we think it is important to understand that they are compounded by equally problematic internal, psychological sources of difficulty. Guilt, anxiety, alienation, powerlessness, rigidity, anger, and competition are common obstacles to success and satisfaction for dual earner couples. The fact that these internal barriers are usually present to one degree or another should not be surprising; today's generation of dual wage partners was generally socialized to accept traditional roles, lack the benefit of successful role models, and find themselves embedded in a social context which is often critical of and challenging toward their dual earner lifestyle. No wonder internal conflict is the rule! For many, these internal issues preclude solutions to the pressing external problems; internal conflicts make people more vulnerable to stress and less efficient in solving problems.

In practice, we have found that the external and internal sources of difficulty are mutually exacerbating, because failure to cope with external demands reinforces the internal problems. As a result, improvement requires changing this ongoing interplay between the external and internal problems. To do this, it's crucial for couples to address both sources of difficulty. In treatment, for example, it's often necessary to provide concrete suggestions on how to meet external demands more successfully, and to assist couples in solving specific problems, before the internal issues can be fully addressed. In the short run this is often needed to keep the family intact; it helps to "buy time" to work on the internal barriers. However, for long term satisfaction with this

lifestyle, it is imperative to address the central internal, psychological obstacles.

#### How to Optimize Mutual Growth The Four C's: Correlates of Success

In our work with dual earner couples, we've discovered that certain common elements characterize the most successful relationships and seem to contribute to a couple's hardiness or ability to cope with the high level of external stressors they often encounter. Those that are able to negotiate the dual wage lifestyle successfully have much in common with a highly stress resistant group of male executives studied by Suzanne Kobasa in the 70's, who did not develop the physical health problems usually associated with their high level of external stress. They also display several qualities that Robert and Marilyn Kriegel have found to be associated with workplace and athletic success.

We've found that considering the four factors that characterize successful dual earner couples provides a framework for helping other couples cope more effectively. Making couples aware of these four factors can help them become more stress resistant.

For mnemonic ease, we've labeled these qualities:

Commitment  
Control  
Confidence  
Cooperation

We'd like to address each of these four characteristics in some detail:

1. **Commitment:** A high level of commitment to an egalitarian, dual wage lifestyle helps successful couples cope with stress. They want to make this lifestyle work for their family. They both value their involvement in the workplace and they both value their family life. They have a fairly clear view of the longterm distribution of rights and responsibilities which they want to characterize their relationship, and are able to weather shortterm storms more easily as a result. They are realistic about their alternatives, and resist the tendency to succumb to romanticized images of traditional marital roles (they avoid comparing their actual, real life with its real frustrations with a fantasy ideal). They have considered the values assumptions which underlie their lifestyle preferences and choices.

Achieving a high level of commitment can be difficult when couples feel forced to both work by external circumstances (usually economic), as is so often the case with dual wage couples. A great many people are hindered by vague feelings

of being cheated out of the traditional, one-paycheck lifestyle they think they'd really prefer. They feel victimized by changes in the economy since the early 60's, which they view as having caused the need for the two-paycheck family. Wives blame husbands for being inadequate providers, which strikes at the core of their husbands' sense of masculinity. So wounded, husbands are even more reluctant to master "feminine" tasks of the hearth, and because their sense of success is being threatened by their wife's need to earn, they ignore and devalue her workplace accomplishments, cheating them both out of the chance to fully enjoy what rewards the workplace offers. Wives feel crushed by the double burden of job and homemaking responsibilities, and feel powerless.

It may be useful to remember that there are two discrete classes of dual wage parents today: those whose own mothers stayed home while they were young, and those whose mothers worked, primarily out of economic necessity. The former group tend to idealize the full-time homemaker role, and are prone to feelings of guilt that they are not able to provide such focused devotion to childrearing. The latter group can itself be divided into a subgroup of parents who find the dual earner situation quite acceptable because it conforms to their early role models' lifestyle, and another group whose members strongly question the idea of maternal employment. They often resented their mothers' working, at a time when this was unusual, and/or had mothers who never resolved their ambivalence about working outside the home. It is important to keep in mind that their mother's generation was even more easily victimized by pervasive, unavoidable social messages glamorizing the stay-at-home mother than working mothers of today. This latter group of "second generation" dual wage earners illustrates the problematic legacy of failure to achieve commitment to a given chosen lifestyle. Such failure communicates negative attitudes to the young, who often go on to play out the problem in their own lives. Awareness of this process should strengthen our resolve to assist today's dual wage families in achieving a high level of commitment to their chosen lifestyle.

We have noticed that some problems in these families can be traced to the way dual wage couples commonly view child care costs. Typically, these expenses are seen as money subtracted from the wife's earnings... costs associated with only her job. This accentuates her already inferior earning power, diminishes her sense of productivity, and impairs her husband's perception of her real contribution to household finances. As a result, wives often feel unsupported as workers, and are denied opportunities to process job-related concerns at home with attentive, helpful husbands. Is it really reasonable to construe child care costs as coming out of the wife's paycheck? This view tends to make working less reinforcing for dual wage women. Unlike professional women in dual career couples, these working women often

can't justify their net earnings by viewing their continued working in terms of the future rewards associated with long term career building.

Many dual wage parents struggle with intensely ambivalent feelings about their lifestyle. Unfortunately, children absorb abundant negative messages from such parental role models: work is painful and cruelly imposed from without; life is unfair; personal control is elusive. A study by Hoffman (1974) suggested that boys in these families may admire their fathers less. These parents are providing for the economic needs of their children... they're often, in fact, providing countless luxuries that we've come to count as necessities: big color TVs, VCRs, CD players, microwave ovens, microprocessors, assorted lessons, etc. But by living their adult lives as if they are not of their own choosing, and as if they are totally outside the scope of their control, these parents magnify their own experience with stress and quite possibly reduce their children's hardiness. Therefore, helping the parents become more committed to the dual wage lifestyle is a critically important first step in fostering the entire family's growth.

The greatest obstacles to this necessary commitment derive from prevalent critical and challenging social attitudes. Three sets of assumptions are particularly threatening:

1. Dual earner couples are harming their children
2. Career women are placing themselves in psychological and/or physical jeopardy
3. Dual wage husbands are burdened and deprived

Therapists, educators, and counselors need to help clients examine these kinds of beliefs and consider them in light of available research evidence. We know that successful dual earner couples are able to set aside the defensiveness that can arise from critical social attitudes. By challenging misconceptions, therapists can reduce their clients' ambivalence and achieve greater levels of commitment.

Dual wage couples frequently feel defensive because of these widespread negative conceptualizations. Popular myths about the harmfulness of the dual earner lifestyle foster maladaptive guilt, anxiety, alienation, and anger. Examining each set of myths in light of the relevant objective evidence helps dual wage couples resolve their ambivalence and make a stronger commitment.

1. The kids. Many dual wage partners have an extremely difficult time with the popular belief that their lifestyle compromises their children's well being. Although most objective developmental research strongly counters prevailing negative attitudes toward maternal employment, showing few differences between children whose mothers are employed and those who are unemployed, and some which

actually show the advantages of having a mother who works outside the home, the public views working mothers as harmful to their children. This misconception must be corrected if couples are to resolve their ambivalence about pursuing a dual wage lifestyle, because when asked what's most important to them, dual wage parents overwhelmingly say that their children's wellbeing is more important than their jobs or their personal success.

The cultural myth suggests that maternal employment leads to distorted, deviant children. In fact, there is no substantial, consistent evidence supporting this myth. Recognizing this may help the myth fade, and significantly reduce parental guilt and anxiety.

Over two and a half decades of research has failed to prove that maternal employment outside of the home harms children. Some recent, large-scale studies even suggest that maternal employment may confer some developmental advantages to some children. For example, a 1986 study on 699 families with children in grades 1, 3, & 5 found that children with employed mothers scored higher on IQ tests and were rated higher by teachers on academic achievement. They appeared more verbally fluent, more autonomous, and better behaved in school. Adolescents of working mothers appear to be better adjusted than those whose mothers don't work, reporting a greater sense of personal worth, personal freedom, a greater feeling of belonging, and better family and interpersonal relations. The greater independence training in families where mothers work outside the home may be in tune with the adolescent's striving for independence. A mother's attitude toward her work is important in mediating the effects of her holding a job on her child's adjustment. It seems that women who feel good about themselves come closer to doing their best as mothers. A rewarding job enhances self esteem, which in turn enhances parenting.

It is important to help clients remember that even a nonglamorous job meets needs above and beyond the purely financial... for example, opportunities to socialize with other adults, involvement with finite tasks that offer a welcome contrast to the never-finished task of parenting, a way of structuring one's day which serves to define non-work, leisure periods (weekday jobs set the stage for the wonderfully welcome relief of the weekend), etc. Recognizing these often ignored invisible rewards can help employed mothers feel good about themselves for having found jobs (even imperfect ones). These positive feelings can contribute to children's perception of their parents' success in managing life, which in turn feeds children's own optimism about one day being able to live the life of a satisfied adult. In general, optimistic, confident children are more motivated to work toward long-term goals and consequently are more likely to succeed.

Working mothers provide positive role models for their children. Their daughters tend to be more ambitious and confident. The fact that wives with careers frequently have chosen to continue working after becoming mothers helps to blur the distinction between work and play. In easing this separation, they redress years of compartmentalization in living created by industrialization. These mothers portray work positively, as something which is exciting, stimulating, enriching, challenging, and even fun! What a lesson for children to learn.

In short, children in dual earner families aren't being deprived! In fact, a recent study by United Media Enterprises found that dual earner parents are more likely to read and draw with their children on a regular basis, are more likely to supervise schoolwork, take them to special events, and talk to them about school and friends. Furthermore, use of child care helps to teach children how to use a broader, varied support system. They learn how to read the expectations of a variety of adults, how to communicate effectively, and how to trust those beyond the immediate family circle. This is extremely important preparation for later life as an interdependent adult.

2. The women. The greater prevalence of rigid sex role stereotypes not only among dual wage partners themselves, but also among their families and peers, makes commitment difficult for many of these women. The widespread attitude that a woman's choosing to work for self-fulfillment is entirely unacceptable... and the parallel belief that such women probably shouldn't have children... makes seeing their job as something they've chosen an impossibility. These women need outside support for another way of viewing their roles and obligations, to free them from the need to defend their working by emphasizing their own victimizations. Helping them appreciate the potential long term benefits for their children and their marriage can help them see having a job as more socially acceptable. Working mothers are often viewed with suspicion by employers who assume their loyalties will be divided between job and family and that performance will suffer as a result. Actually, an employee's performance at work may be enhanced by her participation in multiple roles. Although task specialization and division of labor may foster shortterm increases in efficiency and productivity, as the auto industry painfully learned, it has its price in terms of longterm increased worker boredom, alienation, and dissatisfaction, all of which translate to reduced productivity. For many women, the mix of roles is refreshing and energizing. Many employed women report improved efficiency, heightened self confidence, and a liberating sense of independence in the workplace after having children. They become less maladaptively perfectionistic, better organized, and more willing to take constructive risks than before they were involved with

multiple roles.

Some worry about the psychological and physical effects of "role strain". However, research has overwhelmingly confirmed the health benefits (to both sexes) of having two roles instead of one. Dual wage partners each have two potential sources of self esteem. Research by Grace Baruch and Rosalind Barnett and others indicates that working mothers show greater psychological wellbeing; for most employed wives, the psychological protection of having two roles compensates for the extra obligations, and contentment at work is positively associated with contentment at home. Increasingly it is being recognized that multiple roles are psychologically protective and mutually enhancing. The notion of "role strain" is even fading from the sociological lexicon!

A metaanalytic study by Warr and Parry (1982) revealed that overall, employed women showed better psychological adjustment than nonemployed women on 19 out of 57 measures (including suicide rates, rates of psychiatric illness, ratings of life satisfaction, etc.). The remaining comparisons revealed nonsignificant differences. Among all 57 measures, not one suggested better adjustment among the nonemployed women. Interestingly, they found that employment was more likely to boost a woman's psychological wellbeing if the family had economic problems than if the family is financially stable. This means that even in those dual wage families where women work out of financial necessity, employment confers powerful psychological benefits.

Wives with jobs also need to consider the heavy psychological price of not working outside the home. Because their work in the home is currently accorded little status or respect, women who stay at home often suffer low self esteem. They are more likely to suffer from anxiety, depression, and usually wield less power in their marriages. Staying at home usually affects the type of job a woman will have once the children are grown and she returns to the workplace. Since most women today can expect to work about 25 years, electing to stay at home while children are young entails a substantial eventual sacrifice in the workplace, in terms of both salary and prestige. Women who take themselves out of the workplace run the risk of becoming displaced homemakers in the event of divorce. This role is one characterized by the "triple jeopardy" of needing to seek employment with age, being female, and being seen as inexperienced all working against the effort. A review of the evidence will make it easier to remain committed to the dual earner alternative.

3. The men. Dual wage couples are burdened by restrictive traditional definitions of masculinity, which fail to acknowledge or value men's capacity to nurture. Traditional

American fathers were shown in the early 70's to spend surprisingly little time in actual interaction with their children (one study concluded on average, only 12 minutes a day). But research suggests that men's behavior on the home front has been changing. In one classic community study, where Robert and Helen Merrill Lynd investigated a representative American town in Indiana ("Middletown"), about 10% of all fathers were reported to spend NO time with their children in 1924. A 1978 replication study by Caplow and Chadwick found only 2% in this "no involvement" group. Therefore, the proportion of totally uninvolved fathers dropped from 1 in 10 to 1 in 50. A 1985 study by Juster provided data on the time men spent in "family work" (housework and childcare combined) in 1965 and 1981. According to time diaries, the time in these activities increased from roughly 1.6 hours per day in 1965 to just under 2.0 hours per day in 1981, revealing an increase of about 20%. Taking women's decreasing time in these activities into account, men's proportion of "family work" rose from 20% to 30% over this 16-year period. This rate of change is in fact comparable to the increase in women's proportion of the paid work performed (27% to 35% during the same time period).

Men today are reporting more involvement with their families and greater psychological well-being and happiness from their families than from work. The greater a man's participation in his family life (from doing chores to child care) the more competent and involved he feels as a father, and the less sex-stereotyped his children (especially sons). Studies suggest that father-reared infants actually outperform mother-reared infants on some tasks, challenging the belief that fathers are less effective with babies.

Furthermore, the stress associated with retirement will probably be less burdensome for highly participative fathers, who will continue to enjoy the emotional closeness they have developed with their children.

It is interesting to consider that dual earner couples may paradoxically make it easier on traditional role couples. Dual wage couples are discovering all the "invisible" work stay-at-home mothers did, and are seeing that much of it is very necessary. In addition, as men nurture more, nurturing may become more valued (cross culturally, men's work is more highly valued), making wives that stay at home more respected!

Dual wage couples seem to have an easier time maintaining their commitment when they switch from evaluating and judging themselves to describing and accepting themselves. This makes it easier to take responsibility for life. Successful couples need to emphasize the various BENEFITS, rather than the COSTS of combining careers and family. The successful couples' ability to accept and enthusiastically

embrace their shared lifestyle choice is consistent with a second characteristic, control.

2. Control: Successful dual wage partners assume a high degree of personal responsibility and recognize the choices they make. They perceive outcomes as resulting from their own actions, abilities, and effort. They avoid externalizing their problems, don't blame the world for their problems, and avoid becoming mired in a spiral of mutual blaming within the marriage.

Acceptance of the need for ongoing planning and specific, realistic goal setting is important for couples who are striving to feel in control. Deciding in advance which role to emphasize in cases of conflicting demands is important. For some people, learning how to compartmentalize their roles helps to keep work and family distinct and reduces stress. An assertive behavioral style, and an avoidance of procrastination, is also advantageous. Both seem to be facilitated when couples challenge the notion that they must be "perfect".

In order to maintain an optimal sense of mastery, dual earner couples need to remind themselves of their options. It is particularly important for them to assume an active role in choosing definitions of personal success; developing their own internal performance standards is critical to the balancing act they wish to perform. An acceptance of the need for compromises, flexibility, and the shedding of dispensible "obligations" is necessary. They shouldn't automatically and passively accept the outside world's often questionable definitions of success (regarding performance in both the parenting and working spheres), because such definitions are often self-defeating for them (assuming as these definitions do the traditional division of labor in marriage that allows unilateral devotion to home or job). Spouses in dual wage families need to accept the need for compromises. They need to view things such as choosing a less prestigious job in favor of a high-powered, fast track career as appropriate, given their desire to share participation in parenting and family life. Rather than allow the standards of the outside workplace drag them down to self definitions of "failure", they need to respect their own priorities, and see creating a balance between home and workplace demands as a stunning triumph! "Having it all" is an unrealizable ideal: sampling some of it all characterizes a satisfied, successful life. Consciously making some concessions in defining "having it all" allows dual wage couples the satisfactions of at least having SOME of it all. Helping clients to clarify their values and priorities can be very beneficial. Helping them to recognize that their priorities will shift at different times in their family's life can also yield a broader, more flexible perspective.

Developing these internal standards isn't easy for dual earner couples, in part because many have a history of success in fulfilling external expectations (such as those in the workplace... that's part of why the women want to continue working!) which can actually make it harder on them to stop using external sources of approval as a yardstick.

3. Confidence: Individuals within successful dual wage couples perceive themselves as generally competent, and are not inordinately threatened by the need to make changes. They are able to remain flexible, can tolerate taking risks, and try to see unexpected demands as challenges to growth rather than as threats to security. They work to interpret changes as exhilarating opportunities for discovery and don't overvalue sameness and predictability.

Sustained involvement with multiple roles is often associated with improved self esteem and feelings of competence. A couple's tolerance for change can also be fostered by their conscious development of connections to their community. Building a support system to help buffer the effects of unexpected changes is especially important when dual earner couples live far from their families of origin. This makes the need for a "surrogate" family especially important.

Reassuring dual wage partners that their needs for social support don't represent "weakness" or "failure" can help mobilize appropriate action. Providing this permission for dependence is often important with these clients, because they tend to value autonomy highly and fear implied threats to their independence. The fact that their reliance on child care providers does indeed often make them more dependent on others than they are accustomed to being, frequently makes dependency needs and counterdependence important therapeutic issues.

4. Cooperation: Successful dual wage couples show a high level of mutual trust and respect. They view their relationship as a democratic alliance and value fairness and shared power. They emphasize mutual objectives, regularly reaffirm shared life goals, and avoid competition within the marriage. In other words, these dual earner folks don't DUEL! Instead, they recognize the need for open, unguarded communication. In sharing responsibilities, they are flexible and make accommodating individual strengths and preferences a priority. They value sexual intimacy, and make a conscious effort to reserve time for nurturing their relationship.

Prob.      The biggest obstacle here involves partners' tendency to displace their anger onto their spouses when they are frustrated with their demanding lifestyle. Learning to recognize and label this process often is immensely helpful. These couples actually have an

advantage; the fact that they are both involved in both the job and home arena can facilitate mutual understanding and enhance tolerance for irritability following an especially "bad day" at home or work.

One of the biggest challenges facing these couples is reaching a consensus on how the family's overall workload (including housework, childcare, and workplace responsibilities) will be divided. Without rigid sex roles to guide them, these nontraditional couples are true pioneers, and can benefit from innovative ways of thinking about sharing life's work and functioning as true, equal, mutually supportive partners.

The first step involves reaching agreement about what really needs to be done, and differentiating between "required" and "elected" tasks. This is harder to do than it might initially appear, because it forces an exploration of individual preference differences rooted in personal values ("just how clean is clean?"...how important is beauty: where does "yardwork" end and a "gardening hobby" begin?). Open, respectful exploration of these issues helps couples get a clearer view of what the necessary versus the dispensable tasks are. Sharing this goal development process also helps to remedy the oft-cited problem of men who perform "family work" without taking responsibility for those tasks. Research suggests that the extent to which men organize, schedule, and plan "family work" is much lower than their participation, and has probably not increased as much. Part of this may well be due to the couple's failure to address the separate task of "home management" and develop ways of doing it mutually. Denied the opportunity to have input in planning and evaluating the household tasks they perform, many husbands feel resentful and complain about their wives' totally unreasonable standards. Competitive tendencies can sabotage cooperative efforts... partners must recognize that it may be necessary for them to alter their expectations about how the task should be done.

The next step involves developing a way of balancing the workload and stress load so as to equalize the partners' pleasure/pain ratios. The couple must learn to look at both partners as equally deserving of happiness, and equally able to cope with unpleasant tasks. So long as one member harbors a sense of extreme entitlement, developing a workable, fair system of dividing responsibilities is likely to be impossible. Scorekeeping and preoccupation with a rigid 50-50 split on tasks wastes precious energy and exaggerates the unpleasantness of chores. Developing an explicit, flexible plan for sharing tasks can help partners trust each other. Helping spouses empathize with the others' experience of their life and to recognize what their days actually consist of... how their time is really spent... can help to foster greater willingness to contribute "above and beyond" the minimum demanded. It is

this ability to consider one's spouse's viewpoint, care deeply about their happiness, and thereby grow beyond an inflexible, miserly approach to sharing the workload, that creates a climate of loving mutuality that can make even rushed, difficult times more personally satisfying.

The aim of these steps is not a one-time development of a fixed, final schedule for dividing the workload. Instead, our aim is to help partners learn how to engage in a problem-solving process which will be invoked repeatedly as the nature of the demands upon them changes and necessitates renegotiation.

### Review of Helping Strategies

These four factors, 1) commitment, 2) control, 3) confidence, and 4) cooperation, then, appear to characterize our successful dual earner couples. Several types of interventions can be used to assist dual wage family members achieve greater levels of hardiness. When problems and conflicts exist to a significant degree, we have found that enhancing these characteristics can help dual earner families cope with the stresses of their lifestyle and achieve the balanced success they seek! The preventive model we emphasize aims at educating individuals about the potential problems and challenges that partners in dual earner relationships face. The purpose of this type of intervention is both consciousness-raising and skills-building.

The following suggestions comprise a set of interventions which has been successfully used with a diverse group of dual wage family members.

#### BUILDING STRESS-RESISTANCE STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING STRESS

How can you handle stressful events without becoming harmfully aroused and anxious? Develop the trait of **HARDINESS** and work to replace cynicism with a more constructive, optimistic, and vital outlook.

If you're under a lot of stress, (and as a member of a dual earner family, it is likely that you are), a hardy personality and a positive, trusting outlook may do more for your health than exercise or a strong constitution. Inner resources for managing stress can be improved in various ways. Development of these competencies can enhance individual productivity and satisfaction, and contribute to overall family wellbeing.

#### BUILDING AN ORIENTATION OF HARDINESS

The following four characteristics are the basic components of hardiness:

**COMMITMENT-** Commitment to self, work, family and other important values. Commitment is the opposite of alienation.

**CONTROL-** A sense of personal control over one's life. The opposite is powerlessness.

**CONFIDENCE-** The ability to perceive oneself as competent and see change in one's life as a challenge to master. The ability to see changes as developmental opportunities, rather than as threats.

**COOPERATION-** A mutual approach to solving problems, grounded in an awareness of and respect for others' needs.

#### Methods for Change:

1. Building a sense of COMMITMENT involves seeing the world as interesting and benign. It also requires clarifying your values and resolving ambivalence about lifestyle choices.

a. The first step is to engage in exercises that allow you to envision the possibilities your life offers by imagining all the alternatives available to you.

1. Focusing- where are you now?  
what are you experiencing?

2. Situational Reconstruction-  
where else could you be?  
how could things be worse?  
what shifts would be necessary?  
how could things be better?  
what shifts would be necessary?

b. Ambivalence and conflicting values make commitment difficult for many working women, especially those with children. Adherence to two sets of values that are incompatible creates stress and strain. For example, today, the importance placed on women's needs for self-fulfillment and equality is often in sharp conflict with the widely espoused ideas that young children need a mother at home and that a husband's success depends on the continual availability of a supportive and nurturant spouse. These cultural realities set the stage for self doubt and guilt for many women. How can employed women resolve the question of commitment?

1. Honest self appraisal- identify what makes you uncomfortable & what you want from your life (things, relationships, respect, prestige, power, nurturance,

affection, tranquility, responsibility, beauty...where do the imbalances lie?)

2. Detect, examine, and challenge irrational beliefs that fuel doubt and guilt. Can you be everything to everyone? Does the selfless martyr really help her family the most? Does the workplace really demand total loyalty and perfection?

3. Network with peers (other employed women, other participant fathers, etc.) to underscore the legitimacy of dual values and trying to break with traditionally segregated divisions of labor.

4. Clarify your sense of purpose by developing a consensus with your spouse. Discuss your mutual goals and options. Explore alternatives imaginatively.

5. Stop torturing yourself with unrealistic fantasies! Don't engage in futile comparisons of fantasy and reality. For example, comparing your real life with its real frustrations (given your actual choice to work and raise a family) with a fantasy ideal (For example, for women: a vague romantic idea of how you would function without work obligations outside the home if you were given the chance or if you made the choice. For men: an idealized image of what your life would be like with a handmaiden-type wife constantly at your beck and call).

c. Switch from evaluating and judging yourself to describing and accepting yourself. This makes it easier to take full responsibility for your life.

Enhancing your sense of CONTROL requires recognizing how your personal choices dictate outcomes.

a. Responsible decision-making begins with the formulation of goals and the development of specific plans of action to influence your life.

b. Transform stressful events by recognizing your role in shaping your emotional response to them. Feelings originate in our interpretations of events, not in the events themselves. By changing our view of events, we can alter how we feel. This can increase your sense of personal powerfulness.

c. Develop an assertive behavioral style. This is necessary for setting limits and avoiding overextension. Practice saying no in a firm, nonapologetic voice when turning down an unreasonable demand.

d. Set realistic expectations for yourself. Don't base your self esteem on being perfect...juggling career and family requires compromise. Shed dispensible household

tasks. Relax housekeeping standards and create an efficiently cleanable home.

e. Don't overemphasize unimportant details. Complete assignments in a reasonable way within a realistic timetable. Avoid perfectionism by (1) becoming aware of this tendency and (2) perspective-taking (i.e., does this detail make a big difference in the "grand scheme" of things?).

f. Take charge of scheduling your time. Organize your life. Make diligent use of household "to do" and shopping lists and other time management tools to keep abreast of projects.

1. Don't procrastinate. Recognize this "fear of failure" game as the waster of time it is. Examine why you may avoid testing your real abilities by delaying tasks until the last moment ("if I'd had the time, the job would be perfect, but I waited and so was rushed"). Do you use procrastination to make boring work more exciting? How else could you add interest to your worklife?

2. Focus- be where you are (home vs. work)  
center on activities at hand.  
Compartmentalize your life!

3. Use a Daily List to outline your specific tasks for the next workday. Complete this list at the end of each work day.

g. Search for and create support systems to meet your needs. Delegate! Share responsibility!

h. Use compensatory self improvement strategies to enhance your feelings of control when external realities are limiting you in other ways. Define an area of deficiency and embark on a personal growth program. Acquire a new skill!

3. Increasing your CONFIDENCE involves recognizing one's potential for coping and becoming more future and change oriented. Seeing change and new demands as potential adventure requires an ability to tolerate risk and failure.

a. Address and change irrational beliefs that underlie fear of failure and avoidance of risk-taking. Do you feel you have to be perfectly competent in everything you do? Do you expect yourself to cope perfectly with every demand made of you? Do you think others expect this perfection from you?

b. Clarify your short term and long term goals. Recognize the need for flexibility and the alternative paths to achievement of your most valued long term objectives.

c. Accept the notion that total lack of stress is both boring and deadly. You want your life to change! View your life as a flowing process, rather than as a linear path to a specific destination. Ask yourself how you would like to be remembered after death ( for impersonal achievements or for a shared style of living and interacting, and facing challenges to grow and change)

d. Recall your major experiences with failure. Think about how you have been shaped by your failures. Learn to identify what you have learned from failure experiences. Notice how failure often stimulates more growth and development than success.

e. Create positive self-fulfilling prophecies. Expect the best. Reduce anticipatory anxiety and be careful not to sabotage your own communications by broadcasting expectations of disappointment or criticism.

4. Increasing the level of COOPERATION within a family requires a climate of trust and caring.

a. Establish patterns of open and direct communication. Develop self expression skills that allow family members to discover shared areas of interest or dissatisfaction. Sharing allows a family to function as a system that understands itself.

b. Develop family members' capacity for empathy. Resolving conflicts optimally requires mutual understanding and respect for another's viewpoint.

c. Explicitly recognize the value of compromise. Praise the discovery of mutually beneficial problem solutions. Discuss the value of working to the communal as well as the personal good. Temper competitiveness among members by encouraging children to measure themselves against their own, internal standards, rather than through comparisons with siblings.

d. Develop a flexible method for sharing the family's work. Assess members' abilities and preferences on a periodic basis, in order to match persons and jobs appropriately, fairly, and kindly. Allow all members to participate actively in decision-making about task assignments. Occasionally review the entire household's division of labor as a family, with an emphasis on positive acknowledgement of responsible, successful performance of duties.

e. Support traditions which enhance the family's sense of identity and specialness. Create a variety of shared memories and emphasize their importance with a concrete record (e.g., photos, saved calendar notations, films, etc.). Special outings and shared travel excursions are

particularly salient features of memory, and consequently should be a family priority.

f. Encourage members to see the family as a shared creation, for which all are equally responsible. Avoid having one parent seen as orchestrating family affairs and therefore "in charge" of the group and everyone's happiness within.

### Conclusion

The first examples of dual earner couples typically conformed to traditional sex roles within the family. Husbands felt terrific about "allowing" their wives to work, but made few or no concessions in their own careers or in their contributions to household and family tasks.

In the 80's, it seems that more couples would like a more truly egalitarian lifestyle, one in which both husband and wife, each equally committed to family and work - aspire to integrate their two roles (parent and worker)... to view family and work as complementary, rather than adversarial segments of life experience.

Career and family involvement aren't easily combined, given the demands of today's competitive, inflexible workplace and the scarcity of childcare resources and the like, but with some effort, we think balance can be achieved... partners can sample the rich satisfactions of simultaneous involvement in nurturing and producing... and children can observe and learn how to achieve balance within their adult lives.

These families aren't flawless, and their lifestyle is far from "seamless"... but their choices can set the stage for optimizing the growth and development of all family member... in a manner which more closely approximates fairness to all than many families restricted by limiting traditional sex roles.