Economic Inequality and the “Male Loneliness Epidemic”: Is rising inequality threatening men’s sense of masculinity, and is compensatory masculinity getting in the way of developing emotionally close, male friendships?

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My research investigates how beliefs about masculinity interact with rising economic inequality and how this might be connected to the male loneliness epidemic that is currently being discussed much in the media. Specifically, it looks at how lower socioeconomic status affects the size of men’s social support networks and close friendships between men. Drawing from Connel’s theory of hegemonic masculinity and Vandello and Bosson’s precarious manhood theory, I suggest that the increase in economic inequality affects men in a particular way as their gender role is in large part formed around being independent, stoic, and being a breadwinner. I therefore hypothesise that 1: Men will report having fewer friends, fewer close friends, and fewer sources of emotional support than women. 2: this effect will be stronger in groups with lower socioeconomic status. And 3: precarious manhood beliefs, operationalised using the Reidy et al. “Gender Role Discrepancy and Gender Role Discrepancy Stress” scale, will act as a mediator in the relationship between socioeconomic status and number of friends and sources of social support. I will collect data from a cross-sectional sample of UK based adults over the age of 18 using an online survey.

As a MSc Gender and Sexualities student with a degree in Psychology, Anita Stormyr has a longstanding interest in how people engage with the world around them and how we navigate norms of behaviour in relation to gender, with a particular interest in the study of masculinity. Anita prefers working with quantitative(?) data but has a lot of appreciation for the insights provided by the qualitative methods.