Rethinking social media addiction:

The importance of mechanisms for diagnosis and treatment

by Lukas Gunschera

Conflicts of interest: none

“Social Media Addiction”

Turner et al. (in preparation), Vanderschuren & Everitt (2004), Young (1998)

47% of adolescents report feeling addicted to social media

Addiction is implicated in our thinking and conversations about social media.

- Frequent behaviour with potential negative consequences
- Treatment approaches (detox)
- Addiction treatment centres

Measurement

Brown (1993), Griffiths (1996, 2005)

SALIENCE	MOOD MODIFICATION	CONFLICT
TOLERANCE	WITHDRAWAL SYMPTOMS	RELAPSE

Measurement

Andreassen et al. (2016), Cataldo et al. (2022), Brown (1993), Griffiths (1996, 2005)

SALIENCE

"You spend a lot of time thinking about social media or planning how to use it"

MOOD MODIFICATION

"You use social media in order to forget about personal problems"

CONFLICT

"You use social media so much that is has had a negative impact on your job/studies"

TOLERANCE

"You feel an urge to use social media more and more"

WITHDRAWAL SYMPTOMS

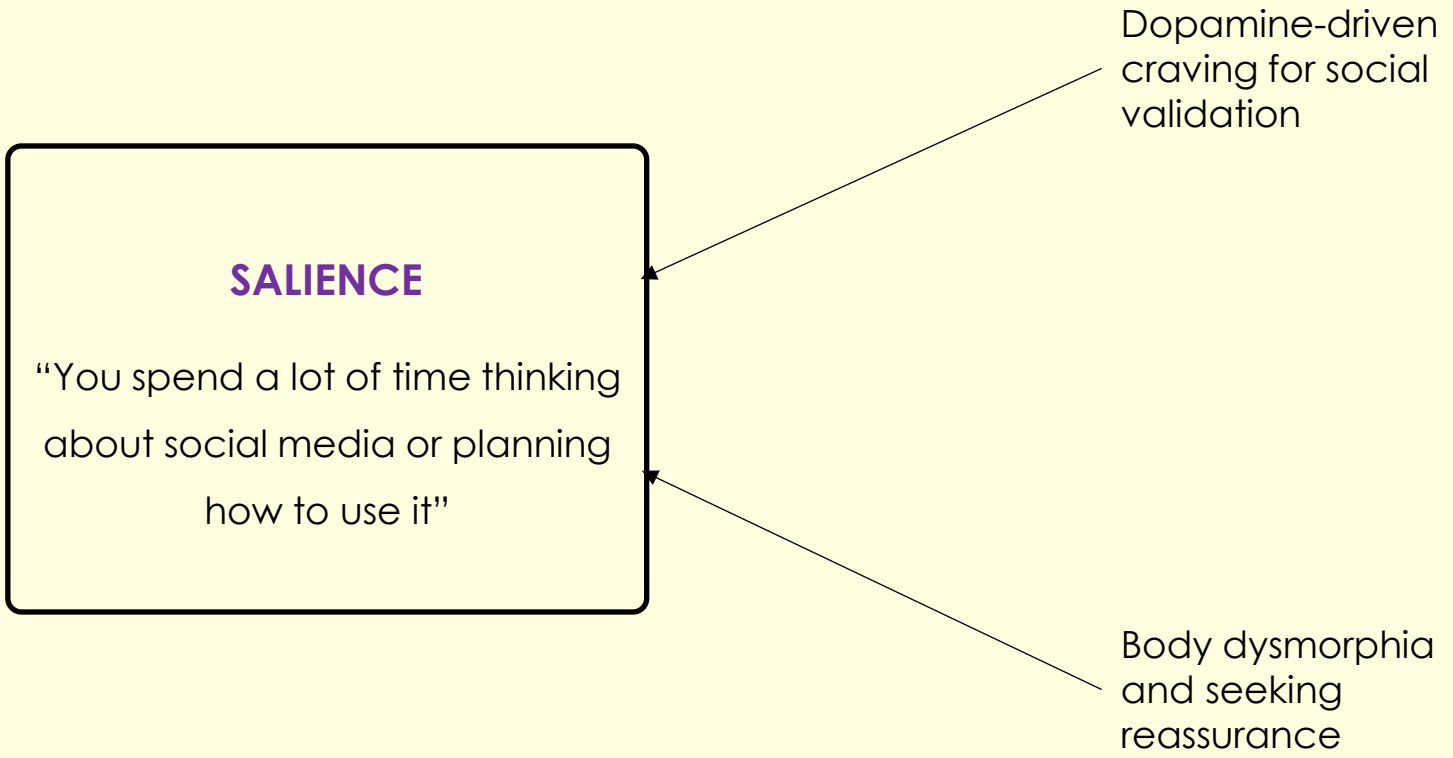
"You become restless or troubled if you are prohibited from using social media"

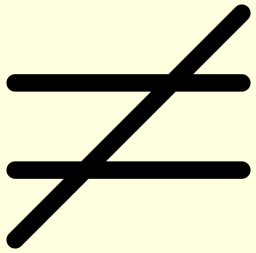
RELAPSE

"You have tried to cut down on the use of social media without success"

Measurement

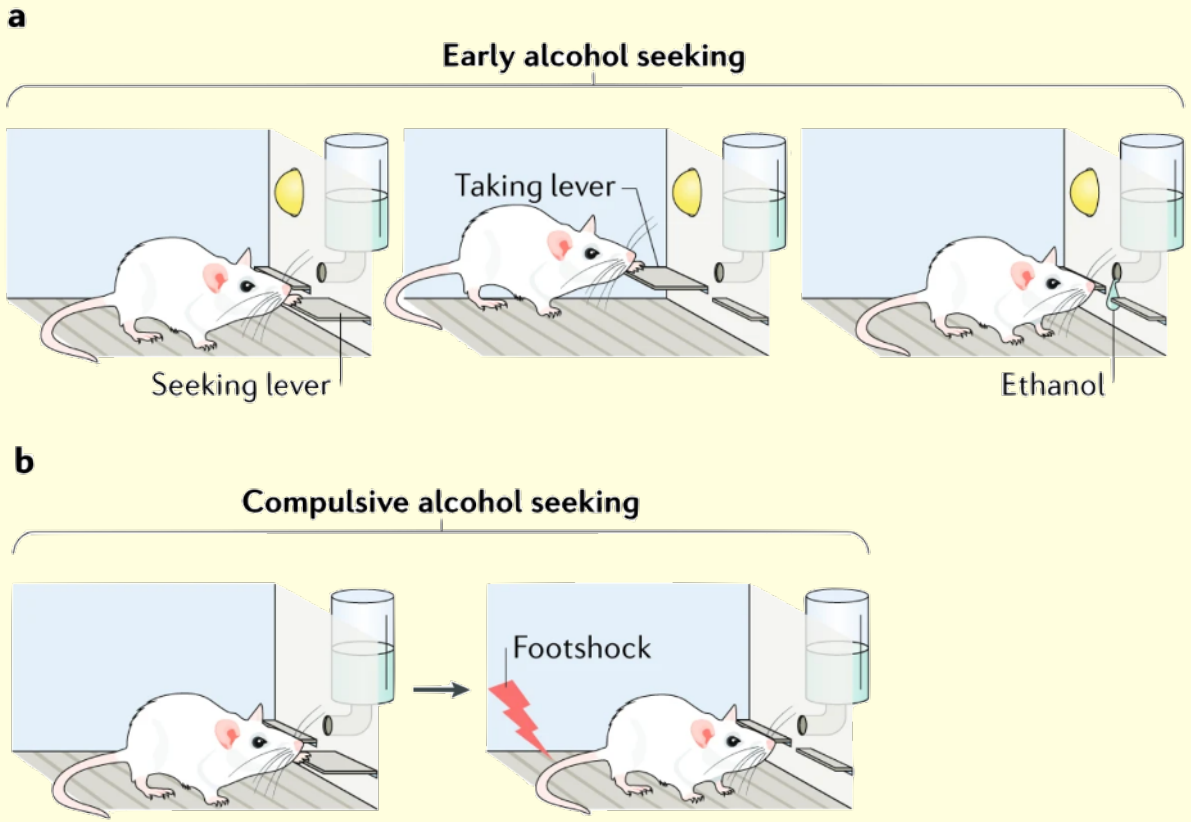
Andreassen et al. (2016), Brown (1993), Griffiths (1996, 2005)

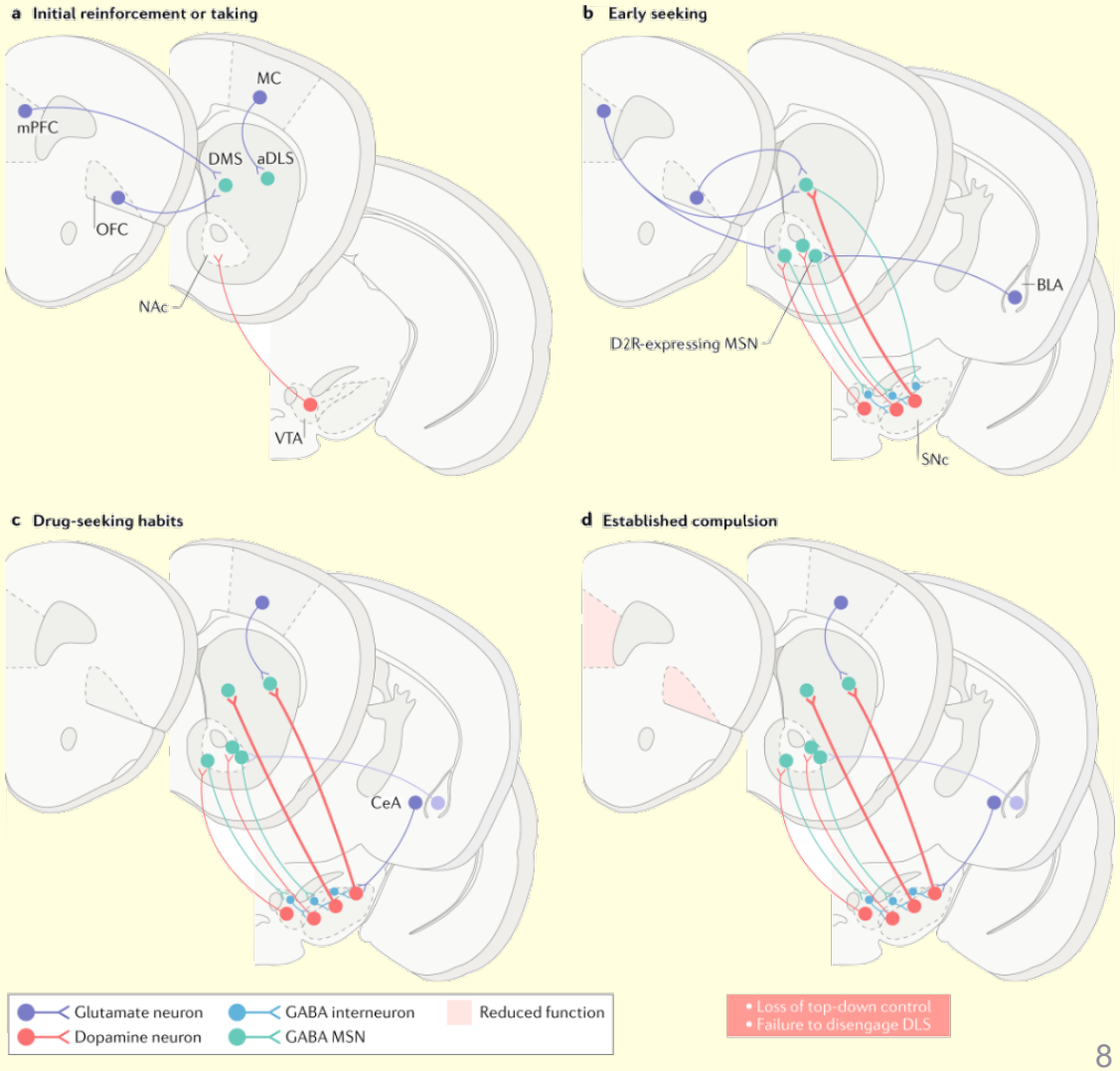


Phenotypic similarity  Mechanistic similarity

Mechanisms of Addiction

Luescher et al. (2020)





Mechanistic Approach

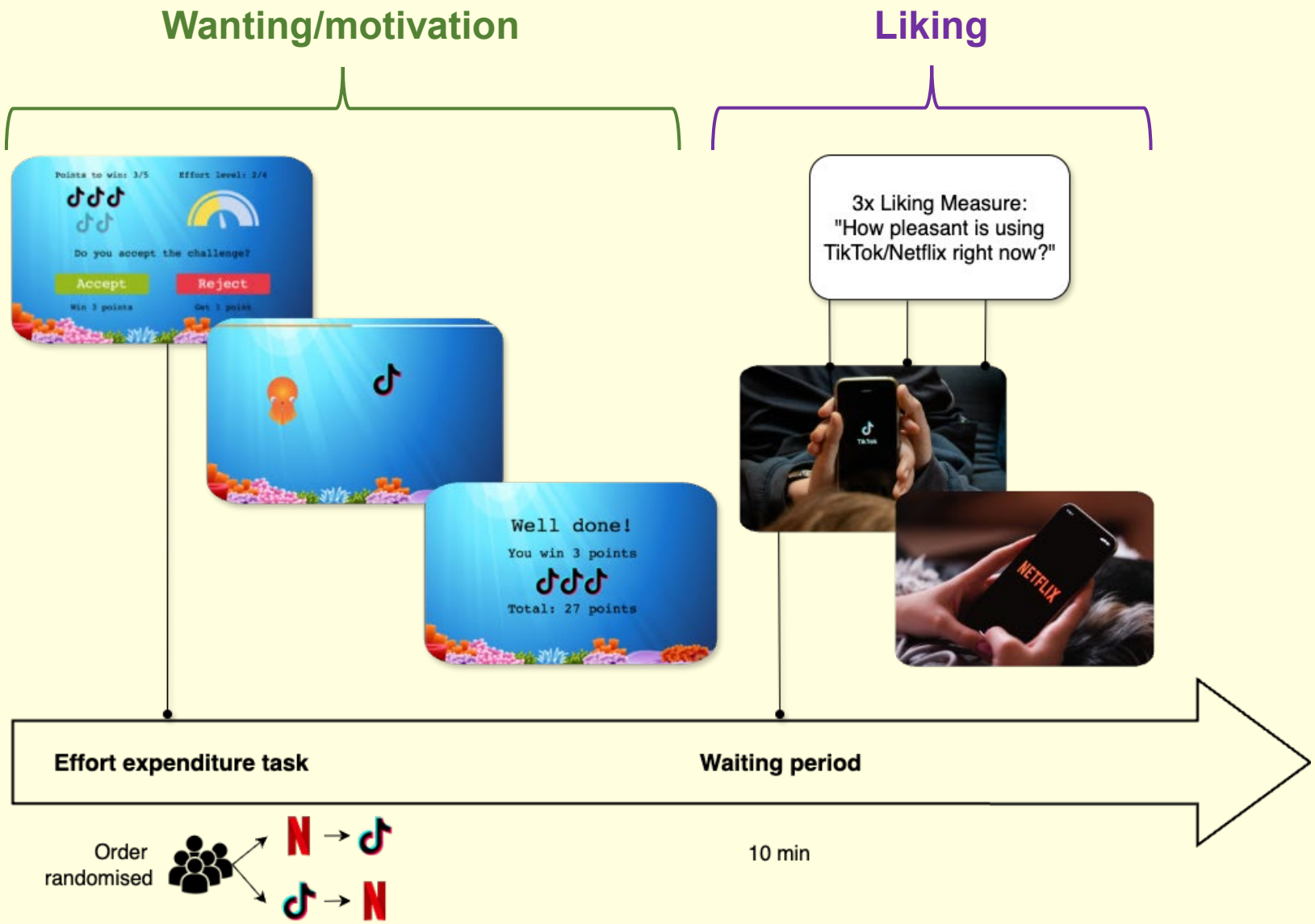
Berridge & Kringelbach (2015), Thomsen et al. (2014), Hellberg et al. (2019), Pool et al. (2016)

RESEARCH QUESTION

Can we measure incentive sensitisation in social media users

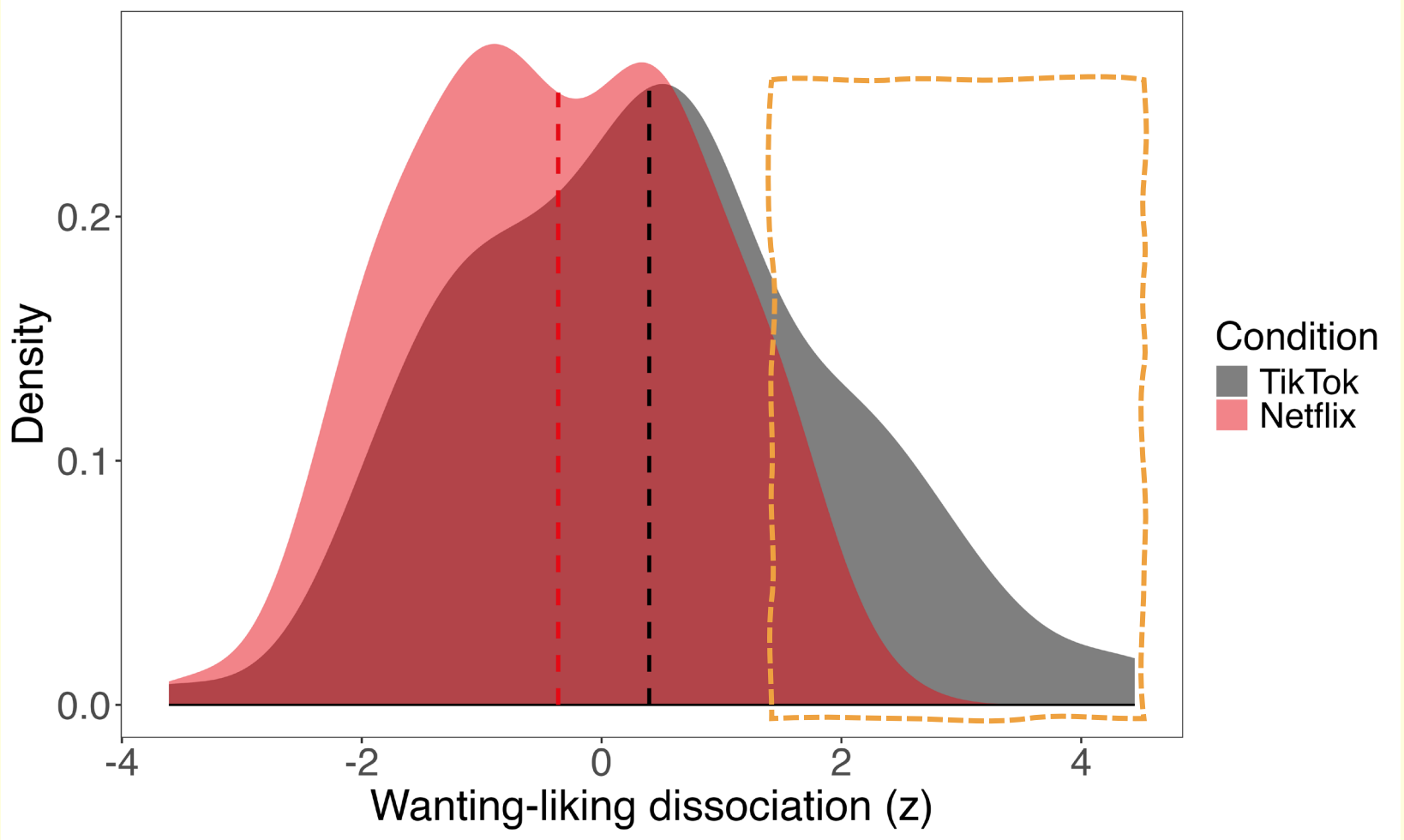
Research Design

Gunschera et al. (in preparation)



Dissociation is more pronounced for TikTok

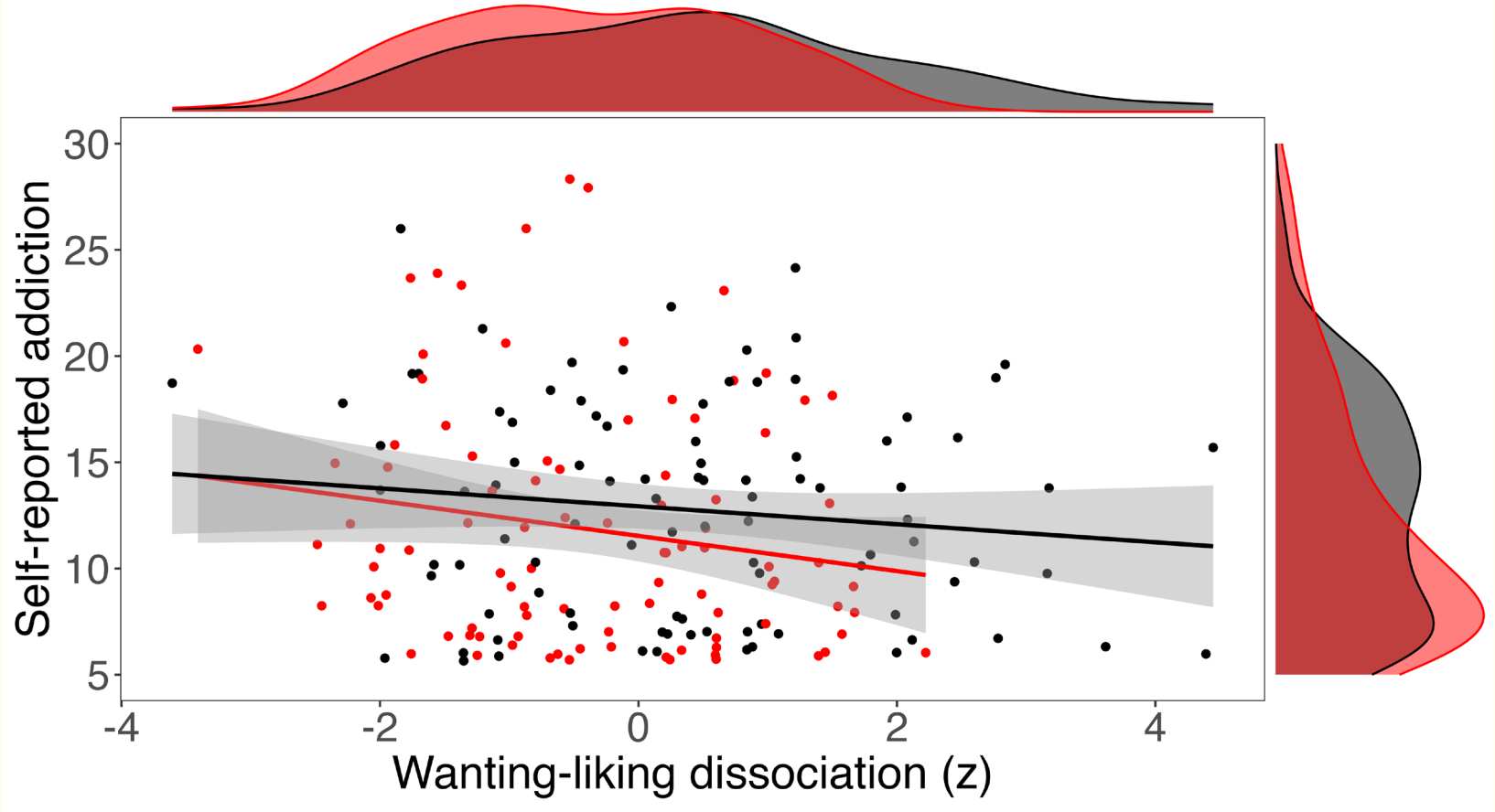
Gunschera et al. (in preparation)



Paired-samples t-test: BF01 = 121.207; *95% CI* [0.350, 1.092].
Cohen's d = 0.404

Dissociation does not relate to self-reported addiction

Gunschera et al. (in preparation)



BF01 = 0.884, r = -0.158, 95% CI [-0.341, 0.038]
Cohen's d = -0.130

Summary

THEORETICAL RELEVANCE

Many adolescents feel addicted to social media

MEASUREMENT

Measurement approaches are ad-hoc and lack validation

MECHANISM

We need mechanistic approaches to disentangle symptoms and mechanisms

Upcoming Research

MECHANISM

Examine mechanistic manipulations using psychopharmacological drugs

LIVED EXPERIENCE

Determine experiences and outcomes relevant to individuals who report feeling addicted

CLINICAL UTILITY

Evaluate the clinical utility of experiences used to measure social media addiction using a Delphi approach with clinicians

Thank you!

Amy Orben
MRC Cognition and Brain Sciences Unit

Camilla Nord
MRC Cognition and Brain Sciences Unit

Sara Mehrhof
MRC Cognition and Brain Sciences Unit

Matti Vuorre
Tilburg University

Ethan Ong
University of Cambridge

Brandon Davidson
MRC Cognition and Brain Sciences Unit

Ioanna Fokas
MRC Cognition and Brain Sciences Unit

@lukasgunschera lukas.gunschera@mrc-cbu.cam.ac.uk