

# How Some Men Pass as 80-Hour-a-Week Ideal Workers

**THEY GET THE JOB DONE, SPEND TIME WITH THEIR FAMILIES UNDER THE RADAR—AND ARE REWARDED** / SARA RIMMER



Erin Reid recalls the response she got from other academics when she mentioned years ago her interest in men's experiences in the workplace.

"They'd say, 'Men don't have gender issues in the workplace—why would you want to study men?'" says Reid, a Questrom School of Business assistant professor of organizational behavior.

Given the initial skepticism about her subject, Reid has been stunned by the response to her April 2015 *Organization Science* study, which examines a high-powered consulting firm and how men as well as women navigated demands that so-called ideal workers log 80-hour weeks, travel "at the drop of a hat," and put their clients above everything else, including their families. Among the responses: the *New York Times* devoted one of its online "Upshot" columns to the study in May, and it was highlighted by Salon.com the same month.

Reid interviewed 82 consultants in the American offices of an elite global strategy consulting firm with a strong US presence, as well as 13 other people associated with the firm, for her study. In keeping with the percentages of male and female consultants at the firm (which were comparable to those of similar companies), 64 of the consultants interviewed were men, and 18 were women. They held undergraduate or advanced degrees from highly selective schools like Williams, Harvard, and Stanford. Reid was given access to performance reviews and internal human resources records.

As explained in the study, some men were getting by with 50- and 60-hour weeks, focusing on local clients in order to greatly reduce their business travel, and making time for their families. The trick—one most women at the firm seemed to be uncomfortable with—was that they were doing it under the radar. Drawing on the late sociologist Erving Goffman's concepts of "passing" and "revealing" as ways to explain how people manage discredited social identities, Reid writes that they were passing as the firm's prized Supermen, or slavishly devoted ideal workers. Not only that, but they were getting the job done and being rewarded with rave reviews and promotions, just like those who really did work 80-hour weeks.

Another group of men—and most of the women—were transparent about wanting time for their families. While the firm accommodated them with part-time schedules (and less pay) and infrequent business trips, these workers, regardless of gender, were marginalized.

They didn't get the rewards—the stellar reviews, promotions, and big bonuses—that went to the 80-hour-a-week ideal workers.

"A lot of people feel like they have to work all the time or that they are expected to work all the time," says Reid. "And yet at the same time, we all talk about the need for work/family/

life balance. There's a problem with this culture of overwork. It's not always necessary for performance. It's not just mothers who have trouble with this culture. It's fathers, too, and people who don't have children."



Erin Reid studied the ways that men at an elite consulting firm gamed the system.