How can we advance understanding of the relationship between loneliness and mental health problems? Psychology and Cognitive Neuroscience Perspective

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What do we know?

- Perceived social isolation (loneliness) - implicit hypervigilance for social threats
  - Atypical response to social rewards
What do we know?

- Perceived loneliness, rather than objective number of social contacts
  - Trait vulnerability?
What do we know?

- **Aetiology of loneliness:**
  - Moderate to strong genetic vulnerability; overlap with genetic risk for depression (e.g. Boomsma et al., 2007; Waaktaar & Torgersen, 2012; Matthews et al., 2016)

- “Lonelier young adults were, as children, more likely to have had mental health difficulties and to have experienced bullying and social isolation.” (Matthews et al., 2018)
What we could achieve as a network

- Work across disciplines

- How does genetic and environmental risk unfold? What are the mechanisms?

- Brain is not just a receiver of environmental inputs
  - Information processing biases contribute to the creation of social environments
• Need to combine genetically informative cohort data and ‘deep phenotyping’ (e.g. computational psychiatry methods) to understand development of loneliness
  – Being clear on the precise processes that are affected is important when we think about interventions ➔ can we build resilience?