

SOLOPHOBIA: 'I'm A Successful Career Woman But I'm Scared Of Being Alone'

Blue Monday – officially the most depressing day of the year – is upon us. But for 20 per cent of successful women, the whole of January is tough. *Look* investigates the rise of 'solophobia'



Sophie says time alone leaves her feeling stressed and lonely

Sophie's diary is packed to the rafters – in the past week alone, she's organised three nights out, been for a run every day and managed to squeeze in dinner with her family, all the while juggling her career as a recruitment consultant and finding time to date. She's been home only to sleep and is living off sandwiches grabbed on the go. But while you might feel exhausted thinking about her diary, for 20 per cent of women, it's a lifestyle that's oh-so familiar. And it's a very deliberate choice. In fact, it's something experts are now calling 'solophobia'.

'My life is very busy,' Sophie, 29, tells *Look*. 'I'll work 11-hour days, then go straight out every night of the week. But while I'm respected at work and appear confident, as soon as I'm on my own, that front breaks. I start worrying about things, like where my career is going, or whether I'm going to be single forever, and I feel suddenly very lonely. I don't do that when I'm busy or surrounded by people. So it's easier to keep up my hectic lifestyle.'

“I'll work 11-hour days, then go out every night”

I'll even go on dates with men I don't have anything in common with, just so I don't have to have a night in.'

And Sophie isn't alone. A brand-new book, called *Love Me, Don't Leave Me*, argues that surrounding yourself with other people for the sake of it isn't a good thing – in fact, it could actually jeopardise our long-term happiness.

'We're all born with a fear of abandonment,' explains its author, psychologist Michelle Skeen. 'But for some people, experiences during adolescence – such as a family divorce or bullying at school – mean that it becomes more dominant as they get older. These people are often very successful professionally because they place so much emphasis on what others think of them, and that's a huge

motivator. But the more you need other people to be happy, the more it means you're likely to either enter unhealthy relationships for the sake of it, or burn yourself out trying to make people like you. It's not sustainable, and it's not healthy.'

'I've never been in a long-term relationship with somebody just for the company, but I will do anything I can to make people like me so I can go out as much as possible,' concedes Sophie. 'I can already see my health suffering. I realised recently that I wasn't eating very well, so I now prepare meals for the week ahead and make sure I eat them at the end of every night. I know that doesn't solve everything, but I do feel like it's a step in the right direction.'



Solve Your Solophobia

Have a fear of going it alone? Michelle Skeen gives *Look* her tips for getting over it...

- Try to recall when you first started to worry about people spending time with you. Understanding this can reduce a lot of the shame you may associate with your feelings.
- Ask yourself what it feels like when you're alone. Are you feeling panicky? Make a list of the emotions, and then work through them – asking yourself why exactly you're feeling that way.
- Write down your worries. The hardest part about dealing with your fears is facing up to them.