

Alcohol in popular music: Changes in the UK music charts 1981 - 2011



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Introduction

- Listening to music a popular leisure time activity
- New digitalised platforms increase access to music
- Debate as to the effects of lyrical content on (young) listeners
- Music and alcohol consumption together in nightlife environments
- Are media portrayals of alcohol contributing to the culture of excessive alcohol use found among young people?



The evidence

- Greater alcohol consumption when:
 - Exposed to alcohol portrayal in films and commercials
 - Visiting licensed premises in which music incorporating alcohol references was played
- Effects of lyrics on other social attitudes and behaviours demonstrated
 - Cannabis use
 - Aggression
 - Sexual behaviour
 - Prosocial behaviour
- Widespread inclusion of alcohol references in US music and increasing in prevalence



Aims

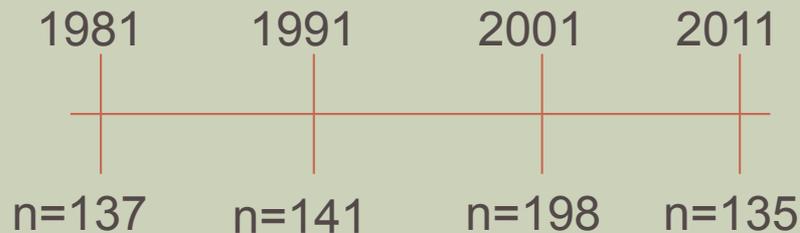
To develop an understanding of the extent of, and changes in, alcohol-related references in popular music in the UK music charts

Methodology



Sample selection

- Official Singles Chart (Official UK Charts Company Ltd)
- All songs reaching a Top 10 position in the target years



- Lyrics obtained from:
 - Well-known web-based lyrics databases (2 or more sources corroborated for accuracy)
 - Original recordings screened and lyrics transcribed

Methodology cont.

Coding procedures

- Lyrics independently assessed by two researchers
($k=.856$, $p<.001$)
- Identified all references to alcohol and alcohol consumption
 - Attention paid to slang terms, e.g. booze, wasted
 - Multiple alcoholic drink consumption or drunkenness
 - Framed with positive, negative or neutral connotations
- Additional data on song genre; performed by solo artist, group or collaboration; gender and nationality of artist(s); highest chart position; time spent in the charts

Methodology cont.

- Not included if:

- Referred to the act of drinking but not in an alcohol-related context and not referencing alcoholic beverages directly

e.g. *'Sippin' on a different drink'*
(Snoop Dog -Sweat, 2011)

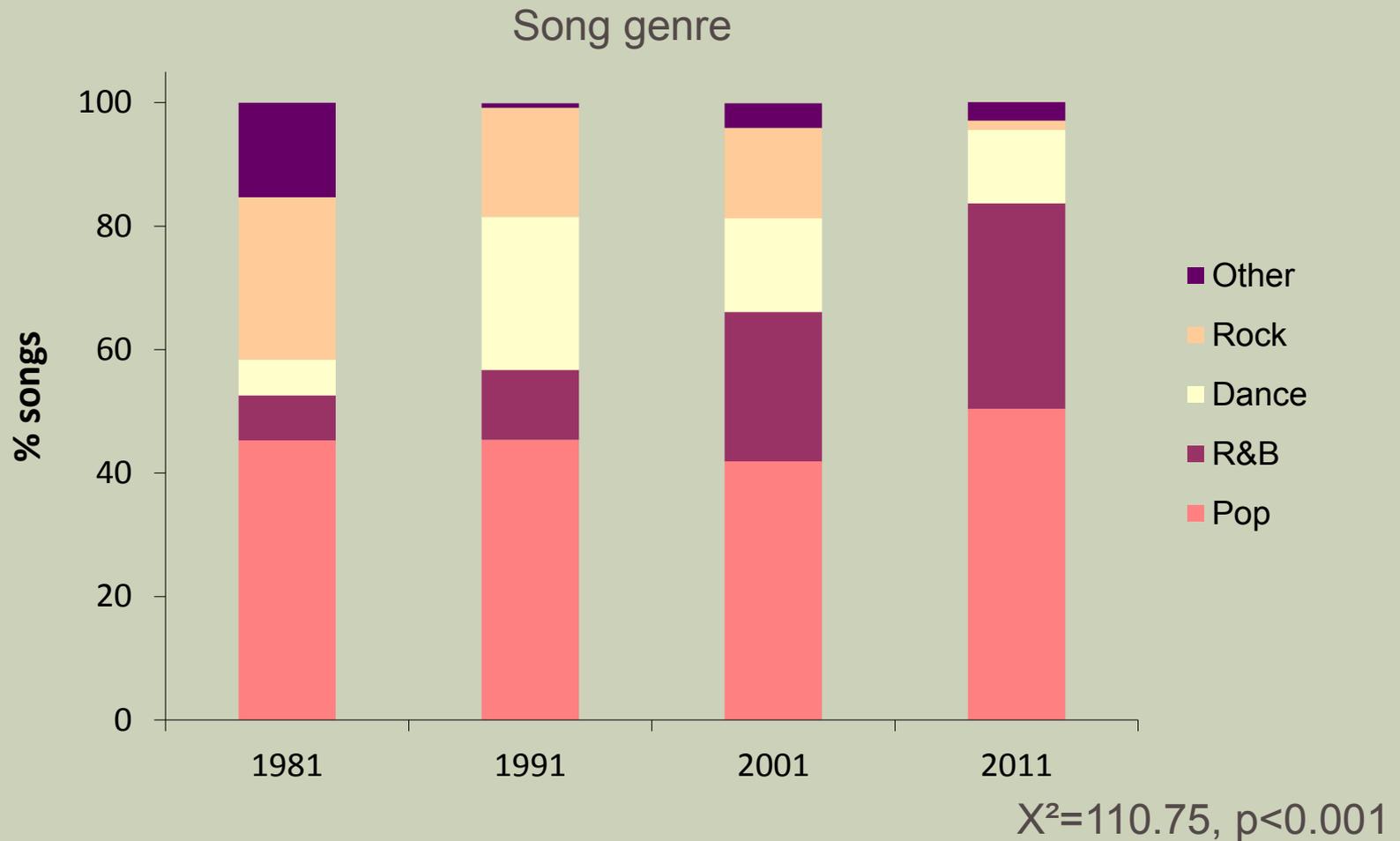
- Referred to drinking establishment but no mention of actual beverages or consumption

e.g. *'We're dancing on the bar'*
(The Saturdays – All fired up, 2011)

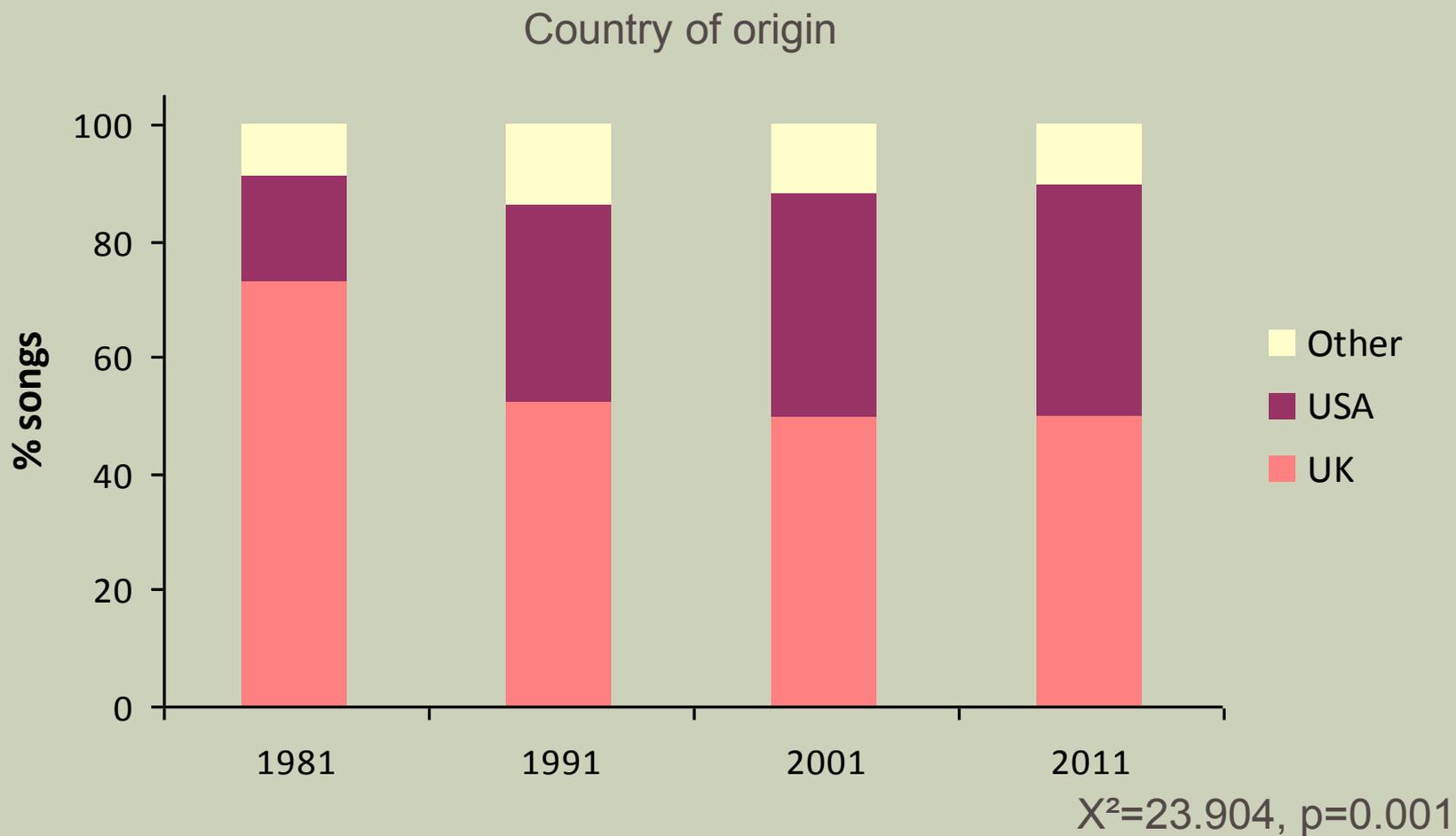
Findings – Changes in chart composition

	All years	1981	1991	2001	2011	X ²	p
Songs (n)	611	137	141	198	135		
Mean weeks in chart	9.5	8.9	8.1	7.3	15.1	61.805	<0.001
Reached #1 (%)	17.3	14.6	13.5	17.7	23.7	6.015	0.111
Artist (%)							
Solo	39.1	29.9	35.5	38.9	52.6		
Group	47.5	65.7	52.5	53.0	15.6		
Collaboration	13.4	4.4	12.1	8.1	31.9	97.2	<0.001
Gender (%)							
Male	58.4	70.8	61.7	55.6	46.7		
Female	23.2	11.7	19.9	27.8	31.9		
Mixed	18.3	17.5	18.4	16.7	21.5	23.0	0.001

Findings – Changes in chart composition



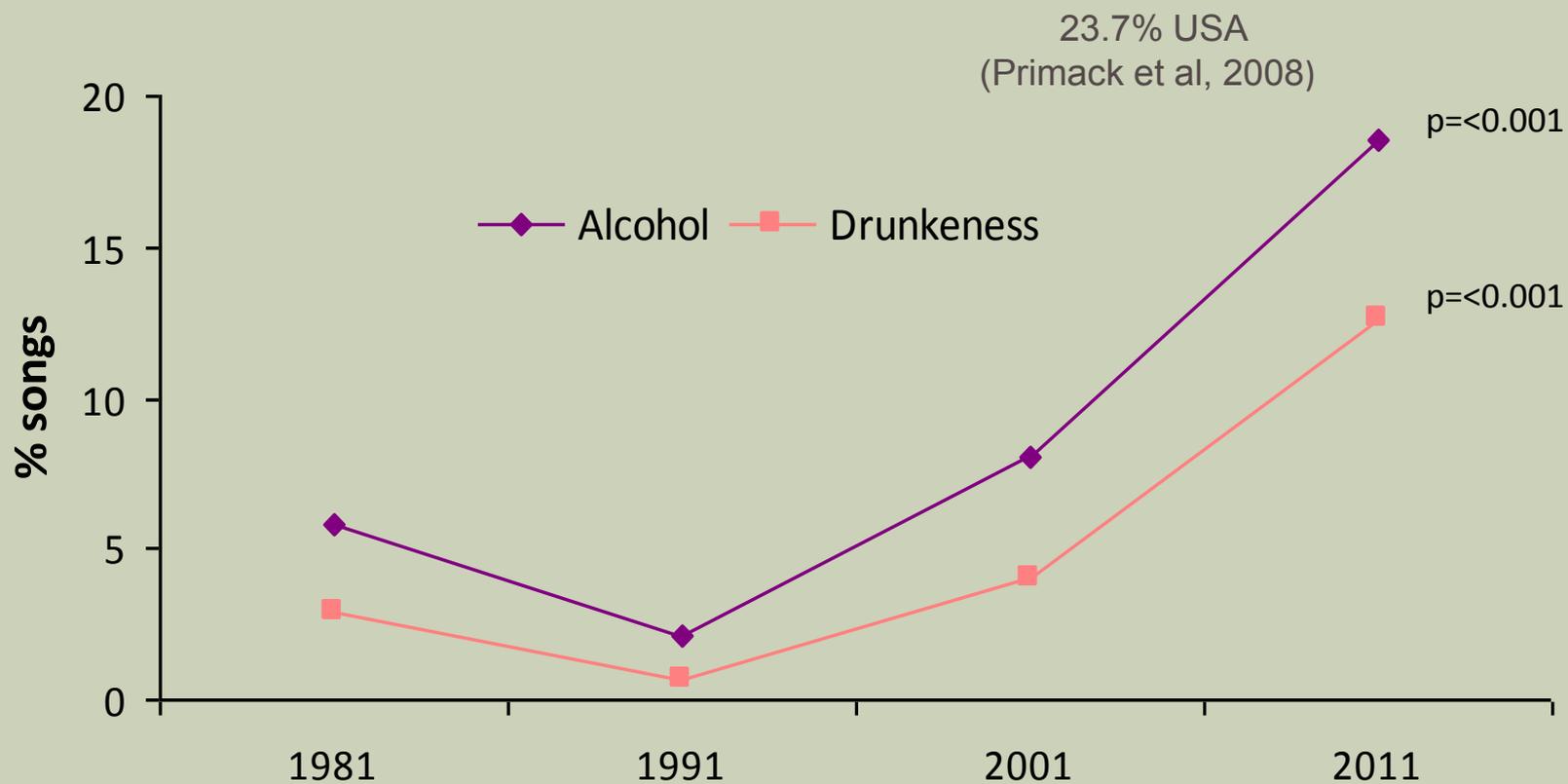
Findings – Changes in chart composition



Findings – References to alcohol and heavy drinking



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Findings – References to alcohol and heavy drinking

- Significantly more alcohol references in songs that (bivariate analyses):
 - Entered the charts in 2011
 - Remained in the charts for more than 10 weeks
 - Were of an Urban genre
 - Originated from the USA
 - Were released by collaborating artists
- Significantly increased odds of containing alcohol reference when (multivariate analyses):
 - Charting in 2011 (AOR 3.39, 95% CI 1.33-8.66, $p < .05$)
 - Of an urban genre (AOR 2.67, 95% CI 1.30-5.50, $p < .01$)
 - From the USA (AOR 2.15, 95% CI 1.11-4.17, $p < .05$)

Findings – Positive, neutral and negative associations

Associated with negative life outcomes

- Squeeze – Labelled with love (1981) 
- Tracy Chapman – Fast car (2011; re-entry from 1988) 



Associated with wealth

Far East Movement – Like a G6 (2011) 

Associated with sexual activity

+ Rihanna ft Drake – What's my name (2011) 



As a resolution to problems

Aloe Blacc – I need a dollar (2011) 

Consumption to excess with no regard for consequences

Dev ft Cataracs – Bass down low (2011) 



Conclusions

- Notable increase in the prevalence of references to alcohol
- Largely accounted for by an infiltration of music from USA and increased popularity of urban music
- Lyrics linked alcohol consumption to valued attributes and favourable outcomes, whilst neglecting negative impacts
- Possible cyclic relationship between lyrical content and alcohol consumption
- More than just a portrayal or implied endorsement of behaviour → current measures of advertising likely to underestimate extent of exposure
- Indication of the importance of research assessing the effect of popular music messages on people's knowledge, attitudes and behaviours
- Public health professionals to work to ensure that popular music does not become a medium for reinforcing and extending cultures of intoxication and alcohol-related harm

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