LONELINESS AND SOCIAL MEDIA
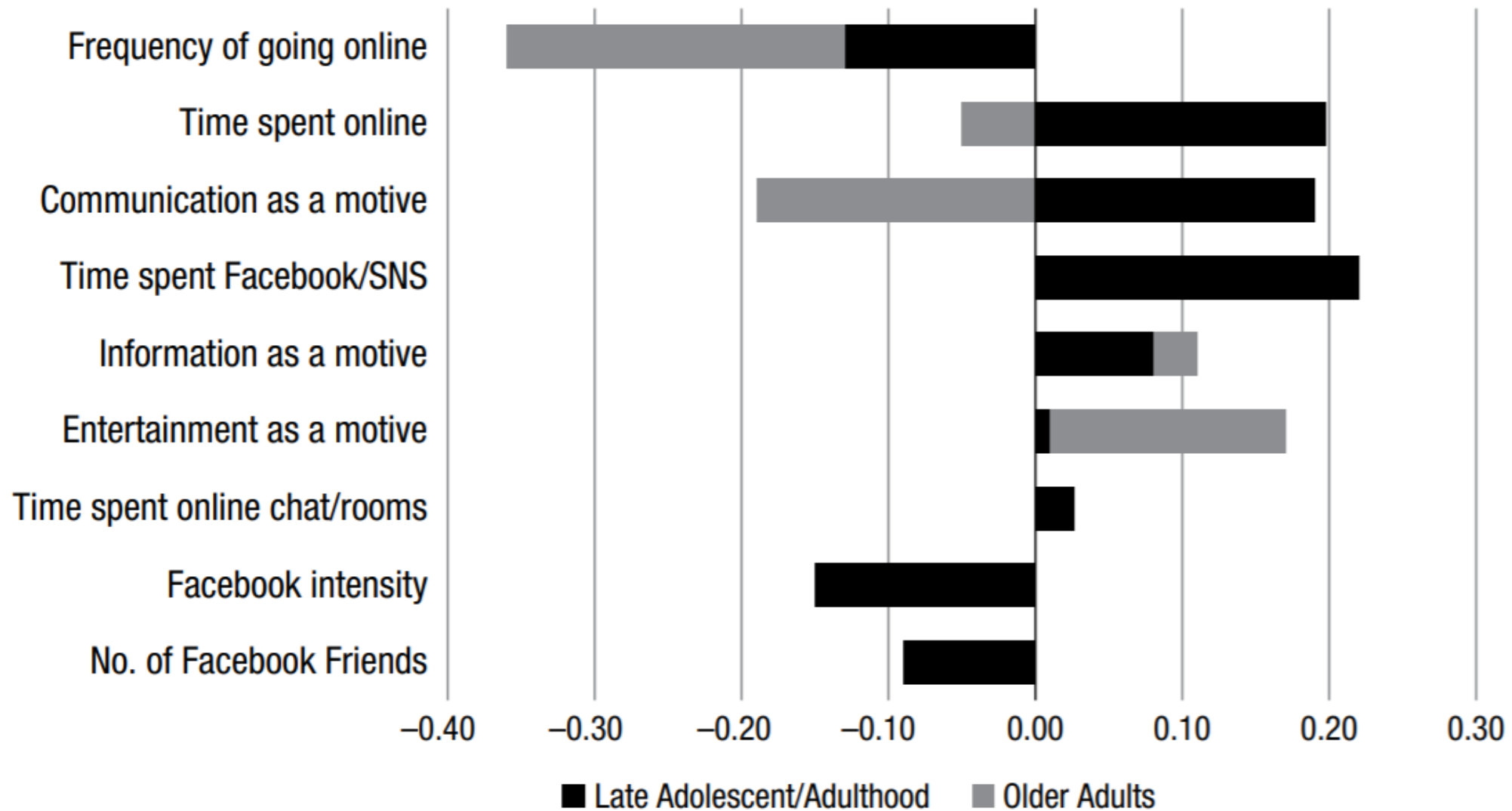
DR REBECCA NOWLAND

EU COP ON FAIRNESS – 16TH FEB 22

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE – WHY?

- Contradictory findings – some studies show positive associations with loneliness and some negative

- Other reviews focused on general well-being/depression but not specifically on loneliness

- Need to examine differences across the life course

Frequency of going online	
Time spent online	
Communication as a motive	
Time spent Facebook/SNS	
Information as a motive	
Entertainment as a motive	
Time spent online chat/rooms	
Facebook intensity	
No. of Facebook Friends	

−0.40   −0.30   −0.20   −0.10   0.00   0.10   0.20   0.30

■ Late Adolescent/Adulthood   ■ Older Adults

Source: Nowland, Necka & Cacioppo, 2018

INTERNET BEHAVIOURS ASSOCIATED WITH LONELINESS

Cyberbullying

Internet addiction/

Problematic Internet
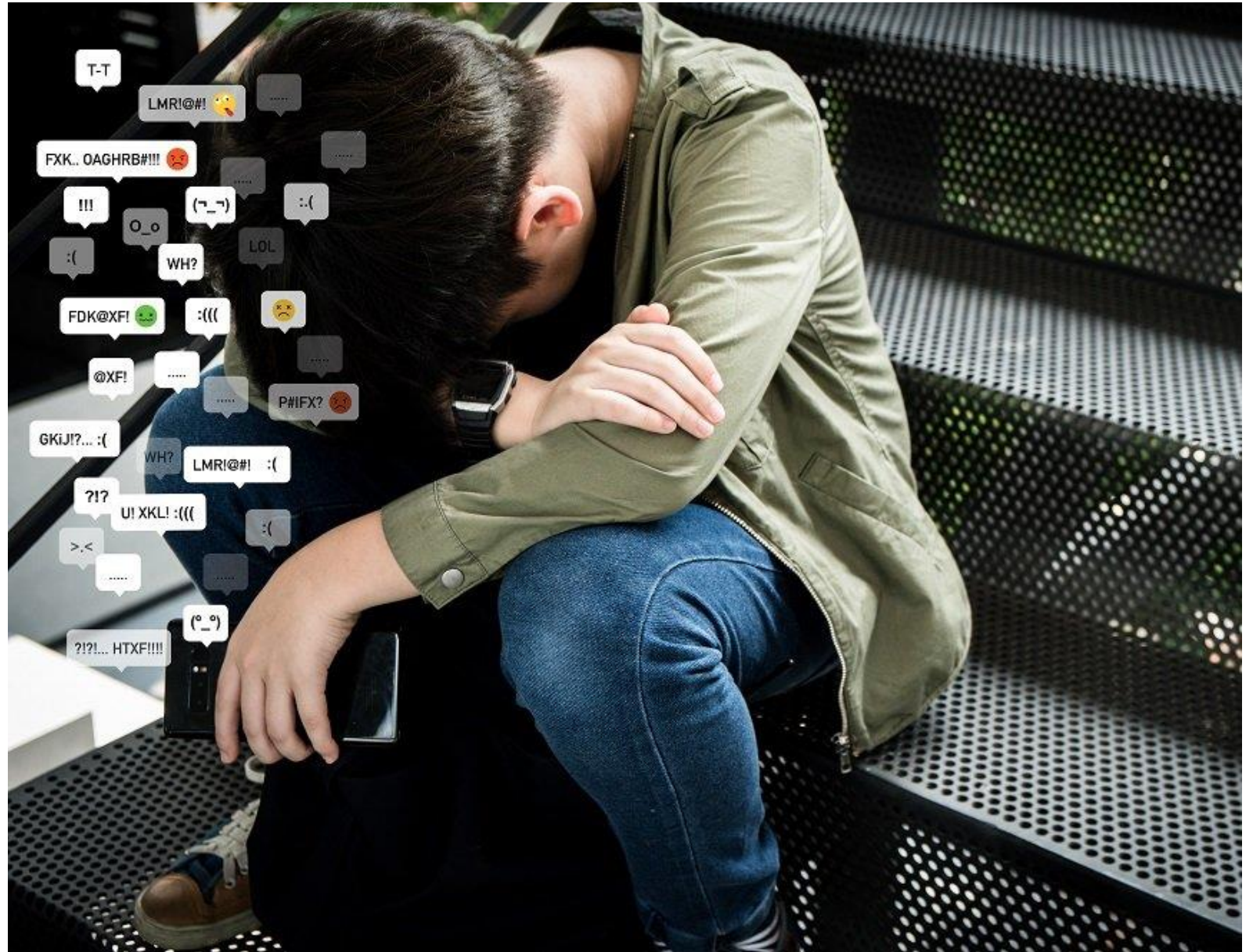
REVIEW FINDINGS

- Based on existing theories: social capital/stimulation, displacement theory

- How technology is used is what is important in relation to loneliness

- Proposal:
  - When used as a way station to enhance new relationships and forge new connections social technology can reduce loneliness
  - When used as a destination to escape social world and withdrawal from social pain can increase loneliness
  - Lonely people may behave differently online

HOW LONELY PEOPLE MAY BEHAVE ONLINE?

- We proposed that feeling lonely may impact on how people behave online

- Some evidence:
  - Passivity online
  - Less overlapping friends online/offline

OPEN QUESTIONS/GAPS IN THE LITERATURE

- Lack of studies specifically with children and adolescents, focussed on undergraduate or elderly populations

- Few longitudinal studies so little examination of the relationship between loneliness and internet use over time

REVIEW UPDATED – WHAT DO WE KNOW NOW?

Still further evidence to indicate relationships between cyberbullying and internet addiction and loneliness

Strong evidence that the use of digital technology to promote social connection with elderly populations reduces loneliness

Differences in the ways in which lonely people engage with technology

Indications that engagement and influence of technology is different between generations

LONGITUDINAL STUDIES: WHAT DO THEY TELL US?

- Longitudinal studies
  - Different impacts by level of usage
- Cross lagged panel studies
  - College students – active and passive internet use associated with loneliness but neither use did not increase loneliness over time
  - Passive use associated with decreases in subjective well-being over time

INFLUENCES ON EXPERIENCING LONELINESS WHEN ONLINE

Self-disclosure

Connectedness

Social comparison

Envy and jealousness

Personality traits – openness

Rumination

EFFECTS OF DIFFERENT MEDIUMS

- Less evidence for differences between the different mediums/types of use

- Instant messaging

- Blogs

- Importance of images

- Social networking sites

RELATIONSHIPS WITH OVERLAPPING CONSTRUCTS

- Loneliness
  - Social loneliness
  - Emotional loneliness
- Social isolation
- Connectedness
- Social anxiety
- Mental health

SOCIAL MEDIA, LONELINESS AND THE PANDEMIC

- Social media supported connections, but not as helpful in the loneliest people

- Age effects – middle age – SM frequency associated with lower loneliness, younger using more types of SM associated with increased emotional loneliness

- Effects influenced by fear of missing out

- Messaging use associated with lower loneliness

SUMMARY

- There are bidirectional relationships between loneliness and social media use

- There are gaps in our understanding, lack of longitudinal work and qualitative studies

- No examination of discrimination, social exclusion or marginalisation in relation to social media use and loneliness

- Evidence for influencing factors relating to motivations to go online, personality

- Important age/generation differences on impacts of social media use on loneliness

- Social media use during the pandemic was an important source of social connection for some
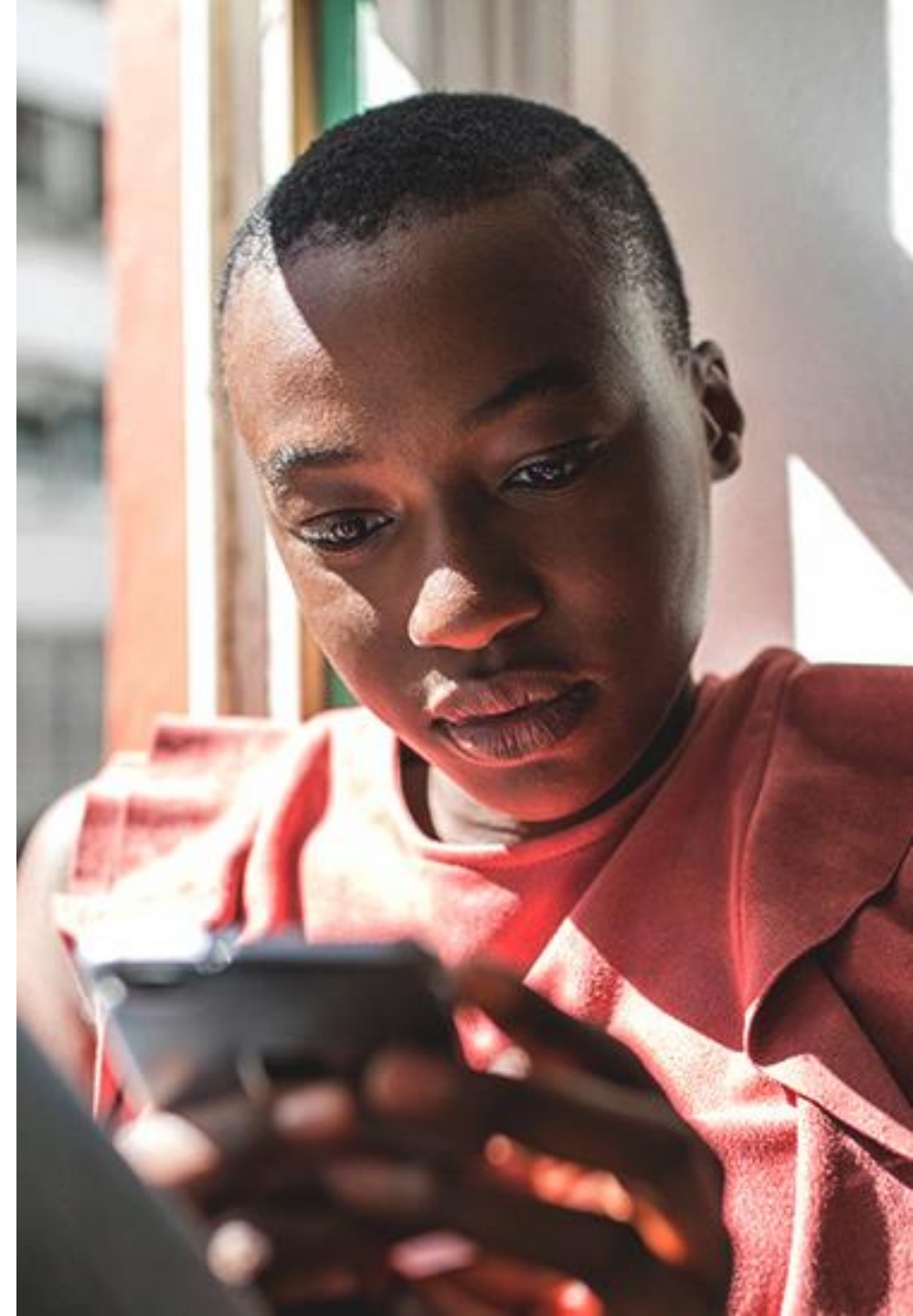
Thank you for listening

Dr Rebecca Nowland

University of Central Lancashire

rnowland@uclan.ac.uk