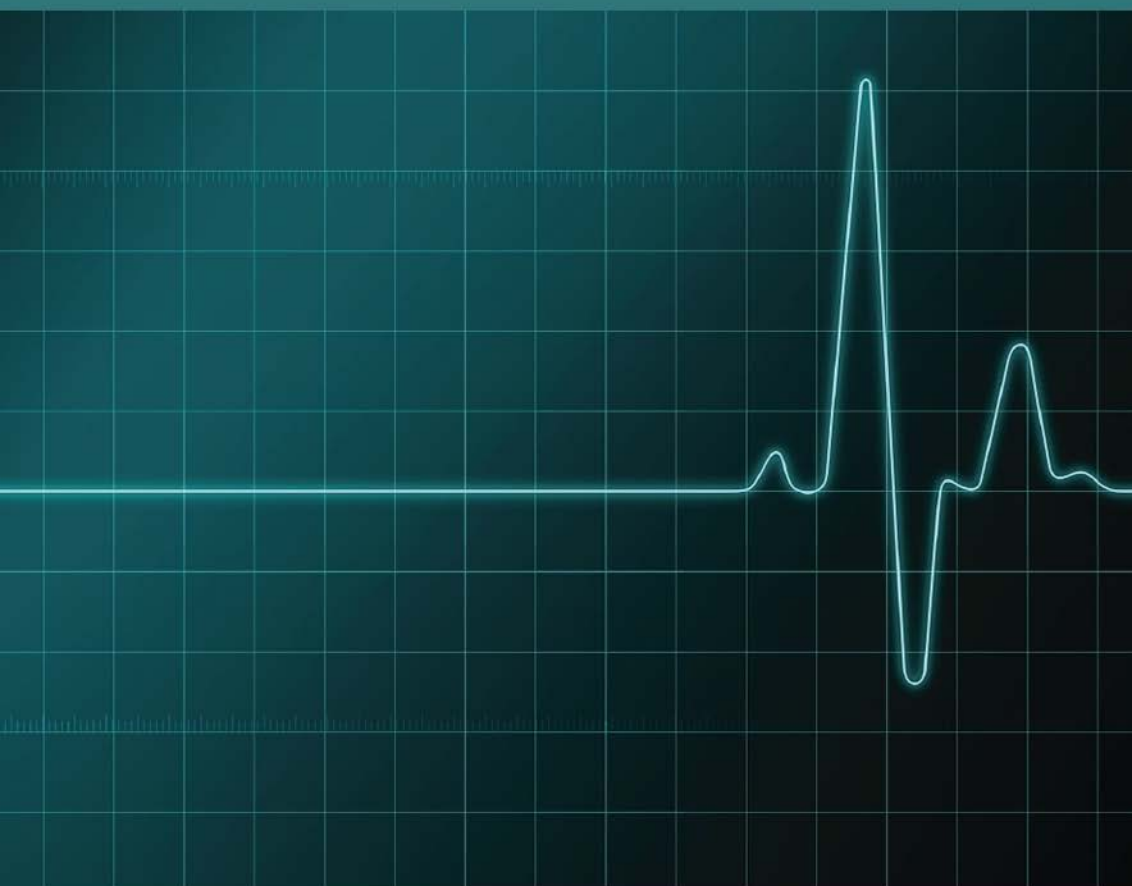




Masculinities, Gender Equality and Crisis Management



EDITED BY MATHIAS ERICSON
AND ULF MELLSTRÖM

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The overarching mission of the rescue services comprises three main areas of responsibility: protection against disasters and accidents; crisis management; and civil defence. This mission covers a long chain of obligations in trying to improve societal prevention capabilities and manage threats, risks, accidents, and disasters concerning generic as well as individual safety. It follows a reactive social chain of threat-risk-crisis-crisis management-care-rehabilitation. The authors in this book show that the interesting occupational characteristics of these duties are their connection to gender and crisis management in a wider sense.

Gendered practices, processes, identities, and symbols are analytical lenses that provide a particular understanding and explanatory base that has received far too little attention in the academic literature. This book identifies four major themes in relation to a gendered understanding of the rescue services, and more generally emergency work:

- Masculine heroism.
- Intersectional understandings of sexuality, class, and race.
- Gender and technology.
- Gender equality and mainstreaming processes.

This book shows how the rescue services constitute a productive ground for contemporary gender studies, including feminist theory, masculinity and sexuality studies. Its critical perspective provides new directions for emergency work and crisis management in a broader sense, and in particular for scholars and practitioners in these areas.

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Abbreviations

BA	Breathing Apparatus
CFS	Community Fire Safety
EMT	Emergency Medical Technician
ESF	European Social Fund
FBU	Fire Brigades Union
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex
MSB	Myndigheten för Samhällskydd och Beredskap
PPE	Personal Protection Equipment
RFSL	Riksförbundet för Sexuellt Likaberättigande
RSYD	Räddningstjänsten Syd
SBB	Swedish Association for Fire Officers
SCCA	Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (English translation for MSB)
SFI	Svenska för Invandrare (Swedish language courses for immigrants)

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Introduction

Masculinities, Gender Equality, Crisis Management and the Rescue Services

Contested Terrains and Challenges

*Ulf Mellström, Mathias Ericson, Anne-Charlott Callerstig,
Katherine Harrison, Kristina Lindholm and Jennie Olofsson*

In this introduction we provide an overview of research on gender issues in the rescue services in combination with introducing the different contributions in this book. The overview is primarily concerned with three national contexts, the US, the UK and Sweden, and we focus on the most prevalent themes in the literature as well as pointing out under-researched areas. The empirical contributions in this volume draw on empirical work from Sweden, the UK and Denmark.

Our aim in this book is to show how the rescue services constitute a fertile ground for epistemological and methodological concerns in contemporary gender studies, including feminist theory, masculinity and sexuality studies. We also believe that the critical perspective offered by interdisciplinary gender studies can provide new perspectives on emergency work and crisis management in a broader sense. As this area of research is still in an early stage, and this book is (to our knowledge) the first collected volume dealing with gender and rescue services, we also want to introduce prevalent themes in the academic literature as well as pointing out neglected areas.

The overarching mission of the rescue services comprises three main areas of responsibility: 1) protection against disasters and accidents, 2) crisis management and 3) civil defence. This mission covers a long chain of obligations in trying to improve societal prevention capabilities and manage threats, risks, accidents and disasters concerning generic as well as individual safety. It follows a reactive social chain of threat-risk-crisis-crisis management-care-rehabilitation. The interesting occupational characteristics of these societal duties are, from our perspective, their connection to gender and crisis management in a wider sense.

The reactive crisis management chain from threat to rehabilitation concerns the fundamental organisation of society, as many ethical, practical and intellectual issues are at stake in connection to emergency management. The occupational organisation of the broad mission of the rescue services concerns (in principal at least) everything from collective military actions to individual

rehabilitation connected to crisis management more generally. As such, this also illustrates how gender is stratified in complex and entangled ways in contemporary society in relation to social and cultural core values.

Currently, we observe a gradual transformation of the rescue services in Sweden, UK and the US. We witness how an organisation that has been characterised by a reactive task orientation is gradually shifting focus and, to a greater extent, emphasising proactivity. In the light of this ongoing reactive–proactive change we argue that different forms of gender analyses are powerful tools to understand the contemporary transformation of the rescue services. From our perspective, gendered practices, processes, identities and symbols are analytical lenses that provide a particular understanding and explanatory base that has received far too little attention in the academic literature. We identify here four major themes in relation to a gendered understanding of the rescue services, and, more generally, emergency work that we regard as of particular importance. These are also relevant to a broader understanding of gender and crisis management, risk and safety, although in this introduction we are primarily dealing with literature on the rescue services. These themes connect to the contributions in this volume, which specifically deal with the rescue services in one way or another. The major themes are:

- Masculine heroism,
- Intersectional understandings of sexuality, class and race,
- Gender and technique,
- Gender equality and mainstreaming processes.

A recurrent ‘leitmotif’ that cuts across the different topics is the ‘doing of masculinity’. Questions of masculinity dominate much of the existing literature on gender and the rescue services and will be given considerable attention. Baigent (2005) pinpoints that “the work of fire fighting is extremely masculinised” (Baigent, 2005: 45) to the extent that the accomplishment of effective firefighting is conflated with the achievement of masculinity (Baigent, 2005: 47). The rescue services are accordingly extremely male dominated all over the world. In Sweden for instance, women compose 2.8 percent of the firefighter squad. There are, therefore, good reasons to begin with the theme of heroism.

Masculine Heroism

The masculine heroism of firefighters is the most common theme that can be observed in the literature on gender and rescue services (cf. Baigent, 2001; 2008; Cooper, 1995; Ericson, 2004; Kruse, 2007; Lorentzi, 1997; Mc Williams, 2007; Olofsson, 2011). There are few, if any, occupations that carry the same particular symbolic weight of classic masculine heroism. Cooper has focused on the question of why the fireman has been so celebrated historically and brings out the “interconnecting qualities of ideal manhood to which he was assimilated: manliness/masculinity, chivalry and heroism” (1995: 141). This also

forms the core of much writing on, and analysis of, how classic masculine core values are re/produced within the fire service. As such it connects closely to what Whitehead (2002: 123) sees as a constituting feature of almost all forms of masculinity: "For most men, any 'heroic project' begins when they leave for work." The conflation of heroism, masculinity and firefighting is also, according to Baigent (2001; 2008), the explanatory key for why women are directly and indirectly excluded from the fire services. From an intersectional perspective, he further points to the interrelation between masculinity and class, where the occupational skills of firefighters are closely connected to an ethos of white working class masculinity (see also Desmond, 2006; 2007).

The heroic masculine men preventing accidents and rescuing people are also commonly associated with a deeply rooted metaphor of masculine achievement as a cultural imaginary of national unity and protection. As Faludi (2007) demonstrates in her book *The Terror Dream. Fear and Fantasy in Post-9/11 America*, male strength and the performative ethos of masculinity were first and foremost symbolised by the firefighters who rescued people from the Twin Towers after the attack (see also Chetkovich, 2004; Lorber, 2002; Sargent, 2002; Tracy and Scott, 2006). As a resource for mobilising public support, firefighters epitomise a cultural ideal and possibly the last bastion of a particular good-hearted masculine heroism:

As fire-fighters picked their way through what remained of the World Trade Centre, they, and the rest of the world, paused to realise that once again fire-fighters have become a symbol of all that is good in the world . . . New York's 'finest' are indeed a shining symbol of the very best in courage and humanitarian selflessness.

(Baigent, 2008: 1)

The cultural production of this particular form of masculinity in the fire service stands in contrast to other forms of masculinities. The heroic firefighters in the tragic scene of 9/11 came to represent and symbolise the glory and bravery of a whole nation against the evil-minded terrorists aiming at the very heart of the American nation. The heavily loaded symbolism of such gendered representational practices is consequently what gives the occupation its prominent aura and elevated status but also points to the inertia of change in gender relations in the rescue services. The gendered irony in relation to the tragedy of 9/11 is described by Baigent (*ibid.*):

Fire fighters are indeed a masculinity that needs to be celebrated but in that typical irony that is the group who are proud to call themselves men, many of those firefighters who are acting out this masculinity were female.

Sites of resistance in regard to change in a highly gender-imbalanced organisation can usually be identified at various organisational locations. According to Dekker (2007) and Dekker and Jonsén (2008), rescue service organisations