

# Firefighters are no macho men

June 27 2011

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The firefighting profession has a strong trademark characterised by heroes and masculinity. This image is commonly reinforced not only in media but also for example in the firemen calendars produced by the firefighters themselves. Yet to simply say that the men in the profession make efforts to maintain and take advantage of the macho status is a gross simplification according to Mathias Ericson, the author of a doctoral thesis based on interviews and observations from several different fire stations.

'The men I met stressed that they are not particularly masculine. They pointed out that they were doing just fine without big muscles and that those types of expectations are just silly. At the same time, however, they feel that the macho image sometimes is a useful tool to gain the [confidence](#) of the public.'

Ericson describes how the studied men distance themselves from the link between their profession and [masculinity](#). Yet they see it as important that the group contains only men.

'Working with only men gives them a sense of togetherness and a chance to socialise in a down-to-earth sort of way. They feel that the presence of females in the workplace would keep them from being as close to each other,' he says.

Ericson observed a "brotherhood" that seemed secure, natural and as anticipated given long shifts and facilities that require a great deal of physical proximity. But also vulnerable and demanding, since it was

assumed that the perceived community is based on the presence of only men. Moreover, not just any man seems to be able to fit in – practically oriented men and men who enjoy the oftentimes raw jargon have an advantage in this respect.

The study discusses which special type of intimacy and natural fellowship [men](#) are assumed to be able to share with each other. It turned out to be particularly important in the [firefighting](#) profession. Self-confidence and belonging was not only a matter of passing the recruitment tests and being hired, but also of fitting into the work teams.

Provided by University of Gothenburg

Citation: Firefighters are no macho men (2011, June 27) retrieved 5 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-06-firefighters-macho-men.html>

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