Consequences and correlates of alcohol use at 16 and beyond: Empirical findings from the British Cohort studies

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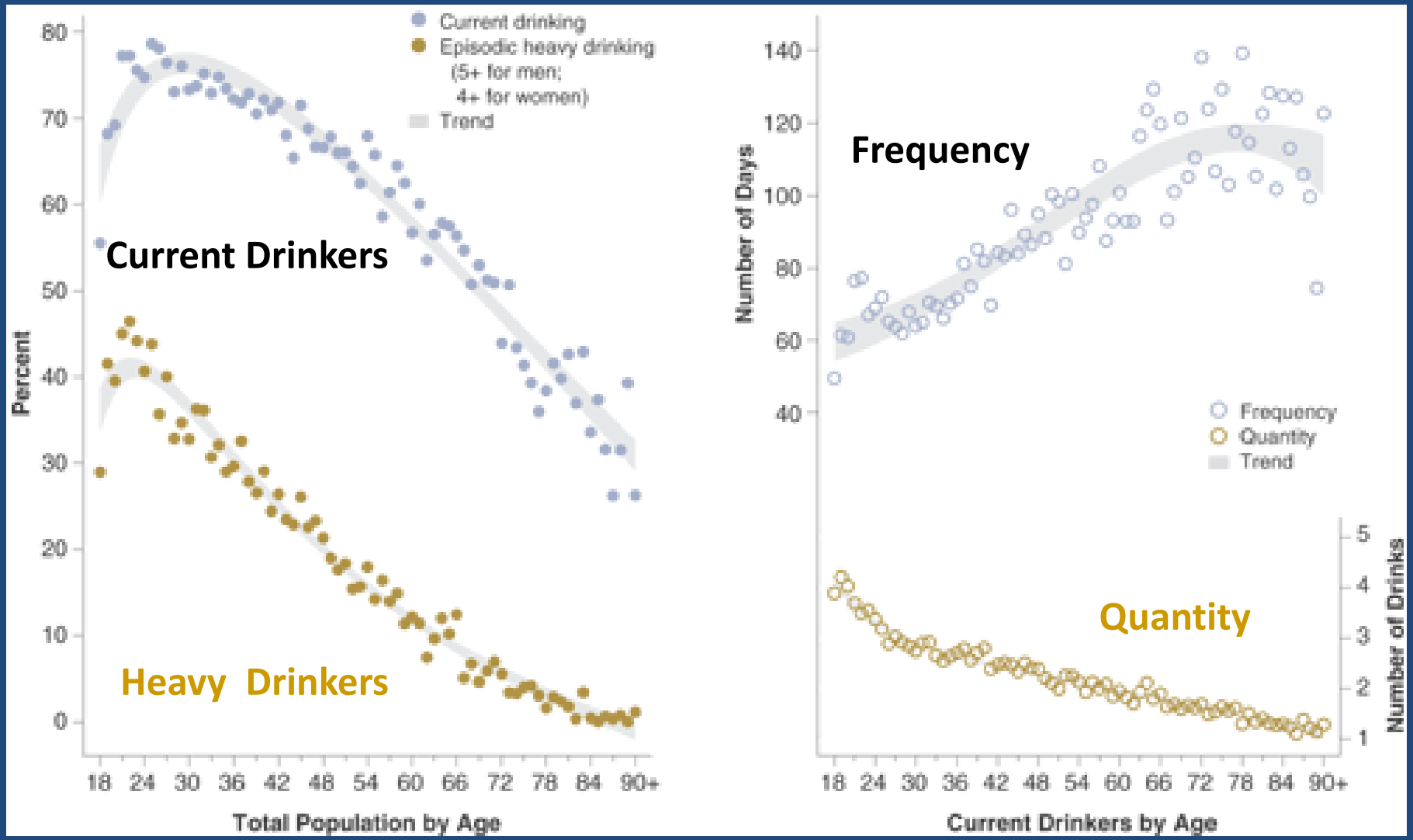
16 and beyond

- A “demographically dense” period of the life course
- Interconnected changes in a range of social roles including marriage, parenthood, employment, and education
- Shaped by family background and childhood experiences, agency, and historical context

Changes in alcohol use

- Rates of alcohol/substance use increase during the late teens/early twenties and then decline
  - Chassin, Hussong, & Beltran 2009

Alcohol Use Across the Life Span



NESARC, 2001–2002

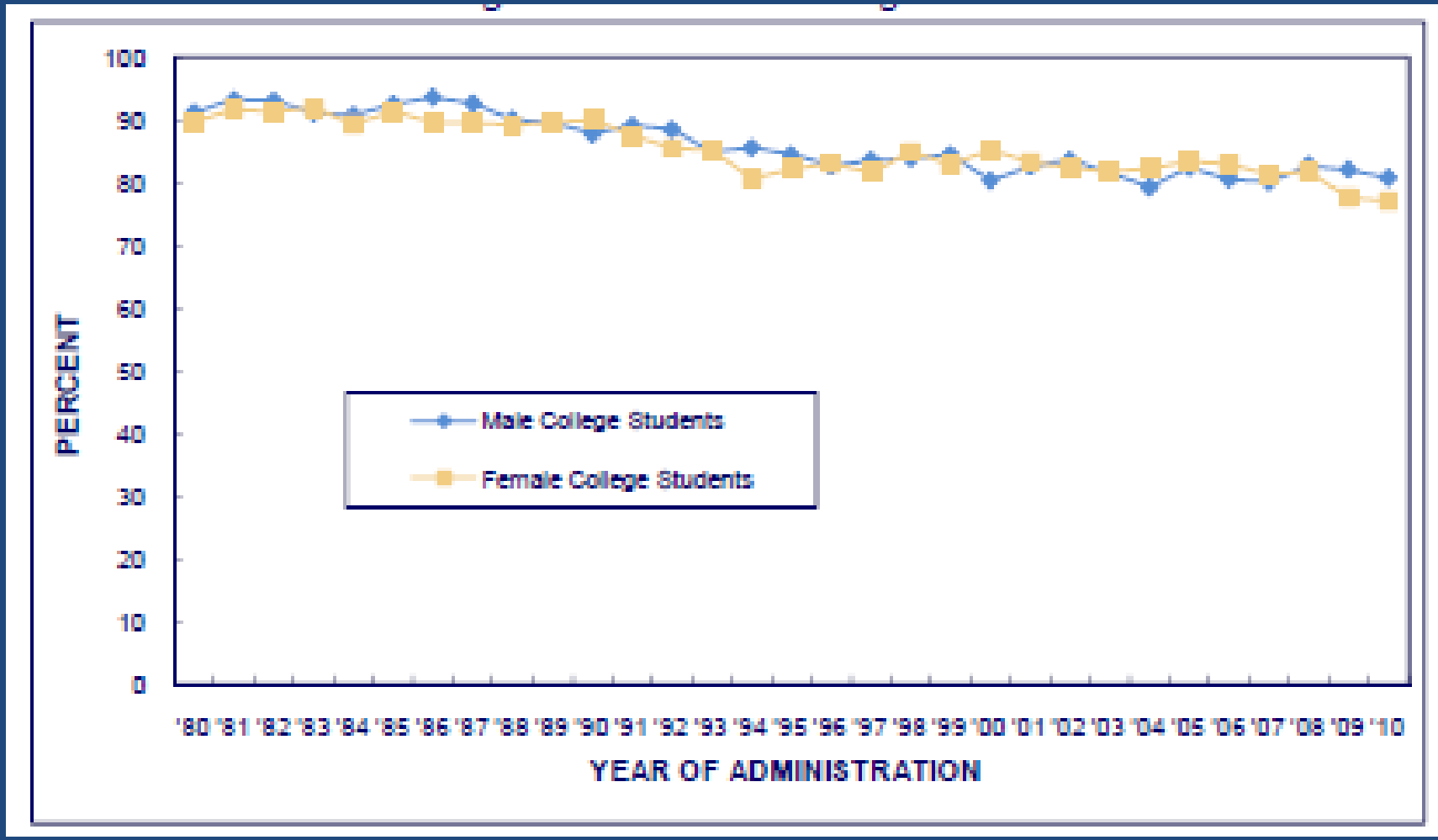
Are they related?

- Lots of research says “yes”
- Social roles changes → Changes in drinking

Summary of research

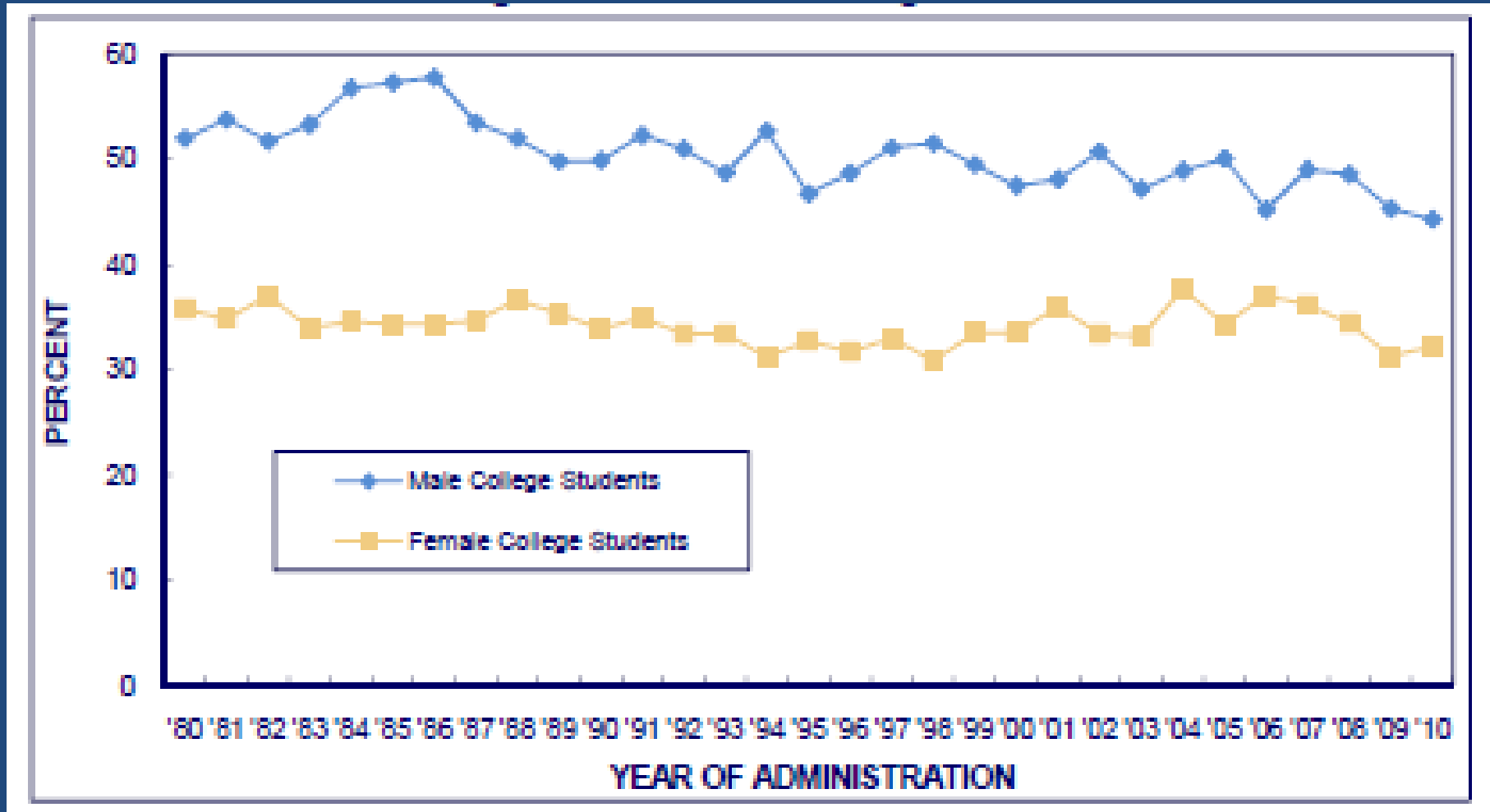
- Going to college → More drinking
- Union formation & parenthood → Less drinking
- Getting a job → More and less drinking

Annual Prevalence of Alcohol Use Among Male and Female College Students



Source: www.monitoringthefuture.org

2-Week Prevalence of 5+ Drinks in a Row Among Male and Female College Students



Source: www.monitoringthefuture.org

Causality versus selection?

- Social role hypothesis: Proximal or concurrent social roles during adulthood impact alcohol use

- Role selection hypothesis: Contextual and individual background characteristics determine both social roles in adulthood and alcohol consumption

Addressing selection issue

- Social roles changes → Changes in drinking
- Experimental design
- Examine within-person change in roles and drinking
  - Need high quality longitudinal data
  - Repeated assessments of social role attainments and drinking behavior
  - Multiple nationally representative cohorts to increase generalizability

3 cohort studies: 1958, 1970, 2001

www.cls.ioe.ac.uk

National Child Development Study 1958
British Cohort Study 1970

- Large-scale ongoing British cohort studies
- National sample of one week's births
  - Each > 17,000 initial cases
- Multiple data sources: Parent, teacher, child, medical, tests, spouse, kids, biomedical, mortality
- Waves
  - NCDS Age 0, 7, 11, 16, 23, 33, 42, 46, 50, *55* →
  - BCS Age 0, 5, 10, 16, 26, 30, 34, 38, *42* →

  - *[MCS 2001 Age 9m, 3, 5, 7, 11 → 14, 17]*

Preliminary results (NCDS)

- Within-person changes in alcohol use and roles
- Odds of heavy daily drinking reduced
  - 45% when women marry; 58% when men marry
  - 35% when women cohabit; 62% when men cohabit
  - 53% when women reside with child under 5 (58% when men do)
  - 28% when women reside with child 5 to 16 (no effect for men)
- Odds increase by 30% when women and men work

Why do family roles reduce drinking?

- “Responsibilities to spouses and children appear to crowd out these kinds of recreation most likely to encourage substance use” (Bachman et al. 2002)

- Restructuring of social activities
  - Leaving the fast lane

- Spouse/partners/children enforcing norms

Mixed norms/expectations regarding work and alcohol use

College and alcohol use

- Evenings out
- Living arrangements (away from parents; residence in fraternity or sorority)
- Absence of adult family roles
- Positive attitudes toward substance use

STOP!
IN THE NAME
OF DRINKING
IOE STUDENT
UNION BAR
ALL
WELCOME

- Adult role attainment → Changes in drinking

- Drinking → Adult role attainment

Adolescent Heavy Drinking → Educational (Degree)

- Teen alcohol use: Clear correlate of school failure

  Cook & Moore, 1993; Williams et al., 2003

- Many possible mechanisms

  Gotham et al., 2003; Newcomb & Bentler, 1988; NIAAA, 2004; Spear, 2000

- Unclear whether relationship causal or spurious
  - Third variables: Child and adolescent risks
- Contingent link? Evans et al., 1994; Rehm et al., 2004; Wills & Yaeger, 2003
  - Riskier for some

NCDS Design & Measures

AGE 16
Heavy Drinking
1974

AGE 42
Education
2000

Heavy Drinkers
Females: 4+ units/week, 13%
Males: 5+ units/week, 25%

Vs.
Moderate and NonDrinkers

Post-secondary degree (31% yes)

Staff, Patrick, Loken & Maggs, 2008, *JSAD*

NCDS Design & Measures

Childhood Balancing Variables 1958-1969

Mother smoked (pregnancy)

Family background (0 to 11): Father manual, Parent low ed, Single parent, Free lunch

Academics: Read, Math (11)

Externalizing/internalizing (7, 11)

Leisure activities (11)

School/work aspirations (11)

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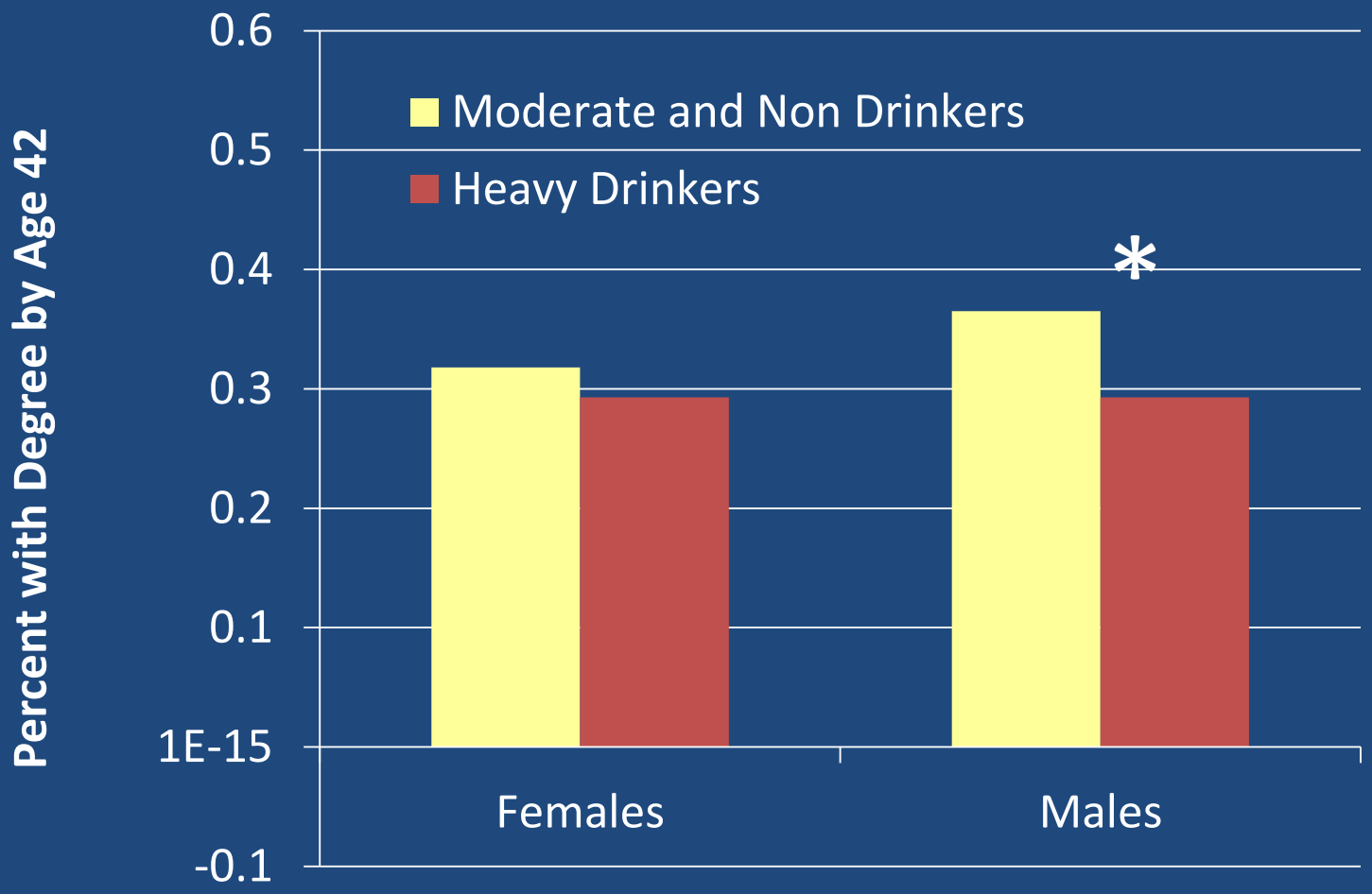
NCDS: Heavy Drinking Age 16 → College Degree



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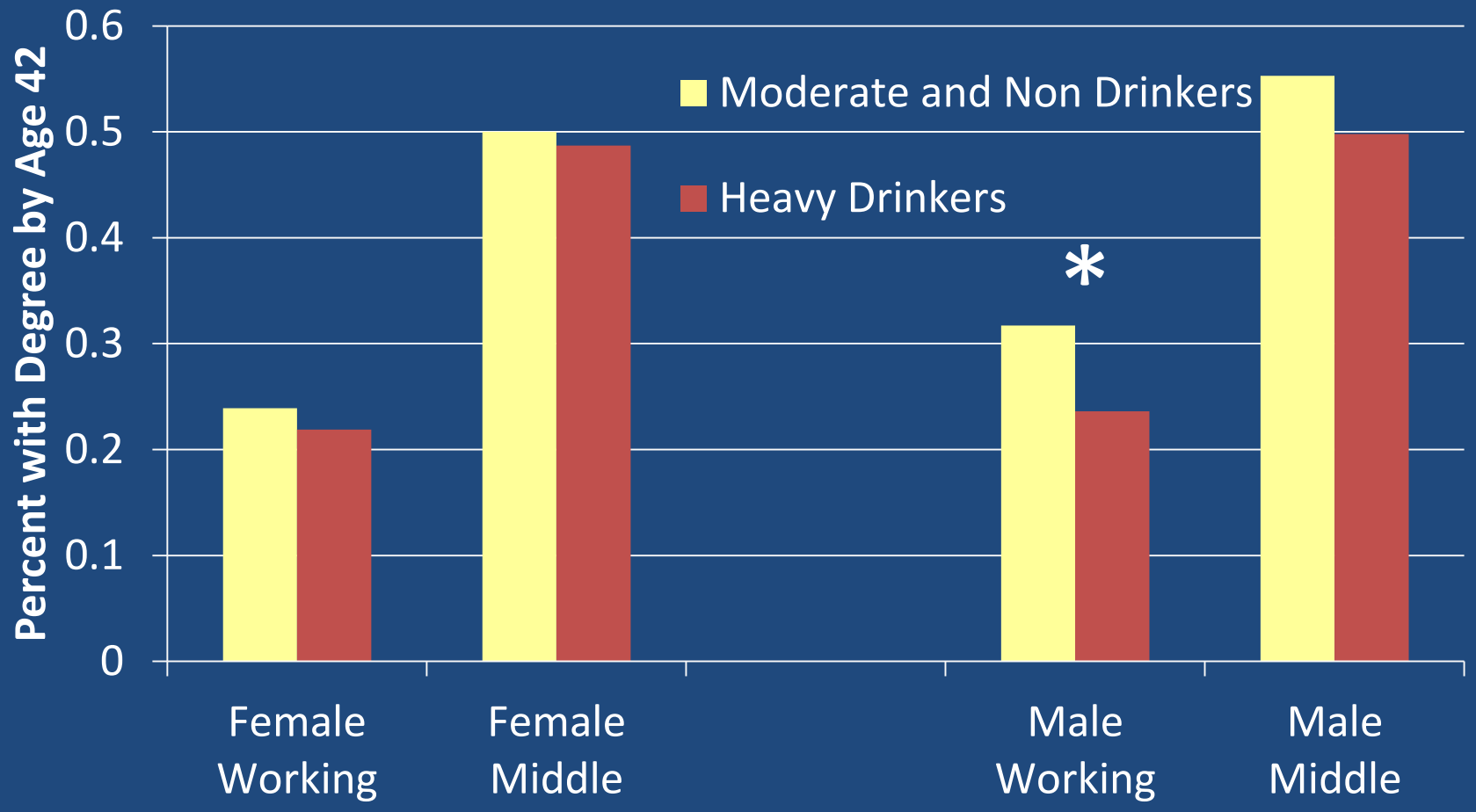
NCDS: Heavy Drinking Age 16 → College Degree by Gender & Social Class



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Take home message

- Documenting consequences is difficult
- Using high-quality-multi-cohort-nationally-representative-LONGitudinal data can help researchers make more causal inferences

Colleagues and Funding

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