



## A VISION FOR EXCELLENCE: THE 2000 KANTER AWARD

Marcie Pitt-Catsoupes, Ph.D.



Shelley MacDermid  
Ph.D.

*Editor's Note: Shelley MacDermid is truly a boundary-pusher. During the past year, Shelley provided leadership for the creation of the Rosabeth Moss Kanter Award, which recognizes excellence in work/life research. MacDermid partnered with the Boston College Center for Work & Family for the 2000 Kanter Award. Once the idea for the award had been developed, MacDermid approached the Center for Work & Family about collaboration. MacDermid states, "The reputation and expertise of the BC Center has been invaluable in bringing this award to life."*

*The first award has been granted to Erin Kelly and Frank Dobbin of Princeton University for their article, "Civil rights law at work: Sex discrimination and the rise of maternity leave policies," AJS, 105(2), 455-492. Our sincere congratulations to Kelly and Dobbin. The award was granted to Kelly and Dobbin at the 10th Anniversary meeting of the Boston College Work & Family Roundtable on October 19, 2000. A separate article about the work of Kelly and Dobbin is included in this issue of the On-Line Newsletter (see next page).*

*Shelley MacDermid is the Director of Purdue University's Center for Families and a faculty member in the Department of Child Development and Family Studies at Purdue. Through her research and extensive publications, Shelley has made significant contributions to the knowledge base of work and family issues. Shelley is currently the co-principal investigator on two grants: a four-year Military Family Research Institute study funded by the Department of Defense and a three year research project funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.*

*Information about the Center for Families can be found at:*

<http://www.cfs.purdue.edu/CFH/home.html>

For some time, Shelley MacDermid has had a vision for excellence. Having dedicated her career to the study of work and family issues, MacDermid wanted to encourage work and family investigators to articulate standards for research that would push the work/family agenda forward and begin to define the parameters of work and family studies.

According to MacDermid, there could be many benefits from focusing on excellence in research. The process of recognizing excellence will encourage researchers from different disciplines to be more aware of contributions that their colleagues are making. She states, "The interdisciplinary nature of the issues makes it very complicated for building the knowledge base. The work/family literature is scattered in many different journals, each reflecting a different discipline. At some universities, you would have to go to as many as 15 different libraries to access the range of relevant journals." MacDermid

thinks that the fragmentation of the literature has limited the cross-fertilization that might otherwise occur as academics and corporate practitioners try to keep up to date with current studies. In essence, as individual researchers, we are missing opportunities to look at issues from different vantage points.

Having previously participated in similar awards for research excellence, MacDermid established a four-step process:

- 1) inviting scholars from different disciplines to participate on the nominating/review panel;
- 2) having panel members nominate articles from 30 different peer review journals published during 1999;
- 3) having each of the nominated articles reviewed by at least two reviewers; and
- 4) having each panel member review and rate the top five articles.

### The 2000 Panel

**MacDermid coordinated the process of nominations, review, and ranking made by the following group of work/family researchers:**

**Lottie Bailyn, MIT**  
**Ellen Bankert, Boston College Center for Work and Family**  
**Rosalind Barnett, Brandeis University**  
**Gary Bowen, University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill**  
**Karen Crooker, University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee**  
**Bob Drago, Penn State University**  
**Linda Duxbury, Carleton University**  
**Naomi Gerstel, University of Massachusetts**  
**Linda Haas, Indiana University**  
**Briget Hiedemann, Seattle University**  
**Jeff Hill, Brigham Young University**  
**Ellen Kossek, Michigan State University**  
**Susan Lambert, University of Chicago**  
**Sharon Lobel, Seattle University**  
**David Maume, University of Cincinnati**  
**Marcie Pitt-Catsoupes, Boston College**  
**Phyllis Raabe, University of New Orleans**  
**Jackie Rogers, Penn State University**  
**Theresa Rothausen, University of St. Thomas**  
**Mary Secret, University of Kentucky**  
**Patricia Voydanoff, University of Dayton**  
**Mark Wardell, Penn State University**

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# "CIVIL RIGHTS LAW AT WORK: SEX DISCRIMINATION AND THE RISE OF MATERNITY LEAVE POLICIES"

*Editor's Note: Erin Kelly and Frank Dobbin received the first Rosabeth Moss Kanter Award for their article, "Civil Rights Law at Work: Sex Discrimination and the Rise of Maternity Leave Policies," (1999). AJS, 105(2): 455-492. In addition, the article won the Mary Parker Follett award for the best article in politics and history from the American Political Science Association.*

## Biographical sketch:

Erin Kelly received her B.A. from Rice University in 1993 and her Ph.D. in sociology from Princeton University in June 2000. She is currently an assistant professor at the University of Minnesota, where she teaches courses on gender, work, and family.

## Biographical sketch:

Frank Dobbin is Professor of Sociology at Princeton University. He studies the evolution of corporate human resource policies, and has most recently focused on how they are shaped by federal laws designed to promote equality of opportunity. His recent articles trace the spread of affirmative action programs, of diversity management policies, and of sexual harassment policies.

## An Interview with Erin Kelly

Editor's note: Erin Kelly kindly spoke with us about the award-winning paper and the research it generated. She began the paper as a graduate student at Princeton University when she took a methods course with Professor Frank Dobbin. Kelly tells an intriguing story of how their research shed light on the paradoxical power of "weak" administrative rulings in the rise of maternity leave policies.

### Q: Please tell us about this award-winning paper.

A: Frank and I started working on the paper my first year of graduate school. Originally, I was interested in studying which fathers took family leave, but I could not find data. I was fortunate, however, that Frank had access to data from a stratified random sample of California, New Jersey, and Virginia employers. Using that data, we were able to chart the spread of maternity leave policies between 1955 and 1985 in 279 organizations.

The analysis showed that over half of the companies had maternity leave in place by 1985. As a young graduate student who did not know the earlier legal history of the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA), I was surprised by the number of companies who had enacted leave policies well before the passage of the FMLA. To see what was going on, I dove into FMLA legal history, and Frank and I started analyzing the data. We think the story that we discovered is interesting for researchers of law and organizations. And it reminds those of us in the work-family field about the earlier history of family leave.

The story starts with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed sex discrimination in employment. But the 1964 landmark legislation did not deal with maternity leave at all, so there was a period of confusion and debate about how maternity leave 'fit' under sex discrimination law. In 1972, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) declared that companies that weren't providing maternity leave were violating Civil Rights Act -- were discriminating against women. This EEOC administrative guideline was published in the federal register and gained some attention in the press.

However, administrative guidelines come out all the time, therefore, we think the next phase was absolutely critical. With the EEOC, some unions sued employers over their maternity leave practices. Those legal battles really catapulted the whole issue of maternity leave into the public's eye. With our data, we are able to show that companies start adding maternity leave in large numbers. By the time the FMLA was enacted, the "damage" (laughing) had been done; many employers had maternity leave policies.

### Q: What are the broader implications of this case? In short how does public policy shape employment practices in the US?

A: We think it's a very interesting case. It underscores the surprising effects administrative guidelines have on organizational behavior. Administrative rulings are 'weak' because they can be overturned by the courts and by Congress. Americans tend to underestimate the importance of policy in part because the federal government appears to be weak.

### Q: Please tell us about your current research projects.

A: In June 2000, I completed my dissertation, which used a survey (funded by the Sloan Foundation) of almost 400 employers. The dissertation, entitled 'Corporate Family Policies in U.S. Organizations, 1965-1997,' looked at how and why organizations provide family policies, such as family leave and dependent care programs. Currently, I am collaborating with Frank Dobbin and Sandra Kalev. We are looking at the impact of the FMLA, a clear mandate, on organizations. The law did have a dramatic effect, bringing on board a group of employers who ignored earlier pressure. We see an enormous increase in paternity leave and leave policies for workers who need to care for seriously ill relatives. We also found that about 20% of surveyed companies aren't abiding by the requirements of the FMLA. Either they aren't allowing leaves or they don't allow 12 weeks of leave for paternity or maternity.

### Q: Any common characteristics among the non-compliant companies, for example, size?

A: The sample includes middle and larger companies (at least 50 employees). The non-compliant companies tend to be smaller, less likely to have professional and managerial workers in core jobs, and are located in states

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MacDermid indicated that the results of the review process did not result in any surprises because the panel focused on investigations that demonstrated careful, thoughtful work. There was consensus among the panel members that any study nominated had to show a high degree of methodological rigor. For the final round of reviews, the panelists selected studies that had clear relevance for public policies, workplace policies, or program supports. For example, the winning paper discussed a careful analysis of the role that legislation can play in employees' access to maternity leave. MacDermid also felt that the papers in the final round asked new questions. She stated, "In general, these papers each took a bold step in some way."

Innovation in research is particularly appropriate that this award, since it was named in recognition of Rosabeth Moss Kanter, author of the 1977 monograph, *Work and Family in the United States: A Critical Review and Agenda for Research and Policy*. Many feel that modern work/family research began with the publication of this book that challenged fundamental assumptions made by researchers, policy makers, and workplace decision-makers. MacDermid stated, "When I was thinking about an award for excellence, I spoke to a number of colleagues around the country. Every one of them sug-

gested that the award be named in honor of Rosabeth Moss Kanter. Her work demonstrated sensitivity to the needs of both families and organizations. This dual perspective is something that we need to promote. More than any other single individual, Kanter's work has shaped work/family research for the past 25 years. I am pleased that she has agreed to have her name connected with the award."

MacDermid hopes that the Kanter award will encourage stronger connections across disciplines. Furthermore, she anticipates that discussions about research excellence will make it more acceptable for researchers to respectfully challenge one another to consider the implications of thorny methodological issues such as low response rates or designs where data collection is restricted to single workplaces. It is MacDermid's belief that it is healthy and productive for researchers to engage in debates such as these. Identifying the "best of the best" also makes it easier for practitioners and the public to know what research studies deserve their attention.

Ultimately, MacDermid expects that the awards will advance work/family research as a field of study defined by theory and empirical investigations.

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that do not have their own state leave law. With the help of the Sloan Foundation, I am investigating the extent to which non-compliance is due to ignorance or resistance. From the preliminary interviews, I'm seeing ignorance and resistance are actually intertwined. This is hard to investigate; I'm still playing around with how to get at this in detail with the interviews. But I am getting the sense that within the organization, there are people who clearly understand the law, but they are resisting by allowing the general population of workers and, sometimes, low level HR managers to remain ignorant.

The policy implication is that we need to educate workers. Perhaps union can play a role in educating workers and managers who are making the deci-

sions. I have some hope that if we get to a system of paid family leave, by applying through an unemployment office, for maternity leave pay, the organization will be taken out of the picture. If we move to such a system, we could educate workers about their basic rights under the existing law.

### **Q: Exciting work. What's next on the research agenda?**

A: I am planning a comparative case study that will explain implementation and variation of family policy within organizations. The key question: Why some organizations whole-heartedly implement family policies, while others put them 'on the books' but make few real changes in their practices or the organizational culture.

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nature of low-wage work." Albelda recommends that public policies should establish systems of care for families – especially low-income families – and children caught in the institutional shifts. What types of policies would best address the work/family priorities of low-income families? Albelda would support a package of supports including universal health care, living wages, wage supports and other benefits that could decrease the crises resulting from income instability, such as caregiving stipends, housing assistance, child care, paid leave, and school care.

Albelda commented, "Public policy options sometimes seem distant. At other times, they are perceived as being obtrusive. But in reality, they can often offer simple, direct solutions to the work/family dilemmas of American families." The well-being of our children depends on providing them basic securities. Albelda is an articulate advocate for the creation of public policies that provide social securities to all families.