

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?

