# Online Social Networking across the Life Span:

Extending Socioemotional Selectivity Theory to Social Network Sites
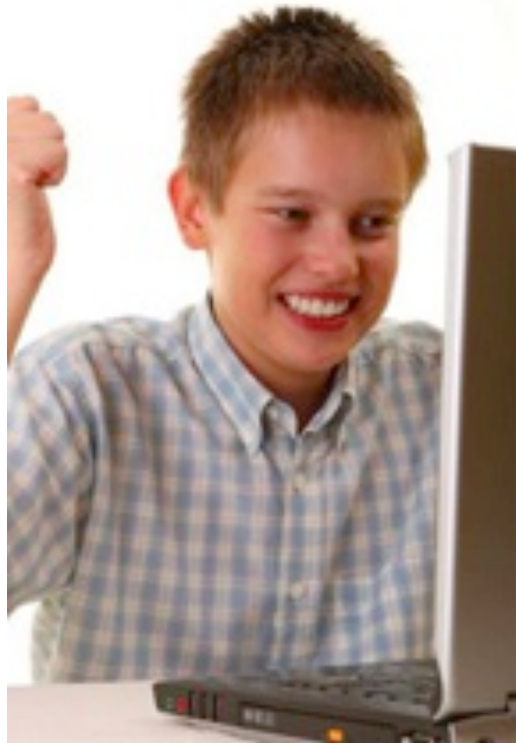
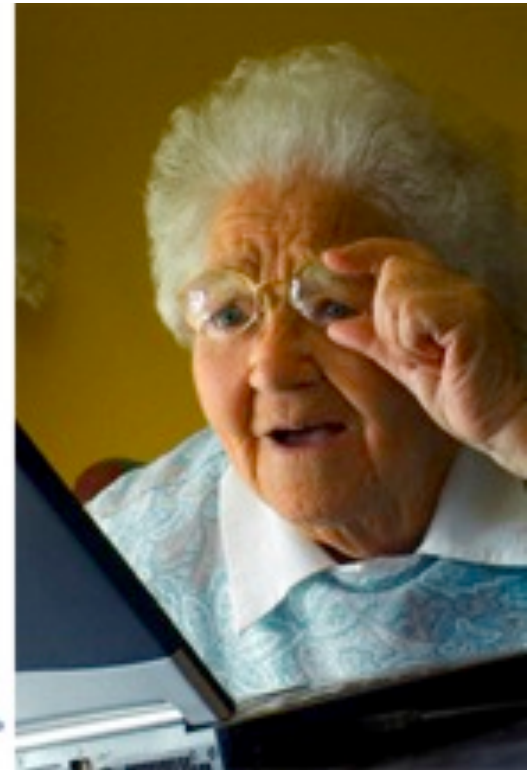Natalya N. Bazarova, Pamara F. Chang, Yoon Hyung Choi, Corinna E. Lockenhoff

Social networking site use by age group, 2005-2012

% of adult internet users age 18+ who use social networking sites

Source: Pew Internet and American Life Project Surveys, March 2005-Feb. 2012
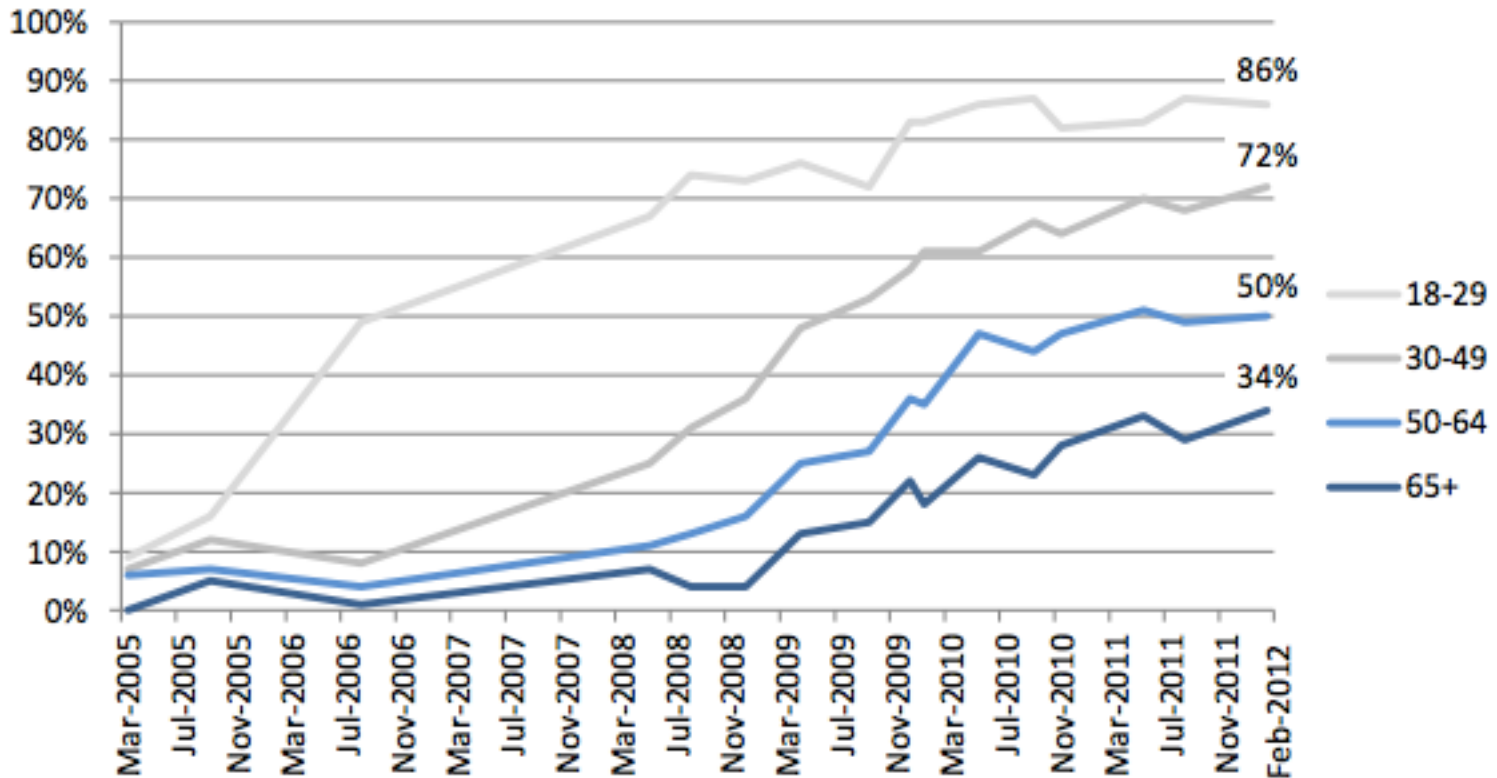
What are age-related differences in online social networking?

facebook.
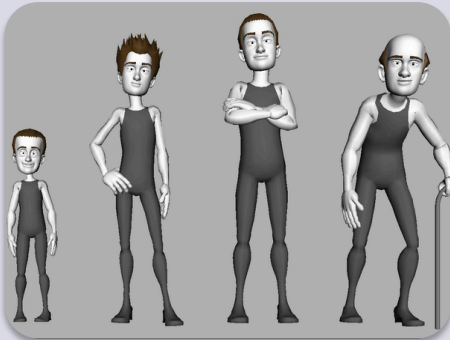
Age

Network Size & Composition

Effects on Well-Being

Socioemotional Selectivity Theory

Perception of Time Horizon

Age → Social Motivations & Goals → Older Adults / Younger Adults

(Cartensen, 1993, 1998, 2006; Cartensen, Isaacowitz, and Charles, 1999)

Socioemotional Selectivity Theory

Perception of Time Horizon

Age → Social Motivations & Goals

- Older Adults → Size & Composition of Network
- Younger Adults → Size & Composition of Networks
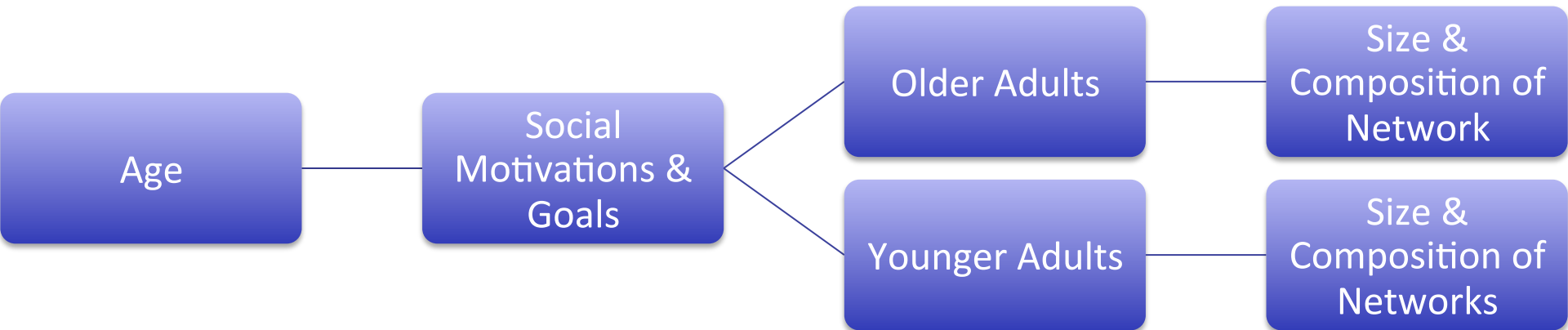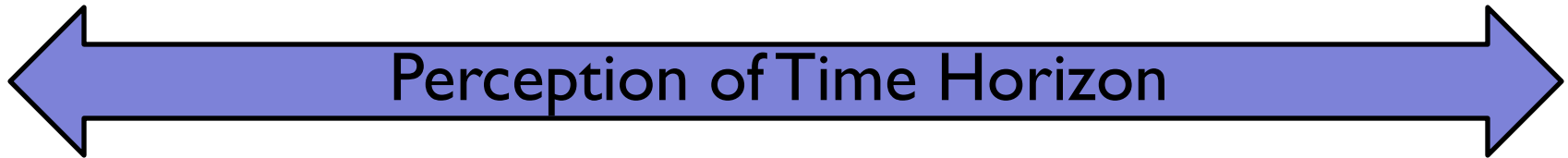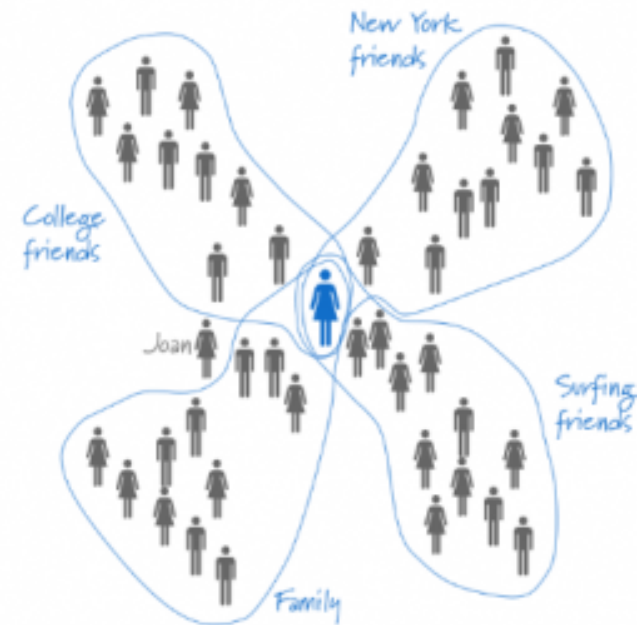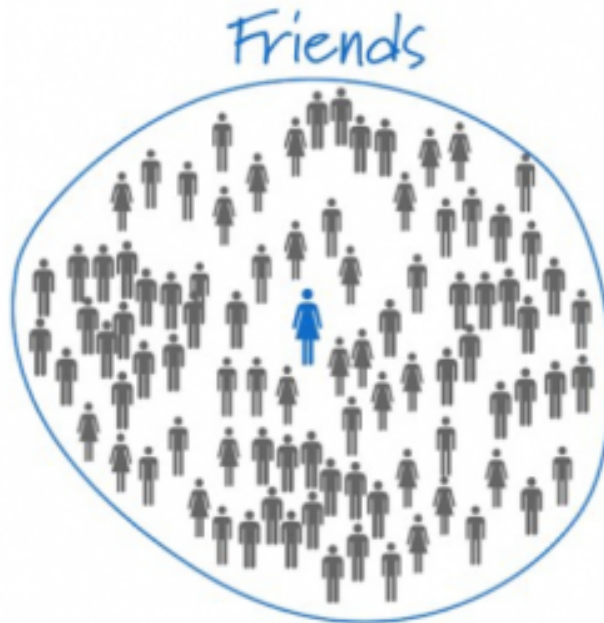
(Lang & Cartensen, 2002; Carstensen, 2006; Cartensen et al., 2000)

Composition of Social Networks

ONLINE

OFFLINE

• Range of relationships (Parks, 2010)

Size & Composition of Social Networks

Facebook Friend

Facebook Actual Friend

Total Friends

Actual Friends

Actual Friends / Total Friends

(Ellison et al., 2011)

8
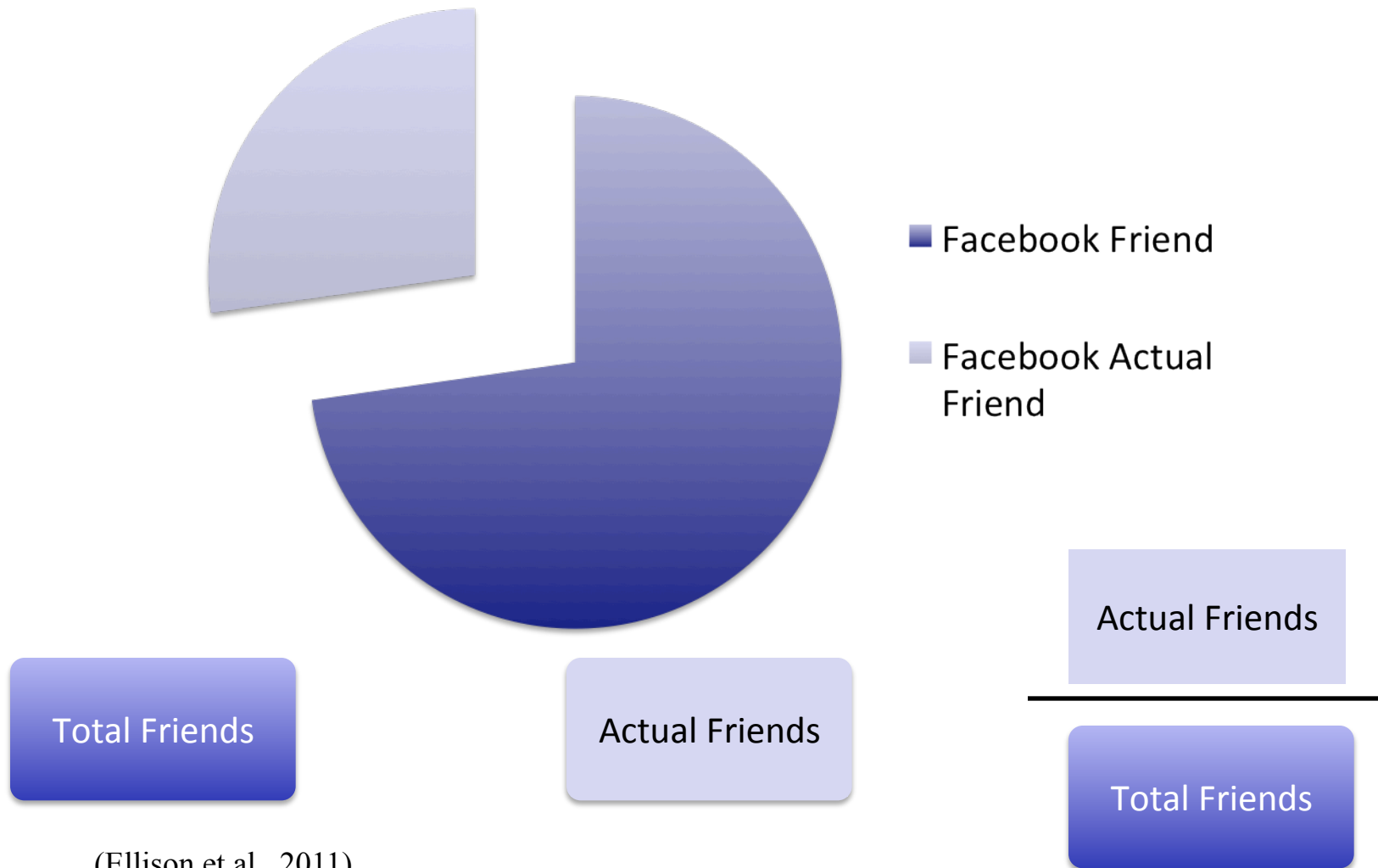
Extending SST to Social Networking Sites

H1a: Age is **negatively associated** with the **total number** of friends in Facebook social networks

H1b: Age is **positively associated** with the **proportion** of actual friends relative to total friends in Facebook social networks

Extending SST to Social Networking Sites
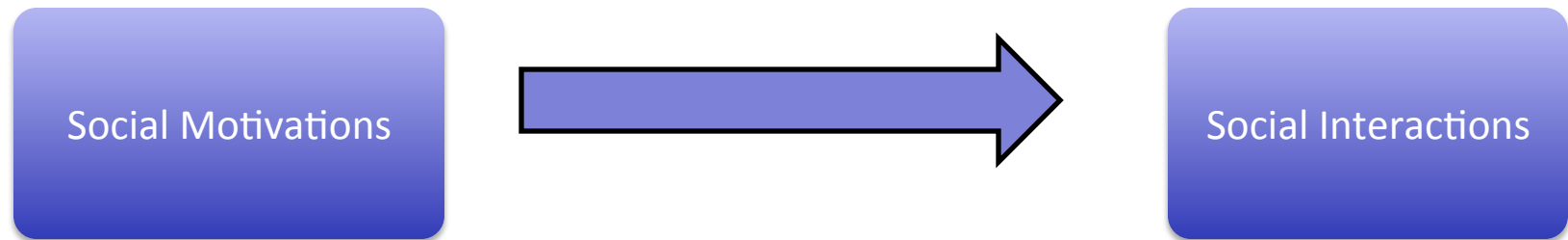
Social Motivations	→	Social Interactions

H2: Age is **negatively associated** with a) self-posting and b) checking information on others on SNSs

Social Network Composition and Well-Being

- Focus on social capital in regards to social benefits of SNSs (Ellison et al., 2011)

- Bridging social capital —— Future-oriented goals

- Bonding social capital —— Present-oriented goals

Social Network Composition and Well-Being

Network Size & Composition

Effects on Well-Being
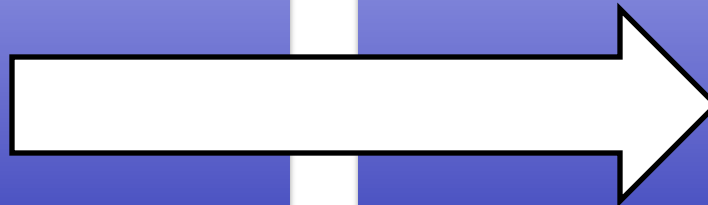
Social Network Composition and Well-Being

H3: The proportion of actual to total Facebook friends is **negatively associated** with social isolation and loneliness

Method

- National telephone survey in the U.S.
- N=1000 adults
- Measures
  - Gender, age, marital status, socioeconomic status and education
  - Internet use
  - SNS use
  - Health
  - Loneliness (UCLA loneliness scale, $\alpha = 0.85$, Russell, 1996)

Method

- Measures
  - Gender, age, marital status, socioeconomic status and education
  - **Internet use**
    - Comfort with Internet

1 ⟷ **5**

Very
Comfortable

Very
Uncomfortable
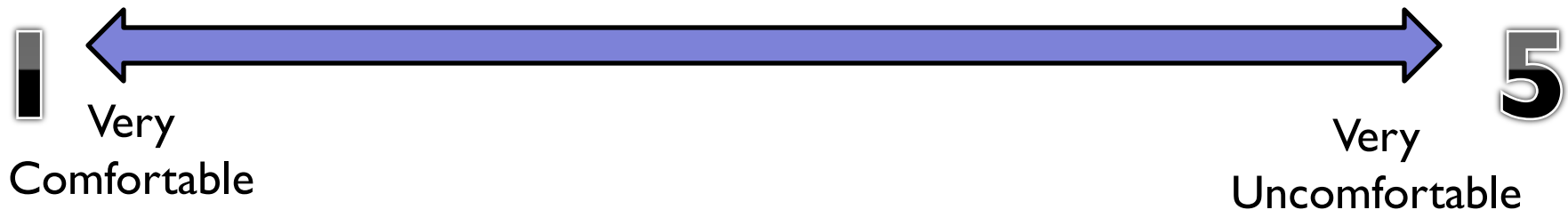
- Hours/week spent on Internet
  - 1=less than 1hr/week → 4=more than 10 hr/week

Method

- Measures
  - Gender, age, marital status, socioeconomic status and education
  - Internet use
  - **SNS use**
    - **Checking information about others**
    - **Share information about self**
    - **1=never, 5 = all the time**

Method

- Measures
  - Gender, age, marital status, socioeconomic status and education
  - Internet use
  - SNS use
  - **Health**
    - **Mental, Physical, and Overall Health**
    - **Past 30 days**
    - **1 = excellent, 5 = poor**

Method

- Measures
  - o Gender, age, marital status, socioeconomic status and education
  - o Internet use
  - o SNS use
  - o Health
  - o **Loneliness (UCLA loneliness scale, $\alpha = 0.85$, Russell, 1996)**
    - o **How often do you feel alone? Isolated? Lack compaionship?**
    - o **1=never, 5 = always**

<u>Results</u>

- H1a: Age is **negatively associated** with the total number of friends in Facebook social networks

The number of total FB friends and the proportion of actual to total FB friends on Age

Predictor	β For log of total FB friends	β For % of actual FB friends
Age	**-.56****	**.33****
Comfort w. Internet	-.03	.11*
Internet Use	.09*	-.01
Overall Health	-.09*	-0.5
Bad Mental health	.09*	-.06
Bad Physical Health	.04	.13**

Note: **p<.01, *p<.05, ^p<.10. For the total FB friends: $F_{(10, 537)}=34.85$, p<.001, adjusted $R^2 = .38$. for the proportion of actual friends: $F_{(10, 536)} =9.71$, p<.001, adjusted $R^2=.14$.

Results

H1b: Age is **positively associated** with the proportion of actual friends relative to total friends in Facebook social networks

The number of total FB friends and the proportion of actual to total FB friends on Age

Predictor	β For log of total FB friends	β For % of actual FB friends
Age	**-.56****	**.33****
Comfort w. Internet	-.03	.11*
Internet Use	.09*	-.01
Overall Health	-.09*	-0.5
Bad Mental health	.09*	-.06
Bad Physical Health	.04	.13**

Note: **$p<.01$, *$p<.05$, ^$p<.10$. For the total FB friends: $F(10, 537)=34.85$, $p<.001$, adjusted $R^2 = .38$. for the proportion of actual friends: $F(10, 536)=9.71$, $p<.001$, adjusted $R^2=.14$.

Results

H2: Age is **negatively associated** with a) self-posting and b) checking information on others on SNSs ✅

Frequency of checking information about others and self-posting on age

Predictor	β Checking on others	β Self posting
Age	**-.26****	**-.26****
Comfort w. Internet	-.04	-.10*
Internet Use	.15**	.15**
Overall Health	-.10**	-.01
Bad Mental health	.12**	.04
Bad Physical Health	.08*	.04

Note: **p<.01, *p<.05, ^p<.10. For checking information about others: $F_{(10, 537)}=10.95$, p<.001, adjusted R^2 = .15. For self-posting: $F_{(10, 537)}=9.69$, p<.001, adjusted R^2=.14.

Results

H3: The proportion of actual to total Facebook friends is **negatively associated** with social isolation and loneliness ✅

Social loneliness and isolation on percentage of actual to total FB friends

Predictor	B(SE)	β
% of actual to total FB friends	-.01(.01)	-.08*
Age	-.01(.01)	-.05
Comfort w. Internet	.08(.05)	.07
Internet Use	.03(.03)	.04
Overall Health	.11(.04)	.13**
Bad Physical Health/30 days	-.01(.01)	-.09*
Bad Mental Health/30 days	.04(.01)	.40**

Note: **$p<.01$, *$p<.05$, ^$p<.10$; $F(11.535)=15.29$, $p<.001$, adjusted $R^2=.22$.
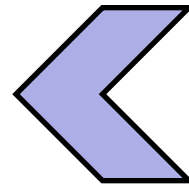
Findings

- **Selectivity** of FB social partners **increases with age**

Findings

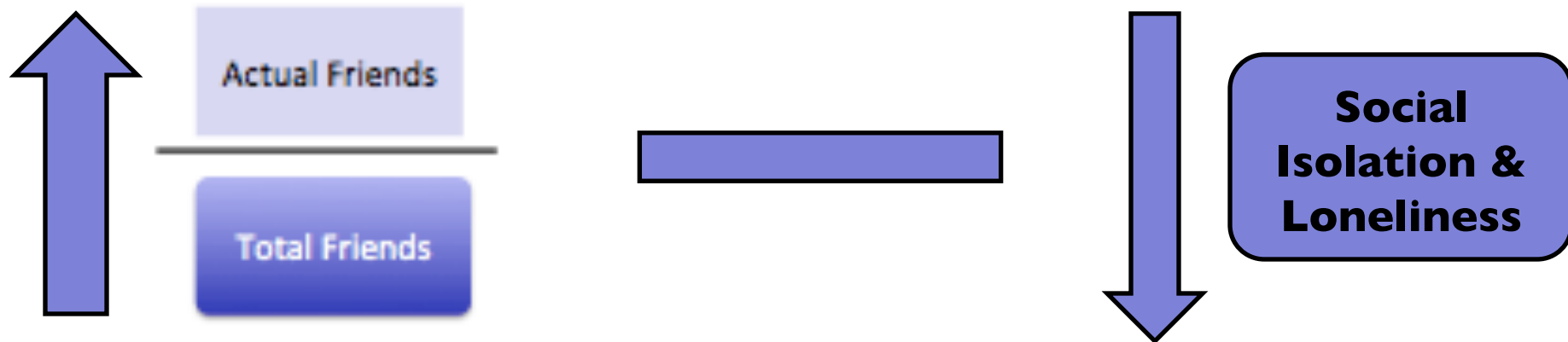- Compared to younger adults, **older adults:**

Friend networks < Actual friends

Findings

Higher proportion of actual to total FB friends is associated with **lower levels of social isolation and loneliness** across the life span

Implications

- Contributes to our understanding of online social networks

- SST provides a conceptual framework

- Novel findings

Future Directions

- Application of SST to online social networks segways into exciting future research

  o How do online networks change across the life span using a longitudinal design?

  o When do younger people start actively decreasing their network size?

Future Directions

- SST emphasizes changes in social goals and motivations

- Social preferences can change due to geographical relocation, illness, or societal-level events (Fredrickson & Carstensen, 1990).