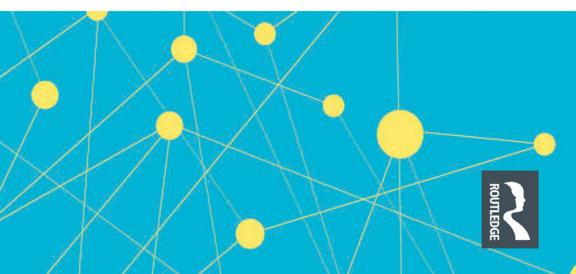# THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HIGH VALUE IN HUMAN BEHAVIOUR

SPEECH OF THE SUFFERING SOUL

Chris Steed

The Significance of High Value in Human Behaviour

The Significance of High Value in Human Behaviour is an innovative conceptualisation of how the quest for a high self-worth works as a psychosocial dynamic, presenting the idea that feelings of impotence and low self-esteem induce a powerful impetus on negative human action. This book gives an account of what it means to base a whole psychological perspective on high value, which has been an understudied aspect of human action.

Employing an ethnographical approach, the book uses client observations and social research to promote original solutions in an empathetic and engaging manner for psychological support services aiding isolated individuals. It considers the concept of a valuable self and examines the negative effects within the personality which can be generated when this drive for a valuable self is blocked through human devaluation or violence.

The Significance of High Value in Human Behaviour will appeal to academics and post-graduate students in the fields of psychology and psychotherapy, psychotherapists with specialist interests in loneliness and self-worth, and sociologists concerned with the psychology of the self.

Chris Steed is a trained counsellor and Anglican priest who combines the experience of counselling psychotherapist practice and post-doctoral research where he developed the distinctive approach in this book. He is a member of the British Association of Psychotherapy and Counselling and the American Psychological Association, and is the author of *Smart Leadership – Wise Leadership: Environments of Value in an Emerging Future* (2017) and *We Count, We Matter: Voice, Choice and the Death of Distance* (2018).

This is a really fascinating book. Rev Dr Chris Steed is a priest, theologian, academic, counsellor and educator and his thesis for the book can be summarised in this single quotation from his introduction to the book: "What we will propose here is a new approach to the inner world based on the value and worth people need to have in order to flourish but which is by definition relational, held with others." That is exactly what this book does drawing on the fields of psychology, philosophy, sociology, economics and theology. I commend it highly.

—*Professor Jamie Hacker Hughes*, *CPsychol CSci FBPsS FRSM FAcSS TSSF, Past President, British Psychological Society*

The Significance of High Value in Human Behaviour

Speech of the Suffering Soul

Chris Steed

Contents

Setting the scene – the psychopathology of everyday life

Although the term "psychopathology" is used medically to mean diseases of the mind, in fact it derives from the Greek words "psyche," "pathos" and "logos": literally, the speech of the suffering soul.[1]

Stress is the disease of the West; worry and anxiety mass murderers. Psychiatric hospitals are full of victims broken under the strain. From ulcers to cancers, insomnia to alcoholism, the toll is heavy. One woman in two is depressed. Every other man is stressed. Extreme alternatives of fight or flight meant they are kept on full nuclear alert without standing down; pepped up, ready to go. Psychotherapy and psychiatry are widely drawn upon to preserve the mental health of Western society. Young people are more stressed, anxious and depressed than ever, according to 2018 data from the UK Prince's Trust. A survey of 2,194 respondents aged 16–25 showed that young people's levels of happiness and well-being has dropped to its lowest level since the Prince's Trust Macquarie Youth Index was launched in 2009.[2]

As I write these words, an article in the UK press reports "*self-harming by teenage girls doubles in 20 years.*" Pressures of school and social media blamed as hospital admissions rise to 13,000. The number of hospital admissions for girls who self-harmed jumped from 7,327 in 1997 to 13,463 in 2017. The number treated for attempting an overdose rose more than tenfold from 1997 to 2017.[3]

Psychological distress gives rise to considerable controversy in diagnosis; divisions that are yet to be healed.[4] Is psychiatry merely a list of symptoms manufactured by drug companies to make money or are the more biologically minded right to dismiss psychiatric and indeed psychoanalytic ideas as no better than palm-reading? While acknowledging benefit many find in antidepressants or mood-shifters, can it be right to pathologise and medicate forms of behaviour deviating from "normal"?

Equally, huge claims are made today about the way neuroscience is being used to support the biomedical model. It seems to provide strong support for the diagnostic categorisation of mental illness and provision of pharmacopeia to deal with it. This does, however, assume that what is taking place in the brain and showing up in brain scans is the cause of presenting symptoms of disorder. Brains are in bodies and bodies have a history inhabited by a social and cultural

context. Is it the chemical map of brain processes that gives the clue to distress? Or is it individual experiences that shape the neural pathways? To say that a given brain state is the underlying basis of a given problem is to specify the brain as the causal source. What is it that brings about the brain condition that is showing up in the scans?[5] The theme of this book is that mental and emotional states are shaped by cultural meanings and that these socio-genic issues are in turn shaped by where society places value as well as the way this reacts with the value of the individual concerned. Frank Furedi, for example, has shown how the therapy industry is the unwitting tool of political and cultural interests in the very turn to the self and the cultivation of vulnerability.[6]

The theme of this book is too close to home to be viewed dispassionately. It pulls us all down – or rather reveals the murky depths. The need for human significance binds humanity together in being able to hold our head up high in common enterprises. Its antithesis is isolation: solitary confinement.

Positive psychology is often regarded as superficial: a disregard for the brutal realities everybody experiences. Identifying strengths and resources to deal with those circumstances gives hope. What we will propose here is a new approach to the inner world based on the value and worth people need to have in order to flourish but which is by definition relational, held with others. This is surely needed today. To view the world through different eyes is to perceive ourselves as compassionate and connected; one where the values of empathy and community are core to our existence not only as individuals but also as societies.[7] A new politics surely waits to be formed through a re-discovery of non-polarised cooperation and common good.

The idea of people needing to have a sense of a valuable self has often been noticed. Invariably, this is at the level of counselling practice; treating people ethically. Counsellors and counselees alike though are all in this together. Being a counsellor can help ease feelings of insignificance and powerlessness; to admit that is hard to do. Helping others often gives a sense of purpose and value. These proposals here will show how the notion of human worth can be operationalised to become fundamental to theory structures of personality and drivers of behaviour.

The theme here is the value placed by society upon us and how that impinges upon our experience. Our experience is necessarily communal. Indeed, we have a social brain. As Louis Cozolino argued, brains exist only within networks of other brains. Every living thing depends for its life on interactions with others.[8] We will, therefore, approach this by noticing certain features of the contemporary landscape that generate questions of the self in relation to others and society:

- Loneliness *(companion)*
- Social media and mental health *(comparison)*
- The quest for significance, for example, zero-sum games in human relationships or the workplace, Islamic Jihad, world leaders *(competition)*
- Violence (which leads to demands for symbolic and legal *compensation*)

A set of data will be assembled, some of it confirmatory studies, some from reflections on client reports on grounds of strict anonymity and with permission. The data will be deployed to indicate pathways into the psyche that throw a good deal of light on the drivers of human action.

The central proposition is this: a major driver of behaviour is the need to cultivate a high value and to pursue our worth against all factors in lived experience that militate against it and diminish us. There is an intolerance with which we are faced, whereby our value is calibrated through conformity to the norms of society. Yet there is another reality, sometimes stronger, of push back against that value-system based on the internal sense of value that almost always can be mobilised. In the realm of psychotherapy, the world has been split into two; the internal realm hermetically sealed from social pressures.[9] Attempts were made in the 1930s, as we will note, to ensure that psychoanalysis was not abstracted from the rest of society. Society is hard-wired into us. This recalls the pioneering work of Andrew Samuels in a more integrated view of the human psyche being a political psyche.[10] Michel Foucault wrote about the "political technology of the self"; in other words, the controlled subjectivisation by the State that shapes the power relations of society.[11] This is a world away from the idea of atomised individuals competing against each other that underlay modern psychology.

How the social transmission of value impacts upon the value within the personhood of the individual subject will be a major focus here. As we will argue, significance is a vital and ineradicable impulse in human affairs. Yet it is one head of a three-headed hydra of ways in which a high value asserts itself in everyday life. The demand to be listened to and given attention is also pressing; the need to be accorded dignity goes to the heart of our humanity in equal measure. An imperative towards being of significance and not being given second class treatment or live a third-rate life is somewhat different to not being heard. It is distinguishable from the question of reacting to indignity or being set trashed.

This essay attempts a unified theory about the way that human devaluation drives social processes. The internal psychological landscape is one aspect, the Protest against being treated with:

1   **Indifference** – the need to be heard, to be taken seriously, to be involved and given *attention*. Not being seen or heard or given attention; being disregarded, set aside or left behind is devaluing. The social sensorium renders people as invisible products, dependent on recognition.
2   **Inferiority (diminishing)** – the politics of reduction, of insult, of a denial of a full measure of humanity. Being belittled or placed in a passive position sustains dependence and vitiates against walking with heads held high as a free and equal participant in social relations. The reflex against reduction or being humiliated calls for appropriate respect for a valuable self and *affirmation*.

3   **Indignity** – at the interplay of indignation and dignity lies the *assertion* of a valuable self: "I am worthwhile." This is the politics of invasion, of being dishonoured, of violation of sacred space that is the essence of violence.

These "triple-A" factors will be looked at through the lens of their opposite: the contrast pole enables a dimension of analytic clarity that gives extra insight. The contrast experience of dignity is that of being treated invasively; the integrity of one's sacred space compromised. The contrast of being taken seriously, being heard and noticed, is to experience indifference. Significance, the sensation of being somebody, is slightly different. Its contrast polarity is to be insignificant, disregarded. Taken to the margins, it is to lose the point of oneself. Aloneness is a major driver in the feeling of insignificance, of lesser worth. On the contemporary scene, it is most manifest in the growing social problem of isolation. Lonely society is everywhere pervasive and present.

At some point political arguments run out and we are left with something else, an "inaccessible interiority" that lies beyond the reach of any political or sociological framework.[12] This is the black box of politics.

The value of the human is a thread through the project I have explored in various fields. This has been under analysis within the life and times of contemporary organisations and how, collectively, we must fight to ensure that humans are not relegated to the margins of high tech society.

We have looked at the same subject within the realm of collective action. "We Count, we matter" indicated that the sharp divide in politics around social distance is due to those who wish to fight to maintain their position and those who are less bothered by being a part of an interconnected web.

We have looked at this reality of loss of significance through the battlefield casualties in the economy and market society we have created.

We have made a fresh study of inequality, indicating how intensified social comparison presents needs and imperatives towards equal worth but which sets up existential crises.

And we have looked also at this through the lens of the principles that forge high value society and its political community based on people-power.

In this book, the quest for a high value and its antithesis, loss of significance, will be pressed in a number of directions.

First, aloneness

The prevalence and depth of isolation in contemporary society shows a lonely exodus that is in retreat from itself as social bonds weaken. We will theorise loneliness in terms of the void in contemporary society and the human soul. The void must be covered over, compensated for by acts that disguise the true extent of the existential crisis facing us. In myriad ways, we must cover up, for

we are naked underneath. What happens when humans do not find the social and personal significance for which they yearn? Often, we curl in on ourselves. We come to feel we are non-people. Those around us are not taking note of or honouring our humanity. Connections between this and loneliness should be apparent. Humans are social creatures who rely on interaction from which to derive our worth. Interaction is the stuff of life and of validation.

> **Intensified social comparison** – over-sharing on social media creates pernicious consequences. All the way from fame-hungry children to the epidemic of self-harming and threat to mental well-being that is crippling young people, we live in anxious times.

Conflict and violence

One way of looking at the violence that continues to disfigure humanity is that of rival groups competing for the scarce resource of attention. Much violence can be seen as a bid to be seen and heard, to make a statement through being noticed. It is a perverse claim that says in effect, "look at me." The insignificant feel their status; their situation that has operated for the diminishment of self. What is needed, or so it is perceived, is violence. Acts of violence will do the job; re-establish the position and reverse the status quo. Violence accomplishes this remedial action through setting up a social exchange system through which the devalued and the victim change places. At the heart of this hermeneutic of violence is transfer, of "the other" that offers atonement.

That the impetus towards high value through significance is a source of much social conflict can hardly be denied. Life is a zero-sum game: there are no winners and winners. On the micro-level units of families, churches, voluntary organisations or commercial companies, significance can be a highly charged competition. Those in hot pursuit of significance, often at others' expense, can wreak havoc. Channelled effectively, it can be a source of much dynamism. On a larger scale, there are countless people who lose out because economic growth is spread unevenly. A capitalist economy generates winners and losers – those who fall behind and have power of money used against them.

This leads on to a third arena for the significance of significance; that of **the psychology of politics**. I have written about this elsewhere. There is a strong need for politicians to listen to the people, to understand their needs and concerns. "*One thing that people who wield great power often fail to viscerally understand is what it feels like to have power wielded against you,*" wrote a much circulated visceral cry in Trumpian America.[13] "*The people who start the wars do not have bombs dropped on their houses. The people who pass the laws that incarcerate others never have to face the full force of the prison system themselves. The people who design the economic system that inflicts poverty on millions are themselves rich. This sort of insulation from the real world consequences of political and economic decisions makes it very easy for powerful people to approve of things happening to the rest of us that they*

would never, ever tolerate themselves." On the other side of the pond, white collars had little conception of blue collar lives.

The significant trash the insignificant: a perennial drama of political operations that does violence to them. Value and power are deeply entwined. The point about significance in the psychology of political action shows up in another way. Political leaders often take the line of pursuing State action that will bolster their image on an international stage. Previous humiliation or diminishment must be reversed. Russia – or Great Britain come to that – must be great again. Like individuals, State actors often only know how to be significant by throwing their weight around, by being aggressive or dominant rather than a more mature political community at home with itself.

Putting politics on the couch in this way is highly instructive. It is also highly relevant. How do we engender a positive vision of what a society can be without regard to the psychology of human flourishing? The impetus to be valued and to feel valuable, the need to feel one is worth something that is central to what it means to be human.

In contemporary life, value is accorded to individuals and groups in a way that is unrelated to inner value or "value-in-oneself." What someone is worth is awarded to social participants on the basis of the wage economy (economic value), identity badges (status value such as ownership or appearance) or identity boundaries (social value; being the right sort of person). The reality is that the social transmission of value and worth is far more than a question of what individuals do for or to each other. Value is communicated at a much broader level than conscious actions and choices. It is embedded within society; individual practice can be read off social practices on a far bigger scale than people and families. Human worth is transmitted by deeply rooted social structures: systems that whirr away behind the scenes to quiet yet deadly effect. It is for the most part systemic factors that explain racism or the power of other "isms." The psychic impact of this needs exploring.

Before we go to proposing an account of what that impetus towards a high value and significance looks like within the psyche and what it is based on, we look at the issue of loneliness and why that generates an existential crisis for growing numbers of people. We then go on to consider the toxic life of cyber space and the way that is fuelling a mental health crisis amongst young people especially. Our third landscape of social anxiety is one of conflict – the kind where because of our separateness and aloneness, we lash out and conceive of the world as a zero-sum game which only winners and losers can play. That leads on to consider how such significance games and violence generally sets up some kind of transfer "change and mart," a social exchange arena in which the violent and the victim engage in trading places.

We are compelled to live as if we are worth something. Where that is absent, experiences of devaluation set up a reaction, that at a profound level, we matter. Experiences of devaluation play loudly in people's lives. A sense of a valuable self is formed in the face of someone who smiled when they saw you. But

experiences of devaluation create an energy which fuels the Protest. Anger was often hot collective indignation; the capacity for outrage a test of the bonds of humanity.

In short, the interior landscape cannot be understood without some concept of the struggle to realise our sense of inner worth and what we will call "a valuable self." With those considerations in place, we move on to asking a fundamental question. How deep does it go? What theory can help to explain these arenas of anxiety? Can we propose new theory? What would it mean to say that the impetus towards high value is fundamental? Should the inner world be re-configured?

Should we care if the human dimension is pushed to the wall? Valuing the human is vital to the public discourse of our time. The moral imperatives of the age are inscribed in large lettering across the contemporary insistence in public discourse that all should be treated equally, irrespective of class, creed, colour, and that all should be cared for and given respect, whether old or young.

I argue that the role that human value plays stands out especially when it is viewed negatively and indirectly. Cultures of devaluation that are indifferent to or diminish human concerns or which treat people with indignity constantly arise.

It is vital to understand the routes through which cultures of devaluation are triggered in psychosocial worlds. There are, I propose, essentially three. Circumstances that erode a sense of value and by implication, a culture of recovery do, I suggest, boil down to indifference, inferiority and indignity.

Social analysis must also take this into account. This book goes beyond "A Question of Worth" to explore the notion that human value is a dynamic in society. It arises in contemporary social processes precisely because it is a factor in psychological life. The impact of those factors and the relationship between them is what will concern us here. This dynamic has been under-theorised.

Drawing on neuroscience, Duffel contends that leaders cannot make good decisions without emotional information (Antonio Damasio), nor grow a flexible brain without good attachments (Sue Gerhardt), nor interpret facial signals if your heart has had to close down (Stephen Porges), nor see the big picture if your brain has been fed on a strict diet of rationality (Iain McGilchrist).[14] We argue here that the mystery of a human person could not be grasped without invoking a construct of human value. Strategies people use to pursue their value are as various as human ingenuity can devise – outrage, laughter, achievement, significance and anger, ever-present. This elixir of life – or is it necessary food? – is gained for many through making some contribution to their world, to feel they counted for something. This was worth waking up in the morning for. The world of social policy woke up to how people needed incentives, to aspire and perspire in a way that fed a sense of worth.

Young people in a state of transition need positive identities. Those trapped in gun crime or radicalisation need employment, music and a group identity that conveys thawing worth. (To concentrate on the guns and the crime and

the ideology is to freeze it and risk problematising normal adolescent developmental behaviours.)[15]

For everywhere there are deficits. Condemn us to live without value and the flowers perish – or they never unfolded. That they can still respond to the sun shows how essential that sun is. Try as we might, we do not function well without a sense of a valuable self. We were condemned to live as if we had a value, to fight against the depression that condemns us to a constituency of one. Self-respect or the value of significant others is not self-indulgent luxury food. The language of our inner self where we construct meanings of everyday life is clear. "Give us this day our daily bread!"

Notes

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Part 1

Arenas of anxiety

Chapter 1

Companion

Without friends, no one would choose to live though he had all other goods.

– Aristotle

Loneliness' lament is a sigh of our times.

It is exceedingly difficult to measure and difficult, therefore, to know if it is on the increase.

That it is making its way up public policy concerns is, however, unmistakable. The effect of persistent loneliness is harmful to humans; it can seriously damage your health. "*As the public health function moves back into local government, councils should ensure that loneliness is recognised as a public health issue, and is proposed as a priority for health and wellbeing boards*."[1]

Loneliness is a well of sadness about the lack of human connection. People can be on their own and enjoy it. All the religions speak of solitude in a positive sense. Yet when humans persistently lack friends and someone close to talk to, it begins to have a negative effect; an effect shaped by cultural influences and not just situational.

Loneliness is not the same as isolation. I am isolated if I have few people around me with whom I can share. Loneliness is not the same as isolation: it is the meaning we wrap around the absence of contact. It is though not purely a question of meanings. Loneliness is harmful to the soul.

As modernisation occurs, it is likely that loneliness grows in its wake.[2] The loneliness of the contemporary self is not a passing fad or social panic. It is being generated by modernity's restless surge: a surge that breaks down social ties in the same breath as it breaks down tradition.

It takes prisoners of any age, indiscriminately.

"*Loneliness is a significant and growing concern for many older people and is something that is now being identified as a major public health issue*," the Local Government Association reported in January 2016.[3]

Aloneness is profoundly threatening. But why?

Speaking into the void

When felt intensely, loneliness rips apart the safe certainties of predictable life. "I'm on my own" forces us to teeter over the precipice.

It is linked at a profound level with the notion of separateness. Alienation from the regular world provokes an interior split. Bifurcation of life results in parcelling our connections into two camps – everyone else and then there's me. I am separate, cut off from connections with meaningful others with no one to share.[4]

Aloneness is the stuff from which existence is wrought. Naked and alone we came into the world: we leave it one soul at a time. It is intrinsic to our nature to be separate yet longing for union. This is a question that the major world religions have sought to answer.

The fear of aloneness is that we will disappear. Out of sight and out of mind, loneliness threatens to suck us in. The void will claim us.

Like unwelcome retirement, loneliness reveals that we are cut off from a powerful source of validation. It is a dashboard indicator to our relational orientation, the pivot of the soul outwards.

The Campaign to End Loneliness surveyed 1,000 GPs in 2013 looking at the impact loneliness has on their patients' health. Of doctors, 75% said they see up to five patients a day whose main reason for visiting their doctor was loneliness and probably have nowhere else to go to for conversation. Of doctors, 10% said they see six to 10 patients each day who say they are lonely.[5]

> I'd definitely class myself as lonely. I've always been a lonely person, even when I've been in a relationship or had loads of people around me. My mental health hasn't been great over the last six months, mainly because my fiancé and I recently split up and we were supposed to get married in July, and my younger brother hasn't been too well, which hasn't helped my mental health. Having a mental health problem is lonely because you constantly feel like you have to explain yourself and tell people why you feel a certain way. If people don't get it, it can be very isolating, especially if you're not able to articulate how you feel.[6]

Studies are indicating that those who identify as lonely are twice as likely to have problems with mental health. Loneliness has an adverse effect on both physical and mental health with lonely people being more at risk of high blood pressure, early onset of cognitive decline, dementia and depression.[7] Depression and anxiety can influence how we connect with others and how we develop relationships.[8] There is a strong link between loneliness and depressive symptoms.[9]

Research conducted by Com Res in the UK for the charity "Silver Line" in November 2013 indicates that up to 2.5 million older people suffer from loneliness.[10] According to UK Age Concern:[11]

- Only 46% of over-65s said they spent time together with their family most days, compared with 65–76% for other ages; 12% of over-65s said they never spent time with family.
- Only 35% of over-65s spent time with friends most days in the last two weeks – 12% never did.
- 49% of all people aged 75 and over live alone.
- 9% of older people feel trapped in their own home.
- 6% of older people leave their house once a week, or less.
- 30% of older people say they would like to go out more often.
- Nearly 200,000 older people in the UK who do not receive the help they need leave their homes.
- 17% of older people have less than weekly contact with family, friends and neighbours.
- 11% of older people have less than monthly contact.

Such studies can be multiplied. The evidence is mounting up. In a survey of various loneliness research reports, the Campaign to End Loneliness found that half of all older people say the television is their main company.[12] In other research reported by the Campaign, it was found that loneliness has an adverse effect on both physical and mental health, with lonely people being more at risk of high blood pressure, early onset of cognitive decline and dementia and depression.[13] The association between loneliness and health is well-documented.[14]

It is not just a UK issue. About 20% of Belgians feel lonely often to always. A recent paper explores the relation between the feeling of loneliness and Subjective Well-Being (SWB) in three studies using a database of 3,770 Belgians. The third study, for example, investigated whether the relationship between loneliness and SWB is mediated by income, health or the basic psychological needs. Preliminary results illustrate a clear relationship between lack of SWB and loneliness. This highlights the importance of tackling loneliness as a serious social issue in the Belgian society.[15]

The point at which loneliness and mental health issues intersect is a particularly tricky one, and the relationship between them is causal for many people.[16] For some, a mental health condition prevents them from being able to socialise and open up to people, whereas for others, mental ill health stems from a lack of close relationships.[17]

Social isolation is most certainly not just an issue for the elderly. Compared with people over 64, three times as many 16- to 24-year-olds regularly feel lonely.[18] It is severely affecting their mental health. Loneliness is strongly linked with premature death in old age, to a similar degree as smoking or obesity. With increasing attention on loneliness as a major public health issue, the study highlights the importance of early intervention to prevent young adults being trapped in loneliness as they age.

Over 2,000 British 18-year-olds were asked questions such as "how often do you feel you lack companionship?" and "how often do you feel left out?"

and were interviewed about their mental and physical health, lifestyle habits, education and employment. Loneliness was common among young adults: the researchers found a quarter of study participants reported feeling lonely some of the time and approximately 7% reported feeling lonely often. These findings mirror a recent UK Office of National Statistics survey which found that loneliness was more common among 16- to 24-year-olds than any other age group. Lonely young adults were more than twice as likely to have mental health problems such as anxiety and depression, and to have self-harmed or attempted suicide. They were more likely to have seen their GP or a counsellor for mental health problems in the past year. One in five in the loneliest 10% of the sample were not in education, employment or training, compared with one in 10 non-lonely young people. Lonelier young adults were more likely to be out of work and education, less likely to be physically active, more likely to smoke and more likely to use technology compulsively (at the expense of other activities and obligations). They were less confident about career prospects.[19]

A study published in *Psychological Medicine* has shown how millennials have a higher risk of mental health problems if they are lonely. Being lonely does not necessarily mean you are on your own. If though you are feeling isolated from other people, it can be completely debilitating to your life. It's bad for stress and even increases the risk of early death by 26%. Lonely millennials have twice the risk of developing mental health problems like depression and anxiety, compared with those who are connected to others. Researchers from King's College London analysed 2,066 millennial twins in England and Wales. They were asked about their experiences at different stages of life, their relationships, how lonely they were and how their mental and physical health was. The most recent data was taken while the twins were 18. Results showed that 7% of participants said they often felt lonely while 23–31% said they felt left out or lacked companionship. Being lonely was associated with double the chance of a mental health problem and a 38% increased risk of being unemployed. Lonely individuals were more likely to engage in risky behaviours like smoking and not exercising.[20]

Thirty-three-year-old Michelle Lloyd wrote:

> *I'd definitely class myself as lonely. I've always been a lonely person, even when I've been in a relationship or had loads of people around me. My mental health hasn't been great over the last six months, mainly because my fiancé and I recently split up and we were supposed to get married in July, and my younger brother hasn't been too well, which hasn't helped my mental health. Having a mental health problem is lonely because you constantly feel like you have to explain yourself and tell people why you feel a certain way. If people don't get it, it can be very isolating, especially if you're not able to articulate how you feel. I started having mental health problems in my teens but I never spoke to anyone about it until my early 20s and it was when I went to university that the loneliness hit. I was spending a lot of time on my own, I was homesick and it got worse from then on. I'm now living alone in London and I feel more isolated than ever, which comes with its own complications.*