

Background

- ◆ Appearance-Related Teasing is defined as any type of negative feedback related to one's appearance (e.g., insults, cruel comments, sexist remarks, poking-fun; Cash, 2012). This is a common experience among adolescents (Haines, et al., 2013).
- ◆ Substance use often emerges in adolescence (Johnston, et al., 2010) and is associated with a host of adverse psychosocial outcomes. Affective regulation models suggest that people use alcohol and drugs to avoid or reduce negative emotional states (Sher & Slutske, 2003).
- ◆ Body image becomes increasingly important to the self-worth during adolescence (Ricciardelli & Yager, 2016), making appearance-related teasing a noteworthy stressor for adolescents who may then turn to substance use as an "escape" from negative emotions and stress.
- ◆ Body image ideals are especially stringent for girls (Blowers et al., 2003), potentially making appearance-related teasing more stressful for girls. Therefore, it is conceivable that girls may be more likely than boys to use substances as an "escape."
- ◆ To date, research has not examined appearance-related teasing and substance use together.

Objective

Primary Objective: To examine the relationship between appearance-related teasing and substance use in a large, diverse community sample of early adolescents.

Secondary Objective: To examine whether gender moderates these relationships between appearance-related teasing and substance use.

Methods

Participants

- ◆ 1,056 7th and 8th grade students recruited from five middle schools in the New England region of the United States
- ◆ 52% Girls
- ◆ 55% Non-Hispanic White, 16% Hispanic, 8% Black or African American, 3% Asian, 14% Multi-Racial/Ethnic, and 4% other race/ethnicity
- ◆ Age: $M = 13$ years, $SD = 0.65$, $Range = 11-15$ years

Procedures

- ◆ Adolescents completed surveys at school in the Fall of 2016
- ◆ Movie passes were given to adolescents upon completion

Acknowledgement: We would like to thank all the students and schools for their participation

Methods

Measures

- ◆ The Weight-Related Teasing Questionnaire (Levine, Smolak, & Hayden, 1994)
 - ◆ Assessed the degree to which adolescents have experienced appearance-related teasing or negative comments about body weight or shape from family members and peers in the past 6 months ($\alpha = .75$)
- ◆ Substance Use Survey (Ohannessian, 2009)
 - ◆ Total alcohol consumption (quantity x frequency)
 - ◆ Binge drinking frequency in the past 6 months
 - ◆ Marijuana use frequency in the past 6 months
- ◆ Covariates
 - ◆ The MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status (SSS; Goodman et al., 2001)
 - ◆ Self-reported height and weight used to calculate BMI-z score (Kuczmarski et al., 2002)

Analytic Plan

- ◆ Hierarchical linear regression models
 - ◆ Independent variable: appearance-related teasing total score^a
 - ◆ Dependent variables: substance use variables^a
 - ◆ Moderator: gender (coded as 1 = girls and 0 = boys)
 - ◆ Covariates: age, race/ethnicity, perceived socioeconomic status, and BMI-z scores

^a Logarithm transformed to achieve a normal distribution.

Results

Table 1. Main Effects of Appearance-Related Teasing

Outcome Variable	B	95% CI (B)	β	ΔR^2
Total Alcohol Consumption	0.04	-0.19 – 0.26	.02	.015
Binge Drinking	0.38*	0.04 – 0.71	.14	.055
Marijuana Use	0.41***	0.21 – 0.62	.21	.026

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

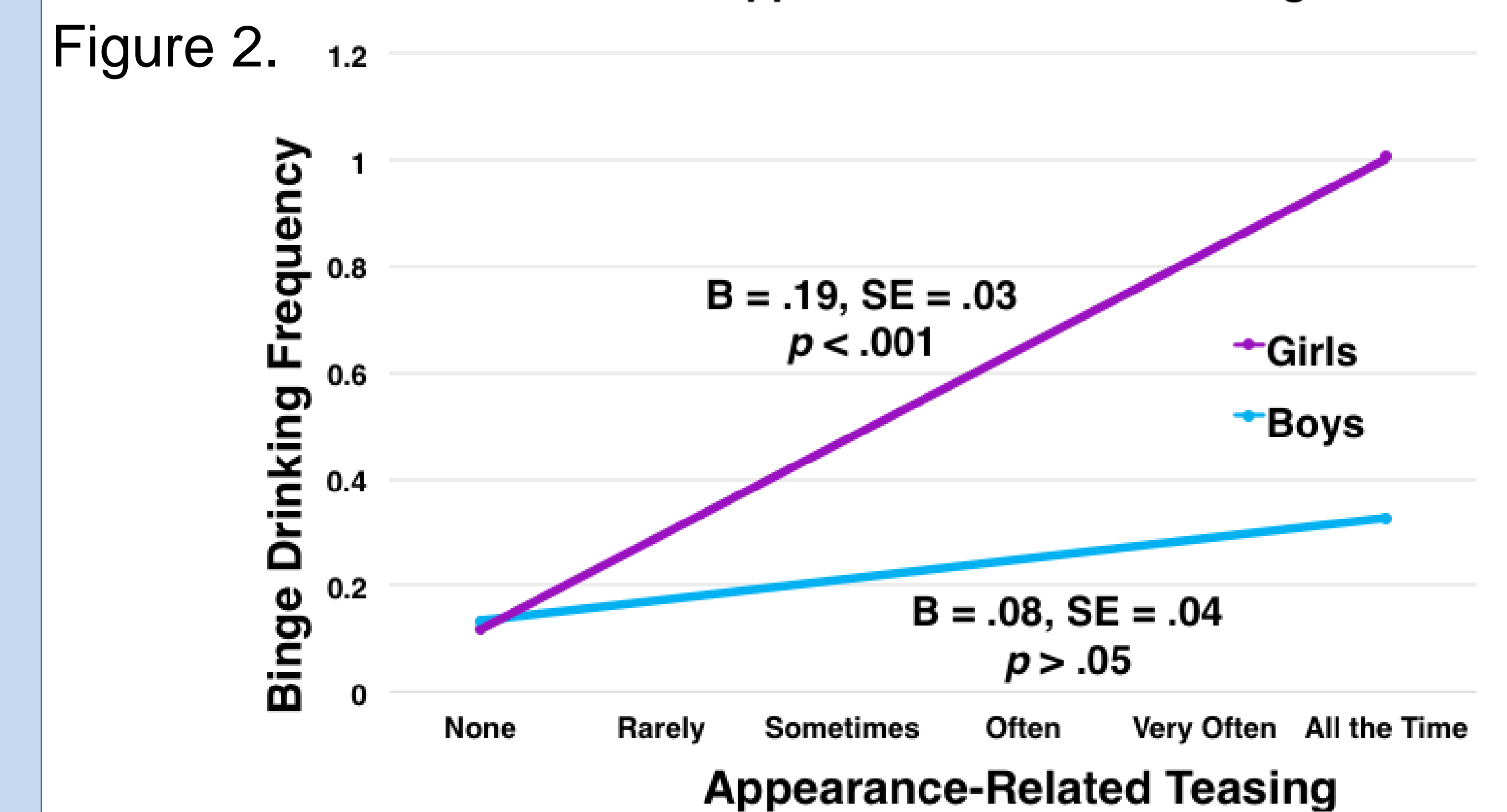
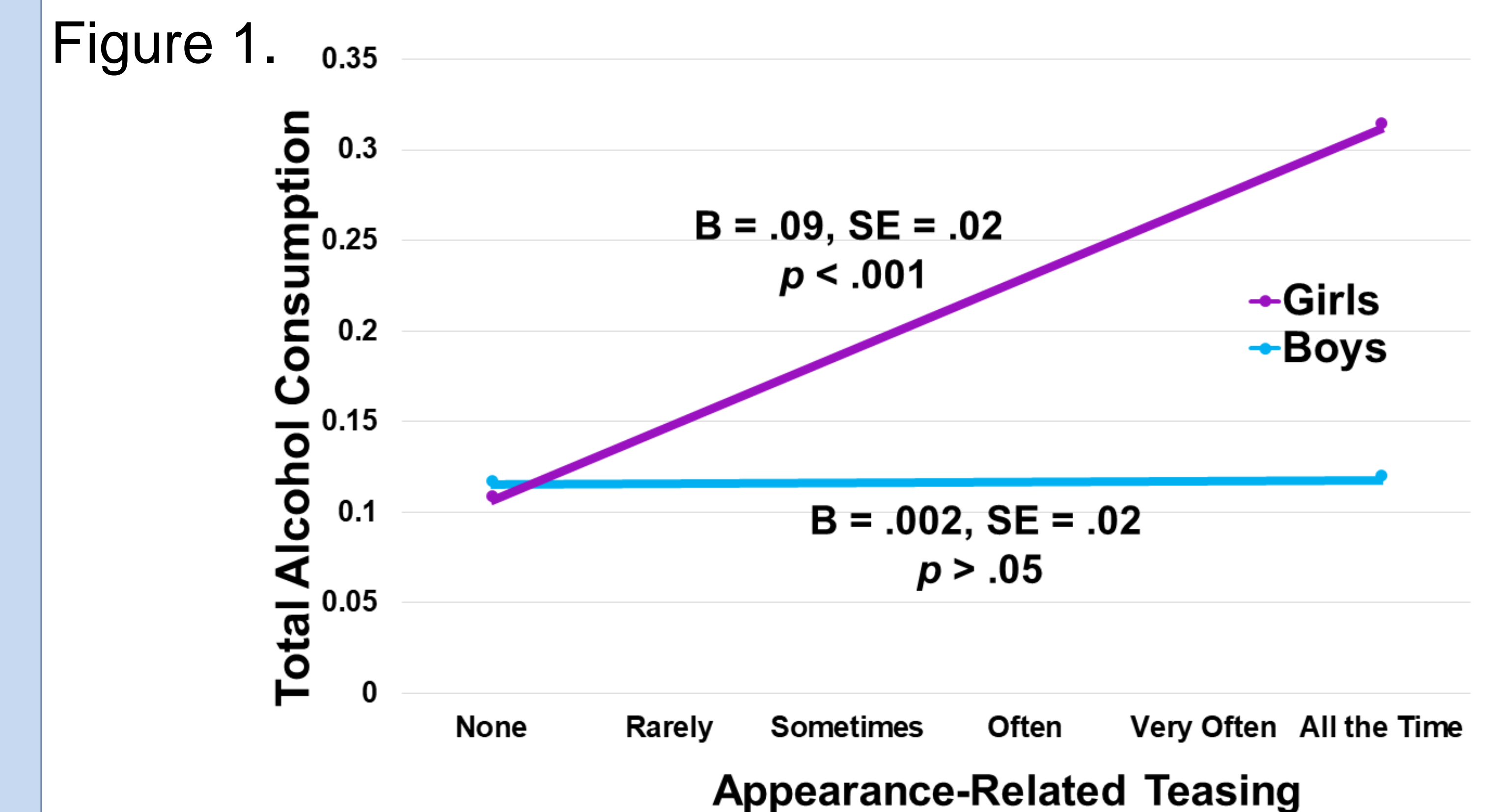
- ◆ Results suggest that adolescents reporting higher levels of appearance-related teasing engaged in significantly more frequent binge drinking and marijuana use.



- ◆ There was no significant relationship between appearance-related teasing and total alcohol consumption.

Results

Gender Moderation:



No gender differences were found in regards to marijuana use ($p > .05$).

Conclusions

- ◆ Overall, the hypothesis that the importance of body image makes appearance-related teasing stressful, and likely to be associated with substance use in early adolescence, was partially supported.
- ◆ Consistent with sociocultural (Blowers et al., 2003) and escape theories (Sher & Slutske, 2003), girls may experience higher degrees of stress in response to appearance-related teasing than boys, thus engaging in more drinking behavior. The hypothesis was not supported for marijuana use.

Implications

- ◆ Results highlight the need to address appearance-related teasing in the school and family context, especially for girls.
- ◆ Future studies should assess the underlying mechanisms that account for these patterns longitudinally.

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