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**Older Adolescents' Perceptions of Social Support and their Willingness to Seek Help for
a Dating Problem from Same-Sex and Other-Sex Friends**

by

Mary G. Simmering

**A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through the Department of Psychology
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts at the
University of Windsor**

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ABSTRACT

This study examined relations among expectations of support (i.e., emotional and instrumental) and late adolescents' willingness to seek help for a dating problem from female and male friends. It also examined whether teens' willingness to seek help differed by past help seeking and gender, and aspects of help seeking perceived as most and least helpful. Online survey data were collected from 122 adolescents (94 females, 28 males) aged 17-18 years. Results showed that expectations of emotional support from male and female friends were related to greater willingness to seek help from friends of the same gender. Previous help-seeking experience was related to greater willingness to seek help from female friends, but less willingness to seek help from male friends for males. Findings also suggest that adolescents prefer emotional support for a dating problem.

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Older Adolescents' Perceptions of Social Support and their Willingness to Seek Help for
a Dating Problem from Same-Sex and Other-Sex Friends

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Adolescence is a developmental period that is characterized by a great deal of growth, adaptation, and change within a short amount of time (Cauce et al., 2002). Teenagers are presented with new challenges and situations with which they must learn to cope. These challenges may be dealt with in ways that are adaptive or maladaptive. Although previous research in the area of adolescence identified this period as a “stormy decade” (e.g., Bandura, 1964) characterized by turmoil, from a developmental perspective adolescence is viewed as a time of forward-thinking transition during which teenagers consider what their roles will be as adults (Berzonsky, 1982; Rask, Astedt-Kurki, Paavilainen, & Laippala, 2003). Adolescents tend to experience changes in their stress levels; however, the sources of stress are often age-related and adaptation is in response to normative events that occur during this stage, for example, puberty (Berzonsky).

Although many teenagers experience an increase in behavioural and emotional difficulties in adolescence, these problems tend to be temporary and most individuals' positive growth is not hindered. However, when adolescents experience an accumulation of negative events or distressful experiences, they may be more vulnerable to maladjustment (Printz, Shermis, & Webb, 1999). Some teenagers progress through this stage in maladaptive ways (Bandura, 1964; Timlin-Scalera, Ponterotto, Blumberg, &

Jackson, 2003; Pinquart, Silbereisen, Rainer, & Wiesner, 2005). One of the important tasks that teenagers face is the development of more significant relationships with their peers while becoming more independent from their parents (Way & Greene, 2006). As adolescents grow older, they become more concerned with their peer networks (Boldero & Fallon, 1995). While this transition is natural, more influence is exerted on adolescents from their peer groups and there is a dramatic shift in their involvement and relationships with other-sex peers (Berzonsky, 1982; Grover & Nangle, 2003).

Definitions of Coping, Help Seeking, and Social Support

According to Folkman and Lazarus (1980, 1985), coping refers to the behavioural and cognitive efforts within which an individual engages or selects for the purpose of mastering, reducing, or tolerating internal and external pressures. Coping also describes the relation between internal and external pressures. Stressors may be dealt with through problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. While problem-focused coping refers to techniques an individual uses in an attempt to directly manage or change the stressor, emotion-focused coping refers to techniques an individual uses in an attempt to regulate the stressful emotions associated with the stressor (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). One form of problem-focused coping that adolescents may use when faced with stress is seeking help or support from different sources in their lives, such as peers (Compas, Connor-Smith, Saltzman, Thomsen, & Wadsworth, 2001; Malecki & Demaray, 2002).

Ensuring that adolescents develop skills to progress through this stage smoothly is important. Peer influence is at its peak at the same time that adolescents encounter new, and sometimes stressful, situations (Berzonsky, 1982; Grover & Nangle, 2003). Coping adaptively with the normative difficulties with which teenagers are presented is important

for their mental, physical, and social well-being (Boldero & Fallon, 1995; Compas et al., 2001).

Help seeking is an adaptive coping behaviour that involves interacting with and communicating a problem to others for the purpose of receiving support, advice, or aid (Boldero & Fallon, 1995; Gourash, 1978; Hunter, Boyle, & Warden, 2004; Rogler & Cortes, 1993). In a focus-group study with 89 Canadian high school students between the ages of 15 and 18 years conducted by Sears, Shepherd, and Murphy (2005), teenagers defined help seeking as discussing their problems and feelings with others in order to receive emotional support or aid.

According to Rogler and Cortes (1993), help-seeking pathways refer to the sequence of events that occur, such as making contact with individuals, between the onset of the problem and the receipt of care. Until the 1990s, most of the research focusing on help seeking gave little attention to the processes by which children and adolescents sought or obtained help. Furthermore, children's and adolescents' mental health needs were thought to be similar to the needs of adults (Srebnik, Cauce, & Baydar, 1996). In a recent review of existing help-seeking literature, Broadhurst (2003) noted that early models of help seeking, as described for example by Gross and McMullen (1983), have been influential by depicting the help-seeking process as a series of decisions and interrelated stages.

Help-seeking models for adults and adolescents are generally described as processes involving three interrelated stages: defining an event or situation as problematic, making the decision to disclose the problem to others, and engaging in the act of seeking help (Cauce et al., 2002; Cohen, 1999; Gross & McMullen, 1983; Srebnik

et al., 1996). Typically, the event or situation must be severe enough to be recognized as problematic; however, the identification of a problem does not in itself guarantee that help seeking will occur (Cauce et al.; Compas et al., 2001). Although the help-seeking pathways of adults as well as children and adolescents include these three stages, children's and adolescents' help-seeking pathways tend to occur within the context of the family, and it is not uncommon for someone else (e.g., a parent) to seek help for the child on the child's behalf (Srebnik et al.). In short, some differences do exist between the traditional help-seeking models of adults and models of adolescent and child help seeking.

In terms of adolescent help seeking specifically, there are limitations in previous research that are noteworthy. Firstly, models of adolescent help seeking (e.g., Srebnik et al., 1996) tend to focus on seeking help from professionals rather than from informal sources of support, such as peers, in the final step of the process (i.e., engaging in the act of seeking help). Examining teenagers' help-seeking behaviour from informal sources is also beneficial since only a small minority seek help from professionals (Sheffield, Fiorenza, & Sofronoff, 2004; Srebnik, et al.). Secondly, these models tend to focus on help seeking for mental health problems despite the fact that past research has demonstrated that the large majority of teenagers who have been diagnosed with a mental health disorder do not receive professional help (Srebnik et al.; Cauce et al., 2002). For example, in research examining children and adolescents' help-seeking pathways, Srebnik and colleagues found that as few as 6-10% of children and adolescents with a psychiatric diagnosis received help from a professional. These researchers noted that individuals' perceived needs are subjective and are different from their mental health

needs. Given that the majority of all teenagers seek help for personal and subjective needs from informal sources such as parents and peers (Boldero & Fallon, 1995; Sears et al., 2005), examining their help-seeking behaviours from these sources for the common problems that teenagers face likely represents a more normative view of adolescent help-seeking behaviour. Thirdly, the majority of help-seeking literature has focused on the act of seeking help (the final step in the process) without considering adolescents who may be at earlier points of the help-seeking process (e.g., Boldero & Fallon; Hunter et al., 2004; Timlin-Scalera et al., 2003). Considering that adolescents' willingness to seek help may provide information about adolescents who are at earlier points in the help-seeking process, interest arises in gaining an understanding of individuals who have problems and are willing to seek help, but have not yet done so.

Despite these limitations in comprehending adolescents' approaches to the help-seeking process, a strength of the help-seeking models (e.g., Cauce et al., 2002; Cohen, 1999; Gross & McMullen, 1983; Srebnik et al., 1996) is that they focus on the process of actively seeking help from the perspective of the help seeker, as opposed to simply receiving help. The individual who is seeking help is conceptualized as having an active role in the experience, and help seeking is viewed from the perspective of the help seeker as opposed to the helper (Broadhurst, 2003). This distinction is important, especially when considering seeking informal help or support, since previous social-support research has focused on the frequency of receiving social support without distinguishing between passive receipt of support, whereby the support is not actively sought, versus active support seeking. Further, much of this research has failed to determine which types

of support are helpful to teenagers, but has instead examined received help in a more global way (Demaray & Malecki, 2003).

Social support refers to one's perception of the availability of support or support sought from members of one's social network, which enhances functioning or potentially acts as a buffer from negative outcomes (Malecki & Demaray, 2002). According to Rogler and Cortes (1993), an individual's social network plays a key role in his or her help-seeking experience. Regardless of whether the individual ultimately receives formal or informal aid, the pathway taken involves the social network. In the current study, social support is defined as the informal network of individuals from whom one can seek help.

Emotional Support and Instrumental Support

Active help seeking described previously relates to adolescents' perceptions of the availability of social support, which tend to be more important in terms of their outcomes than passively receiving support. Research has demonstrated a positive relation between individuals' perceptions of the availability of social support in their lives and their well-being in later life (Mitchell & Hodson, 1983; Printz, et al., 1999; Reinhardt, Boerner, & Horowitz, 2006). Greater availability of social support has been found to predict adolescents' willingness to seek help from their support network (Sheffield et al., 2004). Bal, Crombez, Oost and Debourdeaudhuij (2003) specifically examined social-support perceptions of 820 adolescents between the ages of 12 and 18 years in Belgium by using the Social Support Questionnaire (Sarason, Shearin, Pierce, & Sarason, 1987, as cited in Bal et al.). Forty-two percent of Bal and colleagues' participants reported having experienced a stressful experience. Participants completed the Trauma Symptom

Checklist for Children (Briere, 1996, as cited in Bal et al.) to measure their trauma-related symptoms. The results from this study indicated that high levels of perceived available social support were directly related to having fewer symptoms related to the traumatic experience.

Similarly, in a study examining the evolution of peer-support systems with 413 adolescents between the ages of 13 and 16 years from the United Kingdom, Cowie, Naylor, Talamelli, Chauhan, and Smith (2002) found that teenagers who actively sought help were more likely to use other adaptive methods of coping and to demonstrate more positive adjustment than those who did not. It is possible that feeling as though they are able to turn to sources of support in their lives when necessary is comforting for teenagers, and may better enable them to cope with their problems adaptively (Bolger, Zuckerman, & Kessler, 2000; Reinhardt et al., 2006).

When teenagers do go to others with a problem, different types of help/support may be sought and/or provided. Emotional support refers to providing assistance by demonstrating love, trust, and understanding without judgment, whereas instrumental support refers to providing support in the form of resources, for example, helping the individual solve the problem, offering advice, spending time together, and providing materials, such as money (House, 1981; Malecki & Demaray, 2002). Although the majority of research has focused on examining social support in a global way and given the particular nature of adolescents' situations, it may be more beneficial to examine the frequency of turning to sources of social support for specific types of support. The type of support sought by adolescents may vary depending upon the concern, have different outcomes, and be related to the source of support to which they turn (Ma, 1996). For

example, depression has been found to be related to a lack of instrumental support for adolescent males and a lack of emotional support for adolescent females (Cheng, 1998).

Barriers and Negative Support

Although we are aware that help seeking is an adaptive method of coping, research has shown that many teens are not actively seeking help when they are faced with a problem. For example, Boldero and Fallon (1995) conducted a study in Australia with 1,013 adolescents between the ages of 11 and 18 years. Participants were asked to provide information about a personally-distressing problem that they experienced during the past six months, including whether they asked for help for this problem. Boldero and Fallon found that roughly half of their sample did not seek help despite reporting that their problems were very distressing for them. In the focus-group study conducted by Sears and colleagues (2005), males reported that they often kept their problems and feelings to themselves instead of turning to others, even though they acknowledged that this was not an adaptive way of coping. Further, Bal and colleagues (2003) found that teenagers who had been sexually abused were less likely to seek support from others, despite reporting more symptoms of stress than teenagers who had not.

In a study examining the help-seeking behaviours of 644 high school students in rural communities in Canada, Sears (2004) also found that teenagers with more serious problems were less likely to discuss their problems with members of their family. This research suggests that having a serious problem is not enough to guarantee that teenagers will turn to others for help or support, and that there are barriers that are stopping them from engaging in this method of coping. To date, little is known about the specific barriers to seeking help from adolescents' perspectives (Wilson & Deane, 2001). Deeper

examination into this issue may provide a better understanding of adolescents' help-seeking behaviour.

Some research has begun to identify such barriers that thwart individuals, in general, from turning to others when they experience problems (Wilson & Deane, 2001). For instance, adolescents have reported being concerned with issues of trust and confidentiality, being teased or judged, and not receiving what they need from their helper, all of which tend to make the problem worse for them. They have also reported feeling embarrassed, nervous, and afraid about approaching others for help (Jackson, 2002; Sears et al., 2005). Research focused on the informal help-seeking behaviour for partner abuse of 306 Canadian undergraduate women between the ages of 17 and 51 years ($M = 23.02$ years, $SD = 5.89$) revealed that women who had experienced partner abuse would often leave out information about their problem when talking to others in an attempt to protect their helpers (Dunham & Senn, 2000). Although adolescents appear to consider potential financial and non-economic costs of help seeking, in addition, females report focusing on benefits such as experiencing emotional relief from sharing their problem and getting another's opinion, which can put the problem in perspective (Sears et al.). In a study examining the help-seeking attitudes and intentions of 177 third, fifth, and seventh graders in the United States, Newman (1990) found that individuals were aware of benefits of seeking help as early as the seventh grade.

As noted previously, although there are barriers that prevent teenagers from turning to others when they have a problem, it is also likely that, at times, they do not benefit from the help or support received, and that this may differ depending on the type of support proffered. For example, in a study that examined whether perceived and

received support differentially impacted the well-being of 570 elders recruited from a vision rehabilitation agency in the northeast United States, passively receiving instrumental support negatively impacted the recipients' well-being (Reinhardt et al., 2006). However, this study also found that passively receiving emotional support and perceiving available support positively affected recipients' well-being. A possible explanation for this is that receiving instrumental support when it was not actively sought may cause the recipient to feel like a burden to the helper, or as though they are too dependent (Reinhardt et al.). On the other hand, receiving emotional support may help the recipient to feel cared for and understood. These results speak to the benefits of encouraging active support seeking in older adults and may be transferable to the world of teens.

It is also possible that adolescents do not expect to receive the type of support that they feel they need in order to cope with the problem, and as a result, do not engage in seeking help from others. For example, as described previously, although receiving instrumental support may help solve the problem, it may not have been the type of support that the recipient wanted (Reinhardt et al., 2006). As a result, the recipient fails to gain a sense of social support and does not cope with or solve the problem. According to Cutrona and Russell (1990), receiving support from others is most beneficial when the helper provides the recipient with the type of support that he/she needs and/or desires. In a longitudinal study, Colarossi and Eccles (2003) examined the impact of support on adolescents' mental health from a subset of 217 teenagers with an average age of 17 years recruited from three school districts in suburban Midwestern communities in the United States. They determined that social support is beneficial for an individual's self

esteem; however, it is important to have a match between the needs of the recipient and the abilities of the provider. Teenagers who turn to someone with a problem, but do not feel helped or understood, may feel that their problem is worsened as a result of the experience. Further, having a negative help-seeking experience may discourage them from seeking help again in the future.

Although the findings have been somewhat mixed in terms of whether highly distressing problems are more or less likely to lead to help-seeking behaviours, problem severity appears to be related to adolescents' willingness to seek help. In a study examining factors that promote or prevent teenagers' willingness to seek help for mental illness from informal and formal sources among 254 secondary school students in Australia, Sheffield and colleagues (2004) found that individuals experiencing greater psychological distress as a result of their problem were more willing to seek help from informal sources. Similarly, a Canadian study with 392 participants aged 14 to 19 years conducted by Carter, Menna, and Stanhope (2004) and a Scottish study with 830 participants aged 9 to 14 years conducted by Hunter and colleagues (2004) found that teenagers who perceived their problems as more severe were more likely to seek help from others than those who did not. Moreover, individuals who experienced greater levels of negative emotions were more likely to turn to others than those who experienced less intense negative emotions, respectively. Furthermore, in the focus-group study by Sears and colleagues (2005), teenagers identified that having an unusual or very serious problem would increase their likelihood of seeking help. Other research has found higher levels of problem severity to be associated with less willingness to seek help (Lopez, Melendez, Sauer, Berger, & Wyssmann, 1998; Sheffield et al.). For instance, Lopez and

colleagues examined the help-seeking attitudes of and distressing factors for 253 college students recruited from undergraduate education and psychology classes at a large Midwestern university in the United States, and found that higher levels of problems were associated with less willingness to seek counseling. These results suggest that in some cases, adolescents who appear to require help are not seeking, and hence not receiving, what they need. For example, individuals who have difficulty managing their emotions are less likely to seek help, while others may not be offered help as a result of prejudice or social exclusion (Ciarrochi & Deane, 2001; Barker, Olukoya, & Aggleton, 2005).

Other teenagers may worry about how sharing their problem with another individual will make the other person feel. Mitchell and Hodson (1983) conducted a study examining the coping methods, social support, and psychological health of 60 adult female survivors of physical abuse from intimate partners recruited from six shelters in San Francisco, California. The results indicated that in cases of abuse, turning to others for support was often difficult because helpers would feel uncomfortable discussing the problem and would, in turn, respond negatively or in a way that was not helpful (Mitchell & Hodson). Boldero and Fallon (1995) found that adolescents were less likely to seek help for personal problems than for problems with school and academic performance. It is possible that in situations where teenagers are faced with problems that they feel are embarrassing, they anticipate and expect to receive unhelpful or negative responses from helpers, and this could negatively affect the recipients' well-being (Mitchell & Hodson; Simmering & Sears, 2006). For this reason, it is important to examine whether the types of support that adolescents expect to receive are related to their willingness to disclose

intimate details of problems as they seek help. In addition, examining the aspects of recent help-seeking experiences that adolescents found to be most and least helpful would also be beneficial.

In summary, previous research has found that teenagers are less likely to seek help from informal sources of support when they: a) perceive greater barriers to help seeking than they can overcome, b) have lower self-efficacy, c) feel less skilled at managing their emotions, d) have less insight into their emotions (e.g., have greater difficulty identifying and describing them), and e) are male (Ciarrochi & Deane, 2001; Ciarrochi, Deane, Wilson, & Rickwood, 2002; Ciarrochi, Wilson, Deane, & Rickwood, 2003; Garland & Zigler, 1994; Hunter et al., 2004; Sheffield et al., 2004). Teenagers are more likely to seek help when they: a) perceive few help-seeking barriers, b) have greater adaptive functioning, c) have high challenge appraisals, and d) are female (Carter et al., 2004; Hunter et al.; Sheffield et al.). The current study examines the types of support teenagers' expect to receive from their female friends and male friends, and how these expectations are related to their willingness to seek help. This study also considers how adolescents' previous help-seeking experiences impact their willingness to seek help and which aspects of their experiences were the most and the least helpful.

Developmental Trends in Help Seeking

Although the literature has yielded inconsistent findings, teenagers' help-seeking behaviours appear to be affected by developmental factors. Wintre, Hicks, McVey, and Fox (1988) interviewed 192 participants between the ages of 8 and 17 years, with an equal number of males and females in each age group. This study found that seeking help from peers increased with age, and that older adolescents especially preferred seeking

help from peers when they were faced with an interpersonal problem. Older adolescents also appeared to rely less on their parents for help than younger adolescents, which is likely the result of becoming more independent from their parents. It might be that as teenagers grow older, the ability to recognize an event or situation as problematic, on their own without their parents, is one way of demonstrating autonomy. Schonert-Reichl and Muller (1996) examined correlates of help seeking from parents, friends, and professionals in a sample of 221 thirteen- to eighteen- year olds. The results indicated that a greater number of middle adolescents (i.e., 15 to 16 year olds) than early adolescents (i.e., 13 to 14 year olds) reported seeking help from mothers, friends, and professionals. Abdullah (1992) examined the help-seeking behaviour of 402 adolescents between the ages of 15 and 18 years and found that younger adolescents were more likely to express a need for help and to seek help for mild and severe personal problems. Still other research failed to find differences by age in adolescents' rates of seeking help (Boldero & Fallon, 1995). In short, the specific effect that age has on the likelihood of seeking help remains inconclusive.

Correlates of Adolescent Help Seeking

Type of Problem

The type of problem with which teenagers are faced has been found to be a key factor in their willingness to turn to others for assistance. Adolescents report that they encounter many different types of problems throughout this developmental period. For example, Dubow, Lovko, & Kausch (1990) found that between 33-50% of their sample of school-aged teenagers had experienced problems such as feeling overweight or depressed and having suicidal thoughts, as well as dealing with peer pressure, substance

use, school failure, and getting along with their parents. Several studies have reported that family problems, interpersonal-relationship problems (with both peers and significant others), and education problems are among the problems most frequently reported by teenagers (Boldero & Fallon, 1995; Carter et al., 2004; Fallon & Bowles, 1999).

Teenagers may seek help from others at different rates depending on the type of problem with which they are faced. Interestingly, one study found that adolescents were more likely to seek help for interpersonal problems, for example problems with a friend, than they were for family problems or personal problems despite acknowledging that they found these problems distressing (Boldero & Fallon, 1995). Younger adolescents reported experiencing family problems more frequently than older adolescents while older adolescents reported interpersonal relationship problems more frequently (Boldero & Fallon). This likely reflects adolescents' tendency to develop closer relationships with their peers while gaining independence from their parents. Older adolescents also rated their problems as more serious and more intimate than younger adolescents (Boldero & Fallon). Further, another study found that teenagers who had experienced a family problem within the previous school year were actually less willing to seek help from their parents than teenagers who had not (Simmering & Sears, 2006). According to Sears and colleagues (2005), adolescent males were less willing than females to seek help from friends or parents for a family problem and only tended to turn to others for specific types of problems, such as a problem with a female. It is possible that teenagers, especially males, find it difficult to talk to others about interpersonal problems because they may fear that they will be stigmatized or receive a negative reaction (e.g., be teased).

Although it is common for teenagers to identify problems with dating partners as distressing (e.g., Carter et al., 2004; Fallon & Bowles, 1999) and to report that various aspects of dating can be quite difficult little scientific consideration has been given to how they manage these problems (Grover & Nangle, 2003). In a focus-group study with 58 fourteen- to nineteen- year olds recruited from two high schools in Maine, adolescents emphasized a great deal of concern over relationship problems such as initiating a date, engaging in sexual activity, and terminating the relationship (Grover & Nangle). Boldero and Fallon (1995) found that adolescent females were more likely to report experiencing interpersonal problems than males and generally see these problems as more serious.

For gay, lesbian, and bisexual teenagers, dealing with tasks in adolescence such as developing their identity, sexual scripts, and self esteem can be very difficult because they do not often have media images or role models to whom they can relate (Maticka-Tyndale, 2001). The majority of gay, lesbian, and bisexual teenagers do not communicate their sexual orientation to their friends or families during adolescence. When gay, lesbian, and bisexual teenagers have friends who are accepting of their sexual orientation, they are more likely to feel more empowered as a result (Maticka-Tyndale). According to Garofalo, Wolf, Wissow, Woods, and Goodman (1999), only three to four percent of teenagers identify their sexual orientation as nonheterosexual.

Perceived Controllability of the Problem

Adolescents' perceptions of the level of control they have over a problem have also been found to relate to seeking help and coping. Perceived controllability over one's problem or environment is also referred to as locus of control, and can be internal or external in nature (Meijer, Sinnema, Bijstra, Mellenbergh, & Wolters, 2002). Research

indicates that when teenagers feel as though they have control over their situation or problem (internal locus of control), they perceive the problem as less stressful than when they feel as though it is out of their control (external locus of control) (e.g., Meijer et al.; Pape & Arias, 1995). For example, according to Herman-Stahl and Petersen (1999), when adolescents respond to a challenge with the belief that they can cope with it adaptively, they are less likely to feel overwhelmed or to experience negative emotions as a result. Similarly, perceiving control over a situation has been found to be important in reducing stress for victims of abuse (Pape & Arias). Because control appraisals are related to experiencing fewer negative emotions, teenagers are likely better able to cope with their problem, and may select more beneficial methods of coping as a result.

In terms of help seeking specifically, Schonert-Reichl and Muller (1996) found that when teenagers had an internal locus of control (i.e., they perceived their problem as controllable), they were more likely to have sought help than teenagers who had an external locus of control. Results from another study with 830 participants aged 9 to 14 years indicated that when students felt as though they were able to accomplish something out of a situation with which they were presented, they were more willing to seek help from others (Hunter et al., 2004). According to Boldero and Fallon (1995), older adolescents are more likely to feel responsible for their problem than younger adolescents, and males are more likely than females to report that a problem is their fault. This shift may reflect older adolescents' greater autonomy from their families (Boldero & Fallon).

Choice of Helper

In general, teenagers have been found to prefer informal sources of support, such as parents and friends, rather than formal sources of support, such as counselors (Boldero & Fallon, 1995; Fallon & Bowles, 1999; Sears et al., 2005). Further, certain sources of support, such as parents and friends, tend to provide different types of support (Richman, Rosenfeld, & Bowen, 1998). Teenagers may select different sources of support depending on the type of problem with which they are faced (Wintre & Crowley, 1993). For example, both males and females are more likely to seek help for a personal problem from their peers than from their parents, and previous research has shown that when teenagers are faced with interpersonal problems, (e.g., problems with family members or dating partners) they usually turn to friends for advice and support (Sullivan, Marshall, & Schonert-Reichl, 2002; Youniss & Smollar, 1985).

Researchers have demonstrated that the relationships individuals have with their friends tend to change as they grow older. According to Mathur and Berndt (2006), the activities that individuals engage in with their friends contribute to the development and quality of their friendships, and adolescents tend to engage in more intimate activities that involve self disclosure while children tend to engage in more socializing activities, such as games. In a longitudinal study of 206 urban, ethnic minority teenagers from low socioeconomic backgrounds in New York City, Way and Greene (2006) suggested that adolescents' changes in friendships might have been the product of development. Participants in their study completed questionnaires, including a shortened version of the Network of Relationships Inventory (NRI; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985, as cited in Way & Greene) to measure the quality of adolescents' relationships with their closest same-sex friend and the Perceived Social Support for Friends Scale (PSS-FR; Procidano &

Heller, 1983, as cited in Way & Greene) to measure the quality of adolescents' general friendships. Data were collected on four occasions, and participants ranged in age from a mean age of 14.33 years at the first assessment to a mean age of 17.26 years at the fourth assessment. Results of this study indicated that there was an increase in teenagers' perceptions of friendship quality from middle to late adolescence across all ethnicities (African American, West Indian, Latino, Asian American, and bi- or multi-racial). Further, participants perceived improvements in the quality of their friendships with best friends and general friends. The results also showed that males' perceptions of friendship quality increased sharply across the assessment periods, such that males and females had similar perceptions of friendship quality for both best and general friends in late adolescence. According to Way and Greene, adolescents' improvements in their perceived friendship quality may be the result of improved interpersonal and cognitive skills, as well as a greater desire and need for collaboration and intimacy.

Evidence gathered from the research on adolescent help seeking from friends has focused on same-sex friends as helpers and has failed to consider the extent to which adolescents seek help from their other-sex friends. This distinction should be made since throughout adolescence, teenagers' relationships with their other-sex friends change significantly and most teenagers have relationships with both same-sex and other-sex friends (Connolly, Furman, & Konarski, 2000; Grover & Nangle, 2003). Further, for the majority of adolescents, intimacy increases in relationships between adolescent females and males as they get older, and these relationships tend to become more important to teenagers (Grover & Nangle). Other-sex friendships during adolescence have also been found to provide teenagers with many positive benefits, such as the provision of

emotional support, and this is particularly the case for males. Further, findings from a study examining social-support networks and help-seeking experiences of teenagers of Mexican origin in San Diego, California using a combination of qualitative and quantitative measures, suggested that teenagers who reported having other-sex friends were found to have greater and more diversified peer-support networks (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2005).

Adolescent females most often turn to their same-sex friends when they want support for a problem, whereas they tend to seek support from their other-sex friends if they really trust them or when they feel the need to vent or problem solve (Sears et al., 2005). It has also been shown that teenagers select helpers based on what they need to manage the problem (e.g., emotional support, expertise) and the quality of their relationship with the helper (e.g., closeness) (Sears et al.; Sullivan et al., 2002). For example, females have indicated that they prefer to access their same-sex friends when they have a problem because disclosure and support are important characteristics of females' friendships (Hetherington & Stoppard, 2002).

On the other hand, few adolescent males turn to their same-sex friends with a problem and generally prefer to access their other-sex friends for support when they have a problem (Sears et al., 2005). In the cases where males do turn to their same-sex friends, it is generally for a specific problem, for example a female-related problem, or when they feel that they have a close relationship with the helper. Males also reported feeling as though seeking help was more socially appropriate for females (Sears et al.). These differences demonstrate the importance of considering same-sex and other-sex friends as specific sources as opposed to broadly examining friends as sources of social support.

When teenagers do turn to their friends for help with a problem, they consider several aspects of their relationship or the qualities of that individual. Teenagers are very concerned with trust as a characteristic of their relationship with their helper, and this has been found to be especially true for females who expressed concern over gossip starting (Hetherington & Stoppard, 2002; Sears et al., 2005). It is also important for teenagers to feel as though they can count on their friends and that they will be listened to in a supportive way and be nurtured (Bukowski, Hoza, & Boivin, 1994; Hetherington & Stoppard; Sullivan et al., 2002; Wilson & Deane, 2001).

Gender

Gender is also an important correlate of adolescent help seeking. Previous research has consistently documented gender differences in adults' and teenagers' help-seeking behaviour. For example, Horwitz (1977) reviewed men's and women's help-seeking pathways and found that women discuss their problems more with friends and professionals than men. Studies focusing on the help-seeking behaviours of adolescents have found that females have more positive attitudes toward help seeking, that they are more likely to use and to have used help seeking as a method of coping, and are more likely to view turning to sources of support as the best strategy for feeling better about their problem (Carter et al., 2004; Fallon & Bowles, 1999; Hunter et al., 2004; Sheffield et al., 2004). Further, females were found to be more willing than males to seek help for both a family problem and a personal problem from their peers and their parents (Simmering & Sears, 2006).

Why are more negative help-seeking attitudes and less frequent use of this method of coping associated with the male gender (Garland & Zigler, 1994)? According to

Timlin-Scalera and colleagues (2003), adolescent males often hold traditional attitudes about the male role, and as a result, they restrict their emotions and focus on feeling successful and powerful. This is consistent with findings from the focus-group study by Sears and colleagues (2005), which demonstrated that males reported attempting to minimize their feelings and only turning to others after they felt unsuccessful at dealing with the problem on their own. These males also reported that turning to others for help was a sign of being weak and that they felt as though they were admitting defeat. It is of concern that males have indicated that they often ignore their problem or keep it to themselves until they feel completely overwhelmed since this could lead to other stresses and problems (Sears et al.; Timlin-Scalera et al.). It appears that adolescent males are highly influenced by their need to fit in and maintain their reputation among their peers, and males do seem to endure more negative social consequences than females when they deviate from the traditional male role (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Timlin-Scalera et al.). On the other hand, adolescent females are more likely to report having problems and feeling distressed, to feel comfortable discussing their problems and feelings with others, and to hold a more positive attitude about the use of help seeking (Sears et al.; Sheffield et al. 2004; Timlin-Scalera et al.).

Previous Help-Seeking Experience

Although a few studies have found that previous help-seeking experience was related to a greater likelihood of seeking help in future situations (e.g., Wilson & Deane, 2001), past help-seeking experience has not been considered in the majority of investigations. One study that did examine this relation found that adolescents' memories of a successful help-seeking experience were positively related to their current help-

seeking behaviour (Wilson & Deane). Simmering and Sears (2006) examined the relation between adolescents' previous help-seeking experience with a family problem and a personal problem and their willingness to seek help for the same type of problem from peers and from parents for future problems. Data were collected from 391 adolescents from two rural communities in New Brunswick. The results of this study indicated that teenagers were more willing to seek help from both sources for a personal problem when they had previously spoken to someone about this type of problem. These findings suggest that encouraging teenagers to seek help for a personal problem even once from peers and/or parents appears to increase the likelihood of them doing so again in the future. Limitations of the Simmering and Sears study include that it did not examine the types of support the individuals received (e.g., emotional or instrumental support) and that it did not differentiate between same-sex and other-sex friends.

The Present Study: Purpose and Rationale

The present study is an extension of research conducted by Simmering and Sears (2006). The original study was conducted as Honour's thesis research at the University of New Brunswick. Data were collected from 391 (221 females, 170 males) adolescents in Grades 9 to 12 in New Brunswick, and participants' willingness to seek help from their parents and peers for a family problem and a personal problem was examined. For both problem types, the descriptive results demonstrated that males and females were more willing to seek help from their peers than from their parents, and that gender accounted for much more variance in adolescents' willingness to seek help from peers than from parents. However, a limitation of this study was that it did not differentiate between female friends and male friends. Considering peers as a general group did not provide

information about the extent to which males and females sought help from individuals of both genders. Another limitation of this study is that the age range was broad and that age was not considered as a variable in the study.

The current study intends to account for limitations of the Simmering and Sears (2006) study and to fill the gaps discussed previously in the existing literature. The overarching purpose of the present study is to examine how late adolescents' perceptions of social support are related to their willingness to seek help from their female and male friends for a dating-relationship problem. Similar to the help-seeking models described previously (e.g., Srebnik et al., 1996), the present study examines adolescent help seeking from an active perspective. However, this study focuses on help seeking from informal sources of support instead of professionals. As indicated previously, for the present study, social support is defined as the informal network of individuals from whom one can seek help.

To account for limitations of previous research, social support is differentiated into two types, emotional support and instrumental support. A dating-relationship problem was selected because it is a common, but frequently distressing problem that teenagers face (Grover & Nangle, 2003). It has been found that older adolescents are more likely than younger adolescents to report finding interpersonal problems, such as problems in dating relationships, to be distressing (Boldero & Fallon, 1995; Fallon & Bowles, 1999; Grover & Nangle).

Because only roughly three percent to four percent of teenagers identify their sexual orientation as nonheterosexual (Garofalo et al., 1999), the present study focuses on adolescents who identify their sexual orientation as heterosexual. It was not expected that

there would be enough participants who identify their sexual orientation in nonheterosexual categories to test for differences based on sexual orientation.

Furthermore, according to Maticka-Tyndale (2001), the dating experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual teenagers may be different than heterosexual teenagers and may include different types of dating problems.

Purposes of the Present Study

The current study focuses on help seeking of adolescents between the ages of 17 and 18 years. This narrow age group was selected for several reasons. Firstly, older adolescents are more likely than younger adolescents to report experiencing interpersonal problems (Boldero & Fallon, 1995; Fallon & Bowles, 1999), including dating-relationship problems. Secondly, despite the fact that there have been some inconsistencies in the literature, there appear to be developmental trends in the help-seeking behaviours of adolescents; that is, studies conducted by such researchers as Wintre and colleagues (1988), Abdullah (1992), and Schonert-Reichl and Muller (1996) have found that there are differences by age from middle to late adolescence. More specifically, Wintre and colleagues found that seeking help from peers increases with age from early to late adolescence. Adolescents between the ages of 17 and 18 years were therefore recruited for the present study since approximately 90% of both males and females have had at least one date by age 16 (Grover & Nangle, 2003), and have thus most likely experienced at least one dating problem. Thirdly, according to Boldero and Fallon, the peer network becomes of greater concern to teenagers as they grow older. Lastly, research conducted by Way and Greene (2006) using a sample of 206 urban,

ethnic minority teenagers found that older teenagers also perceive better quality in their relationships with their friends than younger teenagers.

Female friends and male friends were selected as sources of support in the present study since research has shown that teenagers most often select their friends as sources of support when they are faced with a problem, especially when they are faced with an interpersonal problem (Sullivan et al., 2002; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). However, instead of considering friends as a general group, the present study differentiated between female friends and male friends since the majority of teenagers experience significant relationships with individuals of both genders (Connolly et al., 2000; Grover & Nangle, 2003). Much of the research on adolescents' other-sex relationships has focused on dating relationships without placing much emphasis on other-sex friendships (Grover & Nangle). Because teenagers are more likely to seek help from their best friends, or from helpers with whom they share a close relationship characterized by trust (Carter et al., 2004; Wilson & Deane, 2001), the current study examines adolescents' expectations of support from their best male friend and best female friend.

Specifically, this study set out to first examine the relation between adolescents' willingness to seek help for a dating-relationship problem and the type of support (i.e., emotional or instrumental) they expect to receive from their best female friend and best male friend. Examining adolescents' expectations of the help-seeking experience might prove beneficial since negative expectations may prevent them from engaging in this behaviour. Determining whether expectations of receiving a specific type of support from male and female friends are related to varying degrees of willingness to seek help may provide some information about the type of support teenagers wish to receive when they

seek help. In addition, gathering evidence may serve to uncover possible barriers that prevent adolescents from seeking help.

The second primary aim of this study was to examine how adolescents' previous help-seeking experience has affected their willingness to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from their same-sex and other-sex friends. Participants were asked whether they experienced a dating-relationship problem within the past six months, and if so, whether they sought help for the problem and from whom. Their perceived locus of control and their perceived severity of the problem were considered to ensure that the teenagers' experiences were relatively similar to those of their peers. Examining adolescents' previous help-seeking experience is likely beneficial because it provides information about teenagers' actual help-seeking behaviours as opposed to only examining their hypothetical help-seeking behaviours. By determining whether there are differences in willingness to seek help between adolescents who have previously sought help and those who have not, information is provided about whether teenagers who seek help even once are more willing to do so again in the future, or if they are less willing to do so based on their previous (perhaps negative) help-seeking experiences. If it is known that teenagers are more willing to seek help in the future based on awareness that they have sought help in the past, then finding ways to make this method of coping more appealing for adolescents initially may increase the likelihood that they will use this behaviour again in the future.

While there has been little research on previous help seeking, findings from two studies suggest that adolescents who have successful help-seeking experiences are more willing and likely to seek help in the future (Simmering & Sears, 2006; Wilson & Deane,

2001), but that unhelpful experiences may negatively impact their willingness to seek help in the future (Colarossi & Eccles, 2003). These findings provide the rationale for the hypotheses related to previous help-seeking experience. Because gender has been identified as a correlate of adolescent help seeking in other studies, the present study examined variation in adolescents' willingness to seek help by gender.

Finally, the present study investigated which aspects of the help-seeking experience teenagers found to be the most and least helpful. In relation to this, participants were asked whether they felt the overall experience was helpful, and whether they would seek help again in the future. Previous research has not focused on the specific aspects of adolescents' help-seeking experience that appear to be the most and least helpful. Determining which aspects of the help-seeking experience adolescents find to be most helpful provides information about adolescents' perceptions of the positive aspects (and/or the benefits) of help seeking, which in turn, might make them more willing to seek help in the future. Similarly, determining which aspects of the help-seeking experience adolescents most often report to be the least helpful provides information about what they found negative about the experience, which may in turn act as a barrier and prevent them from seeking help in the future.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Previous research has suggested that the receipt of instrumental support is helpful for adolescent males while the receipt of emotional support is helpful for adolescent females (Cheng, 1998). Studies have suggested that males often adhere to traditional male roles by minimizing their emotions, and only go to others if they feel as though they are unable to solve their problem without assistance (Timlin-Scalera et al., 2003; Sears et

al., 2005). It appears that when males deviate from their stereotypical gender roles they are more likely to experience negative consequences than females (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Timlin-Scalera et al.). Alternatively, females tend to be more comfortable expressing their emotions and sharing their problems with others, which is consistent with the stereotypical female role. In line with this reasoning, several studies have found females to be more likely than males to seek help (Carter et al., 2004; Sears et al.; Sheffield et al. 2004; Simmering & Sears, 2006; Timlin-Scalera et al.). Taken together, these findings suggest that adolescents may expect and/or want to receive help from their female and male friends in a manner that is consistent with stereotypical gender roles (i.e., emotional support from females and instrumental support from males). As a result, males and females may turn to same-sex and other-sex friends for different reasons. For example, females may turn to their male friends for advice and to their female friends for comfort and emotional support. Based on these combined findings, in the current study, the author anticipates that these gender stereotypes will be illustrated in the types of support older adolescents will expect to receive from their female and male friends, and in turn, their willingness to seek help from male versus female friends for a dating problem. This rationale served as the basis for the following hypotheses.

Question 1. For a dating-relationship problem, is there a relation between adolescents' expectations of emotional support from their best female friends and best male friends and their willingness to seek help from their female friends and their male friends?

Hypothesis 1(a): For a dating-relationship problem, there will be a positive relation for both males and females between adolescents' expectations of receiving

emotional support from their best female friend and/or best male friend and their willingness to seek help from their **female friends**. Teenagers who have higher expectations of receiving emotional support from their best female friend and/or best male friend will be more willing to seek help from their female friends.

Hypothesis 1(b): For a dating-relationship problem, there will be a negative relation for both males and females between adolescents' expectations of receiving **emotional support** from their best female friend and/or best male friend and their willingness to seek help from their **male friends**. Teenagers who have higher expectations of receiving emotional support from their best female friend and/or best male friend will be less willing to seek help from their male friends.

Question 2. For a dating-relationship problem, is there a relation between adolescents' expectations of instrumental support from their best female friends and best male friends and their willingness to seek help from their female friends and their male friends?

Hypothesis 2(a): For a dating-relationship problem, there will be a negative relation for both males and females between adolescents' expectations of receiving **instrumental** support from their best female friend and/or best male friend and their willingness to seek help from their **female friends**. Teenagers who have higher expectations of receiving instrumental support from their best female friend and/or best male friend will be less willing to seek help from their female friends.

Hypothesis 2(b): For a dating-relationship problem, there will be a positive relation for both males and females between adolescents' expectations of receiving **instrumental** support from their best female friend and/or their best male friend and their

willingness to seek help from their **male friends**. Teenagers who have higher expectations of receiving instrumental support from their best female friend and/or their best male friend will be more willing to seek help from their male friends.

Question 3. Are there differences in adolescents' willingness to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from their female friends and male friends by their previous help-seeking experience with that problem?

Hypothesis 3: Adolescents who have previously sought help for a dating-relationship problem will be more willing to seek help from both their female and male friends.

Question 4. Are there differences in adolescents' willingness to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from their female friends and male friends by gender?

Hypothesis 4: Females will be more willing than males to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from both their female and male friends.

Question 5. Do gender and previous help-seeking experience interact to explain adolescents' willingness to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from their female friends and male friends?

Hypothesis 5(a): Females who have previously sought help for a dating-relationship problem will be more willing than males to seek help for this type of problem from both their female and male friends.

Hypothesis 5(b): Males who have previously sought help for a dating-relationship problem will be more willing to seek help for this type of problem from their female friends and male friends than males who have not previously sought help.

Question 6. What aspects of their most recent help-seeking experience from a female friend did adolescents most frequently report as the most helpful?

Hypothesis 6(a): Adolescents will most frequently report “getting sympathy and understanding” as the **most helpful** aspect of their recent help-seeking experience from a female friend.

Question 7. What aspects of their most recent help-seeking experience from a male friend did adolescents most frequently report as the most helpful?

Hypothesis 7(a): Adolescents will most frequently report “receiving advice” as the **most helpful** aspect of their recent help-seeking experience from a male friend.

Question 8. What aspects of their most recent help-seeking experience from a female friend did adolescents most frequently report as the least helpful?

Hypothesis 8(a): Adolescents will most frequently report “finding out more about their situation” as the **least helpful** aspect of their recent help-seeking experience from a female friend.

Question 9. What aspects of their most recent help-seeking experience from a male friend did adolescents most frequently report as the least helpful?

Hypothesis 9(a): Adolescents will most frequently report “getting emotional support” as the **least helpful** aspect of their recent help-seeking experience from a male friend.

An overview of the above questions, variables, and hypotheses are presented below in Table 1.

Table 1.

List of Research Questions, Variables, and Analyses

Research Question	Variables	Analyses
<i>RQ 1:</i> Is there a relation between adolescents' expectations of emotional support from their best female friends and their best male friends and their willingness to seek help from their female friends and their male friends?	1a) Expectation of emotional support from best female friend. 1b) Expectation of emotional support from best male friend. 1c) Willingness to seek help from female friends 1d) Willingness to seek help from male friends.	Pearson correlations
<i>RQ 2:</i> Is there a relation between adolescents' expectations of instrumental support from their best female friends and best male friends and their willingness to seek help for this type of problem from their female friends and their male friends?	2a) Expectation of instrumental support from best female friend. 2b) Expectation of instrumental support from best male friend. 2c) Willingness to seek help from female friends. 2d) Willingness to seek help from male friends.	
<i>RQ 3:</i> Are there differences in adolescents' willingness to seek help from their female friends by their previous help-seeking experience and gender?	IV 1: Previous help-seeking experience for a dating-relationship problem (No or Yes) IV 2: Gender (Female or Male)	One 2 (previous help-seeking experience) by 2 (gender) ANOVA for willingness to seek help from female friends
<i>RQ 4:</i> Are there differences in adolescents' willingness to seek help from their male friends by their previous help-seeking experience and gender?	DV 1: Willingness to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from female friends DV 2: Willingness to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from male friends	One 2 (previous help-seeking experience) by 2 (gender) ANOVA for willingness to seek help from male friends
<i>RQ 5:</i> Do previous help-seeking experience and gender interact to explain variation in adolescents' willingness to		

(table continues)

Table 1. (continued)

Research Question	Variables	Analyses
seek help from their female friends and from their male friends for a dating relationship problem?	<p>Emotional Support:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Getting my feelings out. 2) Getting emotional support. 3) Talking about how I feel. 4) Getting sympathy and understanding. 	Frequency count followed by chi-square analyses.
<p><i>RQ 6:</i> Which aspects of adolescents' recent help-seeking experience from a female friend did they most frequently report as the most helpful?</p>	<p>Instrumental Support:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Receiving advice. 2) Finding out more about my situation. 3) (S)he did something concrete about my problem. 4) (S)he told me about a similar experience (s)he had. 	
<p><i>RQ 7:</i> Which aspects of adolescents' recent help-seeking experience from a male friend did they most frequently report as the most helpful</p>	<p>Emotional Support:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Getting my feelings out. 2) Getting emotional support. 3) Talking about how I feel. 4) Getting sympathy and understanding. 	Frequency count followed by chi-square analyses
<p><i>RQ 8:</i> Which aspects of adolescents' recent help-seeking experience from a male friend did they most frequently report as the most helpful?</p>	<p>Instrumental Support:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Receiving advice. 2) Finding out more about my situation. 3) (S)he did something concrete about my problem. 4) (S)he told me about a similar experience (s)he had. 	
<p><i>RQ 9:</i> Which aspects of adolescents' recent help-seeking experience from a male friend did they most frequently report as the least helpful?</p>		

Chapter III

METHOD

Recruitment Methods and Procedures

Initially, approval was sought from a school board in Windsor, Ontario to collect data from adolescents attending local public high schools. However, because a decision regarding approval was not provided, other avenues were pursued in order to meet the required time constraints for completing the present study. An online version of the questionnaire packet was created to collect data from adolescents ranging in age from 16 to 18 years via the Internet after receiving approval from the Research Ethics Board (REB) at the University of Windsor. However, only individuals between the ages of 17 and 18 years participated. The study was advertised to recruit individuals of the desired age range by distributing flyers containing the study's URL at local organizations, such as the Sandwich Teen Action Group, the Devonshire Mall, and summer sports camps at the University of Windsor, in Windsor, Ontario and posting an advertisement of the study on their local high school network pages on *Facebook*. Due to a low response rate and time constraints, the final recruitment source was secured by advertising the study to individuals between the ages of 17 and 18 years in the participant pool at the University of Windsor. Attempts were made to recruit an even distribution of males and females across the age group, by accessing organizations that include members of both genders, (i.e., summer sports camps, Sandwich Teen Action Group, *Facebook*).

Approval was requested and obtained from the Research Ethics Board (REB) of the University of Windsor, the directors of the local organizations where flyers advertising the study were distributed (Sandwich Teen Action Group, summer sports

camps at the University of Windsor, and the Devonshire Mall), and the coordinator of the Participant Pool at the University of Windsor. Following receipt of approvals, an online version of the questionnaire packet and a flyer advertising the study containing the URL required to access the survey were created. Flyers advertising the study were distributed to adolescents at local organizations in Windsor, Ontario, such as the Sandwich Teen Action Group, summer sports camps at the University of Windsor, and the Devonshire Mall. The study was also advertised on *Facebook* by accessing local adolescents through their high school networks and providing them with a description of the study and the URL required to access the information page, consent form, and online survey. The study was also advertised through the participant pool website at the University of Windsor. Individuals in the participant pool who were interested in participating were required to sign up for a time slot on the website, which cued the researcher to email the individual with the link to the survey page. These participants received a 0.5 point bonus credit in addition to having the option of being entered into the draw for the iPod.

Once the participants accessed the URL, a printable electronic page containing an information letter describing the study was produced. At the bottom of the information page was a link that read: "Click here to enter survey". Once this link was selected, an adolescent consent form (see Appendix A) was produced and participants were required to read it and then select *I agree* before the survey page was presented. Surveys were expected to take less than one half hour to complete and could be completed at the location and time of the participant's choice. Participants' responses were entered electronically. After completing the online survey, participants were required to click the *submit* button, upon which a window opened informing participants of the option of

being entered into a draw for an iPod. If participants chose to be entered into this draw, they were instructed to select *yes* and were then able to type-in their email address. After selecting the option *yes* or *no* to be included in the draw, a new page opened, thanking participants for their participation and providing them with a list of available community resources for adolescents and their families (see Appendix B) to print and retain. A brief report of the results from the study was posted on the University of Windsor's students' study REB webpage following the study's completion.

In order to protect the anonymity of the surveys being submitted, the researchers arranged for all of the submitted surveys to travel through a secure third party server. Participants' email addresses were removed from their survey responses upon downloading the results of the surveys and were stored in a secure place. The only information that was attached to the surveys was the participant's IP address and the date and time that the survey was submitted. Access to the survey data records is password protected and stored on a computer that can only be accessed by researchers involved in the project.

Because the majority (79.5%) of the individuals who chose to participate learned about the study from the Participant Pool at the University of Windsor the researcher examined whether there were differences in the main analyses based on the location from which participants had learned about the study. However, controlling for this variable using partial correlations did not result in any differences. This variable was therefore not included in further analyses for the sake of parsimony.

The majority of the sample was comprised of females (77%). Most participants in the sample (59.8%) reported living with both biological parents, followed by living with

their mothers only (11.5%), living on their own (9.0%), or living in a remarried family (4.9%). In terms of parents' relationships, the participants reported that while the majority of parents were married (74.6%), 13.9% were divorced, 4.1% were separated, and 7.4% had at least one parent who had remarried. Participants also provided information on their parents' levels of education. The highest level of education that participants reported for the majority of mothers was graduated from high school (25.6%); followed closely by graduated from university (20.7%) and graduated from community college or technical school (20.7%); while the majority of participants reported their fathers' highest level of education to be: graduated from community college or technical school (22.3%) followed closely by graduated from university (21.5%). Participants reported that 77.9% of mothers and 87.6% of fathers were employed. The majority (94.2%) of adolescents identified as heterosexual. Further demographic information is provided in Table 2.

Participants

A total of 147 individuals completed the survey; however, 24 of these individuals were not in the appropriate age range of 17 to 18 years and one individual had mostly incomplete data, thus, their responses were excluded from the analyses. The final sample consisted of 122 predominantly Caucasian (72.1%) adolescents (94 females, 28 males) ranging in age from 17 to 18 years ($M = 17.79$, $SD = .41$). The low number of male participants is a reflection of enrolment in undergraduate psychology courses, from which the majority of the participants were recruited. According to Cohen (1988), a minimum of 30 participants per cell is required to ensure 80% statistical power, given a medium to large effect size (as cited in Aron & Aron, 2003). To ensure adequate power for a 2 x 2

Table 2.

Demographic Characteristics

Variable	%	Mean (SD)
Gender		
Female	77.0	
Male	23.0	
Age		
		17.79 (.41)
17 year olds	21.3	
18 year olds	78.7	
Grade		
Grade 11	0.9	
Grade 12	10.8	
Undergraduate	88.3	
Sexual Orientation		
Heterosexual	94.2	
Homosexual	3.3	
Bisexual	2.5	
Learned about Study		
Participant Pool	79.5	
Sandwich Teen Action Group	8.2	
Facebook	3.3	
Devonshire Mall	3.3	
Friend	5.7	
Ethnicity		
White	72.1	
Chinese	2.5	
South Asian	4.9	
Black	3.3	
Filipino	1.6	
Southeast Asian	2.5	
Arab	6.6	
West Asian	0.8	
Korean	0.8	
Other	4.9	
Current Dating Relationship		
Yes	46.7	
No	53.3	

analysis of variance (ANOVA), a total of 120 participants (30 participants in each of the four cells) is therefore required. The sample was examined for possible outliers using histograms and examination of standardized scores; however, all of the cases fell within the appropriate range as none were in excess of $z \pm 3.29$, ($p < .01$, two-tailed test), as specified by Tabachnick and Fidell (2001). As a result, none were excluded from the analyses.

Measures

Demographic Characteristics

Adolescents were asked to record demographic data, such as their date of birth, age, grade, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, where they learned about the study, their relationship status, family status, with whom they are living, parental level of education, and parental employment status.

Expectations of Support

The type of support adolescents expect to receive for a dating problem was measured using a modified version of the COPE scale (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). The COPE scale was selected because it includes subscales that differentiate between emotional and instrumental support. This measure was modified firstly by making it specific to a dating-relationship problem. This was done by changing the instructions from: "Indicate what YOU usually do when YOU experience a stressful event" to "For the problem below, indicate what YOU usually do when you experience that problem". These instructions were followed by examples of a dating-relationship problem (e.g., deciding to ask someone out on a date). Next, this measure was modified to make the items specific to seeking support from best female friends and best male

friends by including the instruction: “If I turned to my best female friend for help with a dating-relationship problem, I would:” and “If I turned to my best male friend for help with a dating-relationship problem, I would:”. Finally, the measure was modified to assess expectations of support by making the situation hypothetical, for example by changing: “I talk to someone to find out more about the situation” to “I would talk to her/him to find out more about the situation”. The response format, which originally was a four-point scale ranging from *1 = I usually don't do this at all* to *4 = I usually do this a lot* was modified to a four-point scale ranging from *1 = I would not do this at all* to *4 = I would do this a lot*.

Adolescents were presented with a total of eight items from the Seeking of Social Support for Emotional Reasons and the Seeking of Social Support for Instrumental Reasons subscales of the COPE scale. Four of these items focused on seeking emotional support and were presented for both female friends and male friends (e.g., I expect to discuss my feelings with a female friend). Four of these items focused on seeking instrumental support and were presented for both female friends and male friends (e.g., I would try to get advice from a male friend). The response format was a four-point scale ranging from *1 = I would not do this at all* to *4 = I would do this a lot*. An example of a dating-relationship problem was presented to the teenagers prior to filling out the items. Carver et al. (1989) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .85 for the Seeking of Social Support for Emotional Reasons subscale, and a Cronbach's alpha of .75 for the Seeking of Social Support for Instrumental Reasons subscale. In the present study, a Cronbach's alpha of .89 was calculated for the Emotional Support subscale, and a Cronbach's alpha of .78 was calculated for the Instrumental Support subscale.

Willingness to Seek Help

Adolescents' willingness to seek help was measured using a modified version of the Children's Coping Strategies Checklist – Revision 2 (CCSC-R2; Ayers, Newton, & Sandler, 2002; Ayers, Sandler, West, & Roosa, 1996). To measure willingness to seek help for a dating-relationship problem specifically, the instructions for this measure were modified by providing examples of a dating-relationship. The support-seeking subscales of this measure include 14 items with four items for parents, four items for peers, four items for other adults, and two items for siblings. For the present study, this measure was modified by making it specific to female friends and male friends. For example, "You would tell your friends about what made you feel the way you did" was modified to "You would tell a male friend about what made you feel the way you did". Finally, this measure was modified to capture adolescents' willingness to seek help instead of actual help-seeking behaviours. This was done by changing the items from past tense to future tense. For example, "You talked with friends about what you would like to happen" was changed to, "You would talk with a male friend about what you would like to happen". This measure was modified similarly for the previous study the present study extends; however, the items for the previous study focused on support seeking from peers and from parents (Simmering & Sears, 2006).

In the present study, adolescents were presented with a total of eight items from the Support-Seeking subscale, with four items focusing on seeking support from female friends (e.g., "You would talk about your feelings with a female friend"), and four items focusing on seeking support from male friends (e.g., "You would tell a male friend about what made you feel the way you did"). The response format was a four-point scale

ranging from 1 = *never* to 4 = *most of the time*. Ayers' et al. (2002) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .85 for the Support from Peers subscale; and Simmering and Sears (2006) reported alpha coefficients of .89 for the dependent variable of willingness to seek help from peers for a family problem, and .93 for the dependent variable of willingness to seek help from peers for a personal problem. In the present study, a Cronbach's alpha of .76 was calculated for the dependent variable of willingness to seek help for a dating problem from female friends, and a Cronbach's alpha of .91 for the dependent variable of willingness to seek help for a dating problem from male friends.

Previous Help-Seeking Experience

In order to assess previous help-seeking experience, one item revised for the present study assessed whether the teenagers experienced a dating-relationship problem during the past six months (e.g., "Have you experienced a **dating-relationship problem** during the past six months?"). Similar items were developed for a previous study to assess previous help-seeking experience for a family problem and a personal problem (Simmering & Sears, 2006). The response format for the present study was *yes* or *no*. Individuals who respond to these items with *yes* will then be asked whether they spoke to someone about their problem (e.g., "If you selected **YES**, did you speak with anyone about the problem?"). Participants were given a list of potential helpers (i.e., same-sex friends, other-sex friends, parents, brother, sister, counselor, or other adult) and were asked to indicate with whom they spoke about their problem. An additional item was included to assess how often each individual experienced a dating-relationship problem over the past six months (e.g., "Please select the item which best applies to you: Over the

past six months, I have experienced a **dating-relationship problem** - 1-5 times, 6-10 times, 11-15 times, more than 15 times”).

Perceived Locus of Control

Adolescents' perceived locus of control was assessed using the shortened version of the Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control Scale (Nowicki & Strickland, 1973).

Adolescents were presented with a total of 21 items, such as: “Are you often blamed for things that just aren't your fault?”. They were instructed to read the 21 statements and indicate whether they agree with the statements. The response format for the items was *yes* or *no*, with higher scores suggesting a greater external locus of control. Nowicki and Strickland (1973) reported a split-half internal consistency of $r = .81$ for the full version of the measure with 302 adolescents in grades 9 to 11, and test-retest reliabilities of .63, .66, and .71 for students in grades 3, 7, and 11, respectively. It is interesting to note that the test-retest reliabilities increase with age, which is possibly an indication of developmental maturation. For this measure, the split-half coefficient in the present study was .70.

Perceived Severity of the Problem

Adolescents who indicated that they have experienced a dating-relationship problem were asked to think about their most recent experience with this problem and indicate how distressing their problem was for them. This was assessed by an item developed for this study: “How upset did this problem make you feel?”. The response format was a four-point scale ranging from $1 = \textit{not upset at all}$ to $4 = \textit{very upset}$. They were also asked to report on the length of time that they experienced the problem: “For

what length of time did you experience the problem?”. The response format was a four-point scale ranging from 1 = *less than 1 week* to 4 = *more than 3 months*.

Perceived Helpfulness of the Support

In order to assess whether adolescents felt that their help-seeking experience was helpful, we investigated which aspects of the help-seeking experience were found to be the most helpful and which aspects were found to be the least helpful. From a list of options, adolescents were asked to indicate which aspects (e.g., receiving advice, getting out your feelings, etc.) were the most helpful. They were also asked to indicate from the same list of options which aspects of the help-seeking experience they found to be the least helpful. These items were modified from the Seeking of Social Support for Emotional Reasons subscale and the Seeking of Social Support for Instrumental Reasons subscale of the COPE Scale (Carver et al., 1989). For example, “I talk to someone to find out more about the situation” was modified to “Finding out more about my situation” and was presented as an option for the most and least helpful aspects of the help-seeking experience. Because the list of options with which participants were presented was based on the items from the COPE scale, they can be categorized into emotional support and instrumental support. As reported previously, Carver et al. (1989) reported Cronbach’s alphas of .85 and .75 for the Seeking of Social Support for Emotional Reasons and the Seeking of Social Support for Instrumental Reasons subscales, respectively. In the present study, a Cronbach’s alpha of .89 was calculated for the Emotional Support subscale, and a Cronbach’s alpha of .78 was calculated for the Instrumental Support subscale.

Three items were also included to assess the overall helpfulness of the help-seeking experience: “How helpful was this experience?”; “How did you feel after this experience?”; and “To what extent did you feel that your problem was solved?”. The response format is four-point scales ranging from *1 = not helpful at all* to *4 = very helpful*; *1 = I felt worse about my problem* to *4 = I felt much better about my problem*; and *1 = My problem was not solved at all* to *4 = My problem was solved*, respectively. An additional qualitative item was added here, which asked the participants to briefly describe the support that they received and to indicate the top three most effective ways a female friend helps with a dating-relationship problem, and the top three most effective ways a male friend helps with a dating-relationship problem. Finally, the participants were asked whether, based on their help-seeking experience, they would seek help again in the future. The response format was a four-point scale ranging from *1 = Definitely Not* to *4 = Definitely*.

Analyses

Question 1 and Question 2

Two-tailed Pearson Correlations were used to 1) assess whether there is a relation between adolescents’ expectations of emotional support for a dating-relationship problem from their best female friends and best male friends and their willingness to seek help for this type of problem from their female friends and their male friends; and 2) assess whether there is a relation between adolescents’ expectations of instrumental support for a dating-relationship problem from their best female friends and best male friends and their willingness to seek help for this type of problem from their female friends and their male friends. The variables examined include:

- 1) Expectation of emotional support from best female friend; expectation of emotional support from best male friend; willingness to seek help from female friends; and willingness to seek help from male friends.
- 2) Expectation of instrumental support from best female friend; expectation of instrumental support from best male friend; willingness to seek help from female friends; and willingness to seek help from male friends.

Question 3, Question 4, and Question 5

Two 2 (previous help-seeking experience) by 2 (gender) ANOVAs were conducted to assess: 1) whether there are differences in adolescents' willingness to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from their female friends by their previous help-seeking experience with that problem and gender; and 2) whether there are differences in adolescents' willingness to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from their male friends by their previous help-seeking experience with that problem and gender; 3) whether previous help-seeking experience for a dating-relationship problem and gender interact to explain variation in adolescents' willingness to seek help from their female friends and from their male friends for a dating relationship problem. These variables were examined:

- 1) Predictor Variable 1: Previous help-seeking experience for a dating-relationship problem (No or Yes)
- 2) Predictor Variable 2: Gender (Female or Male)
- 3) Dependent Variable 1: Willingness to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from female friends

4) Dependent Variable 2: Willingness to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from male friends

Question 6 and Question 7

A frequency count was used to determine: 1) Which aspects of adolescents' recent help-seeking experience from a female friend did they most frequently report as the most helpful; and 2) Which aspects of adolescents' recent help-seeking experience from a male friend did they most frequently report as the most helpful. The options were then combined into emotional-support scores and instrumental-support scores, and chi-square analyses were conducted to determine whether relations exist between these variables.

Question 8 and Question 9

A frequency count was used to determine: 1) Which aspect of adolescents' recent help-seeking experience from a female friend did they most frequently report as the least helpful; and 2) Which aspect of adolescents' recent help-seeking experience from a male friend did they most frequently report as the least helpful? The options were again combined into emotional-support scores and instrumental-support scores so that chi-square analyses could be conducted.

Chapter III

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

Prior to running the analyses, the accuracy of the data file was examined by ensuring that all of the values were within their appropriate ranges by looking at the minimum and maximum values for each variable. After testing for patterns of missing data, mean substitution was used to replace missing values, as recommended by Tabachnick and Fidell (2001). Data were screened to ensure that they met the assumptions. In terms of normal distribution, the variable of expectations to receive emotional social support from a female friend was found to be moderately negatively skewed; however, because analyses of variance tend to be robust to violations of normality no transformations were made (Tabachnick & Fidell)

Description of the Variables

Over half of the participants (60.3%) reported having experienced a dating-relationship problem within the past six months. When examined by gender, chi-square analyses indicated that more females than males reported having experienced a dating-relationship problem $\chi^2(1, N = 121) = 6.74, p = .009$. This finding is consistent with previous literature that has found that females are more likely to report experiencing problems than males (Boldero & Fallon, 1995). Of the participants (both males and females) who reported having experienced a dating-relationship problem within the past six months, the majority (90.9%) reported having spoken to someone about the problem. Chi-square analyses by gender indicated that more females than males reported having spoken to someone about their problem $\chi^2(1, N = 77) = 7.86, p = .005$. This result should

however be interpreted with caution as one of the cells possessed less than the required five cases per cell due to the small number of males in the sample.

Participants also reported on information about their experiences with dating-relationship problems, including the frequency with which they have experienced dating-relationship problems and the duration and severity of their most recent dating-relationship problem. In terms of problem duration, frequency counts indicated that adolescents most often selected *less than 1 week* (59.8%) and *1 week to 1 month* (26.2%) as the modal lengths of time over which their most recent dating-relationship problem occurred. The majority of adolescents (89.6%) selected *1-5 times* as the number of times that they had experienced dating-relationship problems over the previous six months. Similar proportions of adolescents selected *very upset* (31.8%), *a little upset* (30.8%), and *somewhat upset* (28.0%) to report on the severity of their most recent experience of a dating-relationship problem, while fewer (9.3%) selected *not at all upset*.

Previous research has suggested that teenagers who have a more internal locus of control are more likely to seek help than teenagers who have a more external locus of control (Schonert-Reichl & Muller, 1996). Because it is likely that an individual's tendency to either view problems as being due to factors outside of themselves (i.e., external locus of control) versus under their own control (i.e., internal locus of control) might have affected participants' expectations about and willingness to engage in help seeking, locus of control was also examined. The mean locus of control rating was 8.72 (of a possible 21.0, with higher scores indicating a more external locus of control), which suggested that adolescents in the sample tended to have a more internal than external locus of control.

The items describing adolescents' most recent experience with a dating-relationship problem (i.e., problem duration, frequency, and severity) and Perceived Locus of Control were included as covariates to ensure that differences in these variables among participants would not impact the results. Table 3 presents the means, standard deviations, minimums, and maximums of these variables. These variables were considered because adolescents' help-seeking behaviours have been found to differ as a function of problem severity (Carter et al.; Hunter et al., 2004; Sheffield et al., 2004). Prior to conducting the main analyses, partial correlations were used to control for the variables of Perceived Locus of Control, frequency of experiencing dating-relationship problems, and the duration and severity of the most recent dating-relationship problem. However, no differences were found in the overall effects; therefore, bivariate correlations were used to test Question 1 and Question 2. Because of the number of comparisons, α was set at .01.

Bivariate correlations were also conducted among the measures of adolescents' expectations of support, including emotional support from female friends, emotional support from male friends, instrumental support from female friends, and instrumental support from male friends. All of the variables were statistically significantly and positively correlated. These results are presented in Table 4.

Main Analyses

Descriptive statistics for the dependent variables, including means and standard deviations are presented in Table 5. In terms of the dependent variables, willingness to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from **female friends** was statistically significantly correlated with willingness to seek help for a dating-relationship problem

Table 3.

Descriptive Results of Problem Duration, Frequency, and Severity, and Perceived Locus of Control

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Duration <i>n</i> = 107	1.59	0.85	1	4
Frequency <i>n</i> = 115	1.13	0.41	1	4
Severity <i>n</i> = 107	2.82	0.99	1	4
Perceived Locus of Control <i>n</i> = 122	8.72	3.25	0	21

Note: Higher scores = greater problem duration, frequency, and severity

Higher scores = more external Perceived Locus of Control

Table 4.

Bivariate Correlations among Expectations of Support from Female Friends and Male Friends

	^a Emot Support	^b Inst Support	Inst Support
	Male Friends	Female Friends	Male Friends
Emot Support	.49**	.50**	.29*
Female Friends			
Emot Support	--	.25*	.59**
Male Friends			
Inst Support		--	.37**
Female Friends			

Note: $N = 122$ (females: $n = 94$; males: $n = 28$). * $p < .01$ ** $p < .001$

^a Emot = Emotional

^b Inst = Instrumental

Table 5.

Means and Standard Deviations of the Dependent Variables, Total Sample and Separated by Gender

Dependent Variables ^a	Females	Males	Total
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
Willingness to Seek Help From Female Friends	2.94 (.68)	2.61 (.56)	2.86 (.67)
Willingness to Seek Help From Male Friends	2.69 (.87)	2.34 (.62)	2.61 (.83)

Note: Higher scores indicate greater willingness to seek help. ^a Possible range = 1 to 4.

N = 122 (females: *n* = 94; males: *n* = 28)

from **male friends** ($r = .44, p < .001$).

*Adolescents' Expectations of **Emotional Support** for a Dating-Relationship Problem and their Willingness to Seek Help from their Same-Sex and Other-Sex Friends*

To test Hypothesis 1(a), bivariate correlations were calculated to assess whether, for a dating-relationship problem, there was a positive relation between adolescents' expectations of receiving **emotional support** from their best female and male friend, and their willingness to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from their **female friends**. These results are presented in Table 6. As predicted, the results indicated that adolescents' expectations of receiving **emotional support** from their best female friends were statistically significantly and positively related to their willingness to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from their **female friends** ($r = .69, p < .001$), suggesting that adolescents who had higher expectations of receiving **emotional support** from their best female friends were more willing to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from their **female friends**. This was the case for both females ($r = .70, p < .001$) and males ($r = .59, p = .001$).

In addition, as predicted, the results indicated that adolescents' expectations of receiving **emotional support** from their best male friends were statistically significantly and positively related to their willingness to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from their **female friends** ($r = .30, p = .001$), suggesting that adolescents who had higher expectations of receiving **emotional support** from their best male friends were more willing to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from their **female friends**.

However, when the data file was split by gender, the correlations were no longer statistically significant at an α level of .01 (females: $r = .21, p = .045$; males: $r = .42,$

Table 6.

Adolescents' Expectations (Exp.) of Emotional (ES) and Instrumental (IS) Support and their Willingness to Seek Help for a Dating Problem from Female Friends and Male Friends, Total Sample and Separated by Gender

	Exp. of ES from Female Friends	Exp. of ES from Male Friends	Exp. of IS from Female Friends	Exp. of IS from Male Friends
Females				
Willingness, Females	.70**	.21	.61**	.30*
Willingness, Males	.29*	.61**	.23	.58**
Males				
Willingness, Females	.59*	.42	.62**	.30
Willingness, Males	.38	.63**	.41	.39
Total				
Willingness, Females	.69**	.30*	.62**	.29*
Willingness, Males	.34**	.62**	.28*	.53**

Note: $N = 122$ (females: $n = 94$; males: $n = 28$). * $p < .01$ ** $p < .001$

$p = .028$)

To test Hypothesis 1(b), bivariate correlations were used to assess whether, for a dating-relationship problem, there was a negative relation between adolescents' expectations of receiving **emotional support** from their best female and male friend, and their willingness to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from their **male friends** (see Table 6). This hypothesis was not supported, as the results indicated that adolescents' expectations of receiving **emotional support** from their best female friends were statistically significantly and positively related to their willingness to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from their **male friends** ($r = .34, p < .001$). This finding suggested that adolescents who had higher expectations of receiving **emotional support** from their best female friends were more willing to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from their **male friends**. When the data file was split by gender, this finding was statistically significant for females ($r = .29, p = .004$), but not for males ($r = .38, p = .049$).

The results also indicated that adolescents' expectations of receiving **emotional support** from their best male friends were statistically significantly and positively related to their willingness to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from their **male friends** ($r = .62, p < .001$), suggesting that adolescents who had higher expectations of receiving **emotional support** from their best male friends were more willing to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from their **male friends**. When the data file was split by gender, this finding was statistically significant for both females ($r = .61, p < .001$) and males ($r = .63, p < .001$). However, this finding did not support the hypothesis that there would be a negative relation between adolescents' expectations of receiving **emotional**

support from their best female friend and/or best male friend and their willingness to seek help from their **male friends**.

Please note that, when separated by gender, the results should be interpreted with caution due to the large discrepancy between the percentages of females (77.0%) and males (23.0%) in the sample.

Adolescents' Expectations of Instrumental Support for a Dating-Relationship Problem and their Willingness to Seek Help from their Same-Sex and Other-Sex Friends

To test Hypothesis 2(a), bivariate correlations were used to assess whether, for a dating-relationship problem, there was a negative relation for adolescents' expectations of receiving **instrumental support** from their best female and male friend, and their willingness to seek help from their **female friends** (refer to Table 6). This hypothesis was not supported, as the findings indicated that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between adolescents' expectations of receiving **instrumental support** from their best female friend and their willingness to seek help from their **female friends**.

Thus, adolescents who expected to receive **instrumental support** from their best female friend were more willing to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from their **female friends** ($r = .62, p < .001$). These results were found for both females ($r = .61, p < .001$) and males ($r = .62, p < .001$).

The results also indicated, contrary to the hypothesis, that adolescents' expectations of receiving **instrumental support** from their best male friends were statistically significantly and positively related to their willingness to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from their **female friends** ($r = .29, p = .001$), suggesting that adolescents who had higher expectations of receiving **instrumental support** from their

best male friends were more willing to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from their **female friends**. When split by gender, these results were statistically significant for females ($r = .30, p = .003$), but not for males ($r = .30, p = .116$).

To test Hypothesis 2(b), bivariate correlations were used to assess whether, for a dating-relationship problem, there was a positive relation between adolescents' expectations of receiving **instrumental support** from their best female and male friends, and their willingness to seek help from their **male friends**. The results are presented in Table 6. As predicted, adolescents' expectations of receiving **instrumental support** from their best female friends were statistically significantly and positively related to their willingness to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from their **male friends** ($r = .28, p = .002$), suggesting that adolescents who had higher expectations of receiving **instrumental support** from their best female friends were more willing to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from their **male friends**. However, when split by gender, these results were not statistically significant at an α level of .01 ($r = .23, p = .026$ for females; $r = .41, p = .029$ for males).

In addition, as predicted, the results indicated that there was a statistically significant positive relation between adolescents' expectations of receiving **instrumental support** from their best male friends and their willingness to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from their **male friends** ($r = .53, p < .001$), suggesting that adolescents who had higher expectations of receiving **instrumental support** from their best male friends were more willing to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from their **male friends**. When split by gender, these findings remained statistically significant for females ($r = .58, p < .001$), but not for males ($r = .39, p = .038$).

Summary of bivariate correlations results. To summarize the results from the bivariate correlations, adolescents who had higher expectations of receiving **emotional support** from their best female friends and best male friends were more willing to seek help from their **female friends** and from their **male friends**. Similarly, adolescents who had higher expectations of receiving **instrumental support** from their best female friends and best male friends were more willing to seek help from their **female friends** and from their **male friends**. However, when the data file was split by gender, the results indicated that for males only, having higher expectations of receiving **emotional support** from their best female friends was not statistically significantly related to their willingness to seek help from **male friends**, and that having higher expectations of receiving **instrumental support** from their best male friends was not related to their willingness to seek help from their **female friends** and their **male friends**.

Again, please note that, when separated by gender, the results should be interpreted with caution due to the discrepancy between the numbers of participants in each gender group.

Adolescents' Willingness to Seek Help for a Dating-Relationship Problem from Same-Sex and Other-Sex Friends by Gender and Previous Help-Seeking Experience

Two 2 (previous help-seeking experience) by 2 (gender) analyses of variance were conducted to assess adolescents' willingness to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from their female and male friends. Because only two ANOVAs were conducted, α was set at .05.

Adolescents' willingness to seek help for a dating problem from their female friends. The results from the first ANOVA indicated that there was a statistically

significant main effect for previous help-seeking experience ($F(1, 77) = 8.70, p = .004$). As predicted in Hypothesis 3, these findings suggested that adolescents, who had previously sought help for a dating-relationship problem, were more willing to seek help for this type of problem from their **female friends** than adolescents who had not. These results are presented in Table 7.

Contrary to Hypothesis 4, which stated that females would be more willing than males to seek help for a dating problem from their **female friends**, the main effect for gender was not statistically significant. The two-way interaction was also not statistically significant.

Adolescents' willingness to seek help for a dating problem from their male friends. The results from the second ANOVA indicated that, as predicted in Hypothesis 5(a), a statistically significant two-way interaction was found for willingness to seek help from male friends ($F(1, 77) = 4.65, p = .034$), suggesting that females who previously spoke with someone about a dating-relationship problem were more willing to seek help for the same-type of problem from **male friends** than females who had not. However, contrary to Hypothesis 5(b), males who previously spoke with someone about a dating-relationship problem were less willing to seek help from their male friends than males who had not. The results are presented in Table 8. The main effects for previous help-seeking experience and gender were not statistically significant. This is contrary to Hypothesis 4, which stated that females would be more willing than males to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from their **male friends**.

To summarize, the results from the two ANOVAs suggested that adolescents who previously turned to someone for help with a dating problem were more willing to seek

Table 7.

Adolescents' Willingness to Seek Help for a Dating Problem from Female Friends by Gender, and Previous Help-Seeking Experience

Dependent Variables ^a	Predictors		<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	η^2
Willingness to Seek Help from Female Friends	Gender		.006	1	.000
	Females (<i>M</i>)				
	2.50				
	Males (<i>M</i>)				
	2.52				
	Previous Help-Seeking Experience		8.70*	1	.106
	Yes (<i>M</i>)				
	2.87				
	No (<i>M</i>)				
	2.14				
Gender * Previous HS Experience		1.06	1	.014	
Females		Males			
Yes (<i>M</i>)	No (<i>M</i>)	Yes (<i>M</i>)	No (<i>M</i>)		
2.99	2.00	2.76	2.28		

Note: Higher scores indicate greater willingness to seek help. ^a Possible range = 1 to 4.

* $p < .05$

Females ($n = 63$). Males ($n = 14$).

Table 8.

Adolescents' Willingness to Seek Help for a Dating Problem from Male Friends by Gender, and Previous Help-Seeking Experience

Dependent Variables ^a	Predictors		<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	η^2
Willingness to Seek Help from Male Friends	Gender		.457	1	.006
	Females (<i>M</i>)	Males (<i>M</i>)			
	2.30	2.53			
	Previous Help-Seeking Experience		1.18	1	.016
	Yes (<i>M</i>)	No (<i>M</i>)			
	2.60	2.32			
	Gender * Previous HS Experience		4.65*	1	.060
	Females				
	Males				
	Yes (<i>M</i>)	No (<i>M</i>)	Yes (<i>M</i>)	No (<i>M</i>)	
	2.85	1.75	2.35	2.71	

Note: Higher scores indicate greater willingness to seek help. ^a Possible range = 1 to 4.

* $p < .05$

Females ($n = 63$). Males ($n = 14$).

help from their **female friends** than adolescents who had not. In addition, while females who had previously experienced a problem were more willing to seek help from male friends, in this instance, males were actually less willing to seek help from their male friends.

Again, because of the low number of males in the sample, the results of each ANOVA should be interpreted with caution.

Adolescents' Perceptions of the Most Helpful Aspects of Seeking Help from Female Friends and Male Friends

Female friends. A frequency count was used to determine which aspects of adolescents' recent help-seeking experience from a **female friend** were most frequently reported as the most helpful. Contrary to the prediction that adolescents' modal response would be *getting sympathy and understanding* for the most helpful aspect of their recent help-seeking experience from a **female friend** (Hypothesis 6(a)), overall, adolescents' modal response (40.2%) identified *getting my feelings out* to be the most helpful aspect of their recent help-seeking experience from a **female friend**. A number of adolescents (25.2%) also reported *receiving advice* as the most helpful aspect of their recent help-seeking experience, while 13.1% selected *talking about how I feel* as the most helpful aspect of their recent help-seeking experience.

When the data file was split by gender, the results of the frequency count indicated that females' modal response (43.2%) of *getting my feelings out* was the most helpful aspect of their recent help-seeking experience from a **female friend**, while males (42.1%) most frequently reported *receiving advice* as the most helpful aspect of their

recent help-seeking experience from a **female friend**, followed by *getting my feelings out* (26.3%). These results are presented in Table 9.

Male friends. A frequency count was used to determine which aspects of adolescents' recent help-seeking experience from a **male friend** were most frequently reported as the most helpful. As predicted in Hypothesis 7(a), overall, adolescents' modal response (32.4%) identified *receiving advice* as the most helpful aspect of their recent help-seeking experience from a **male friend**, followed by *getting my feelings out* (14.7%).

Similarly, when the data file was split by gender, the results of the frequency count indicated that both females (27.3%) and males (53.8%) most frequently reported finding *receiving advice* to be the most helpful aspect of their recent help-seeking experience from a **male friend**. These results are presented in Table 10.

Following these analyses, the response choices for the most helpful aspects of adolescent help-seeking for a **female friend** and for a **male friend** were combined into emotional-support and instrumental-support responses. Chi-square analyses by type of support were conducted to test for differences. The results indicated that adolescents found emotional support from a **female friend** to be more helpful than instrumental support ($\chi^2(1, N = 104) = 26.0, p < .001$). When the data file was split by gender, chi-square analyses by type of support indicated that both females and males found emotional support from a **female friend** to be more helpful than instrumental support ($\chi^2(1, N = 85) = 21.8, p < .001$; $\chi^2(1, N = 19) = 4.26, p = .039$, respectively).

Table 9.

Modal Responses for the Most Helpful Aspects of Adolescents' Recent Help-Seeking Experience from a Female Friend, Total Sample and Separated by Gender

	Female <i>n</i> = 88	Male <i>n</i> = 19	Total <i>n</i> = 107
Variables			
Receiving advice	19 (21.6%)	8 (42.1%)	27 (25.2%)
Getting my feelings out	38 (43.2%)	5 (26.3%)	43 (40.2%)
Finding out more about my situation	1 (1.1%)	1 (5.3%)	2 (1.9%)
Getting emotional support	6 (6.8%)	--	6 (5.6%)
Talking about how I feel	11 (12.5%)	3 (15.8%)	14 (13.1%)
She did something about my problem	1 (1.1%)	--	1 (.9)
Getting sympathy and understanding	6 (6.8%)	--	6 (5.6%)
She told me about a similar experience she had	3 (3.4%)	2 (10.5%)	5 (4.7%)
Nothing	3 (3.4%)	--	3 (2.8%)

Table 10.

Modal Responses for the Most Helpful Aspects of Adolescents' Recent Help-Seeking Experience from a Male Friend, Total Sample and Separated by Gender

	Female <i>n</i> = 55	Male <i>n</i> = 13	Total <i>n</i> = 68
Variables			
Receiving advice	15 (27.3 %)	7 (53.8%)	22 (32.4%)
Getting my feelings out	9 (16.4 %)	1 (7.7%)	10 (14.7%)
Finding out more about my situation	4 (7.3%)	--	4 (5.9%)
Getting emotional support	5 (9.1%)	--	5 (7.4%)
Talking about how I feel	8 (14.5 %)	--	8 (11.8%)
He did something about my problem	1 (1.8%)	--	1 (1.5%)
Getting sympathy and understanding	5 (9.1%)	1 (7.7%)	6 (8.8%)
He told me about a similar experience she had	5 (9.1%)	3 (23.1%)	8 (11.8%)
Nothing	3 (5.5%)	1 (7.7%)	4 (5.9%)

Chi-square analyses by type of support were also conducted to determine whether adolescents perceived emotional support or instrumental support to be most helpful when seeking help from a **male friend**. The results indicated that adolescents found emotional support from a **male friend** to be more helpful than instrumental support ($\chi^2(1, N = 64) = 5.06, p = .024$). When the data file was split by gender, chi-square analyses were not statistically significant. However, at least one cell had fewer than five cases per cell. The lack of statistical significance could therefore have been the result of low power.

These results suggested that both males and females perceive emotional support from a **female friend** as more helpful than instrumental support. Similarly, the results suggested that both males and females perceived emotional support from a **male friend** as more helpful than instrumental support; however, these results were not statistically significant when the data file was split by gender.

Adolescents' Perceptions of the Least Helpful Aspects of Seeking Help from Female Friends and Male Friends

Female friends. A frequency count was used to determine which aspect of adolescents' recent help-seeking experience from a **female friend** was most frequently reported as the least helpful aspect of this experience. It was predicted that adolescents' modal response would identify *finding out more about their situation* as the least helpful aspect of their recent help-seeking experience from a female friend (Hypothesis 8(a)); however, the results indicated that, overall, adolescents most frequently (49.5%) selected *nothing* as the least helpful aspect of their recent help-seeking experience from a **female friend** followed by *receiving advice* (15.0%).

When the data file was split by gender, a high percentage of females (48.9%) most frequently selected *nothing* as the least helpful aspect of their most recent help-seeking experience from a **female friend** followed by *receiving advice* (17.0%). Similarly, a high percentage of males (52.6%) selected *nothing* as the least helpful aspect of their recent help-seeking experience; however, this was followed by *getting my feelings out* (10.5%) and *getting emotional support* (10.5%). The modal responses for the least helpful aspects of adolescents' recent help-seeking experience from a **female friend** are presented in Table 11.

Male friends. A frequency count was used to determine which aspect of adolescents' recent help-seeking experience from a **male friend** was most frequently reported as the least helpful aspect of this experience. It was predicted that adolescents would most frequently report *getting emotional support* as the least helpful aspect of their recent help-seeking experience from a male friend (Hypothesis 9(a)). Contrary to the hypothesis, the results indicated that, overall, adolescents most frequently (42.0%) selected *nothing* as the least helpful aspect of their recent help-seeking experience from a **male friend** followed by *getting sympathy and understanding* (14.5%).

When the data file was split by gender, females' modal response (42.9%) was *nothing* for the least helpful aspect of their recent help-seeking experience from a **male friend**. Males also most frequently (38.5%) selected *nothing* as the least helpful aspect of their recent help-seeking experience from a **male friend**, followed by *getting sympathy and understanding* (23.1%). The modal responses for the least helpful aspects of adolescents' recent help-seeking experience from a **male friend** are presented in Table 12.

Table 11.

Modal Responses for the Least Helpful Aspects of Adolescents' Recent Help-Seeking Experience from a Female Friend, Total Sample and Separated by Gender

	Female <i>n</i> = 88	Male <i>n</i> = 19	Total <i>n</i> = 107
Variables			
Receiving advice	15 (17.0 %)	1 (5.3 %)	16 (15.0 %)
Getting my feelings out	3 (3.4 %)	2 (10.5 %)	5 (4.7 %)
Finding out more about my situation	6 (6.8%)	--	6 (5.6%)
Getting emotional support	1 (1.1%)	2 (10.5 %)	3 (2.8%)
Talking about how I feel	3 (3.4 %)	1 (5.3 %)	4 (3.7 %)
She did something about my problem	6 (6.8%)	1 (5.3 %)	7 (6.5%)
Getting sympathy and understanding	4 (4.5%)	1 (5.3 %)	5 (4.7%)
She told me about a similar experience she had	7 (8.0 %)	1 (5.3 %)	8 (7.5 %)
Nothing	43 (48.9 %)	10 (52.6 %)	53 (49.5 %)

Table 12.

Modal Responses for the Least Helpful Aspects of Adolescents' Recent Help-Seeking Experience from a Male Friend, Total Sample and Separated by Gender

	Female <i>n</i> = 56	Male <i>n</i> = 13	Total <i>n</i> = 69
Variables			
Receiving advice	5 (8.9 %)	1 (7.7 %)	6 (8.7 %)
Getting my feelings out	6 (10.7 %)	--	6 (8.7 %)
Finding out more about my situation	2 (3.6%)	1 (7.7%)	3 (4.3%)
Getting emotional support	3 (5.4%)	1 (7.7 %)	4 (5.8%)
Talking about how I feel	1 (1.8%)	1 (7.7 %)	2 (2.9 %)
He did something about my problem	5 (8.9%)	--	5 (7.2%)
Getting sympathy and understanding	7 (12.5 %)	23.1	10 (14.5%)
He told me about a similar experience she had	3 (5.4%)	1 (7.7%)	4 (5.8%)
Nothing	24 (42.9 %)	5 (38.5 %)	29 (42.0 %)

Following these analyses, the options for least helpful aspects of adolescent help-seeking for a **female friend** and for a **male friend** were combined into emotional-support scores and instrumental-support scores, and chi-square analyses by type of support were conducted to test for differences. The chi-square analyses indicated that there were no statistically significant differences in adolescents' perceptions of the least helpful aspects of their recent help-seeking experiences from both a **female friend** and a **male friend**. Thus, it appears as though adolescents do not perceive either type of support as less helpful than the other.

Chapter IV

DISCUSSION

Summary of the Results

The present study investigated the relation between the type of support (i.e., emotional or instrumental) that adolescents expect to receive from their best female friend and best male friend and their willingness to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from same-sex and other-sex friends. The study also examined whether adolescents' previous help-seeking experience influenced their willingness to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from their female and male friends. Finally, the study also investigated adolescents' perceptions of the most helpful and least helpful aspects of their recent help-seeking experience.

Consistent with previous studies that have found that interpersonal problems (i.e., dating problems) are frequently reported by adolescents (Boldero & Fallon, 1995; Fallon & Bowles, 1999), over half of the participants (60.3%) in the present study reported having experienced a dating-relationship problem within the previous six months. In addition, more females than males reported both experiencing this type of problem and speaking with someone about the problem. This is also consistent with previous studies that have found that females are more likely to report experiencing interpersonal problems and to seek help for their problems than males (Boldero & Fallon; Carter et al., 2004). Participants' responses indicated that experiencing interpersonal problems was at least *a little upsetting* (30.8%) for adolescents and *very upsetting* for many (31.8%). Similarly, previous research has indicated that older adolescents tend to perceive their problems as more serious than younger adolescents, and that these types of problems are

distressing for them (Boldero & Fallon; Fallon & Bowles). However, while many adolescents reported having experienced a dating problem over the past six months, these experiences did not appear to be as frequent as suggested in previous literature (e.g., Fallon & Bowles) as almost 90% (89.6%) of adolescents reported having experienced dating problems between *1-5 times*. The present study did not examine the frequency of experiencing dating problems in relation to other problems. It is possible that the frequency with which participants in this sample experienced dating problems would be high relative to their experiences with other types of problems.

Adolescents' Expectations of Support for a Dating-Relationship Problem and their Willingness to Seek Help from their Same-Sex and Other-Sex Friends

Emotional Support

Findings from the present study suggested that adolescents who perceived either type of support from their best female friend were more willing to go to their female friends for help in the future. This suggests that regardless of gender or the type of support that is expected, simply having an expectation of receiving support from adolescents' best female friends is significantly related to willingness to seek help from female friends. It is likely that both females and males of this age group find receiving emotional and instrumental support from their female friends to be a positive experience. It appears that older adolescents have more opportunities for other-sex interactions than younger adolescents. For example, the pursuit of post-secondary education provides the opportunity for many other-sex interactions that may be desired following this transition of entering university and moving away from parents, especially if a particular type of support was often provided from an other-sex parent when the adolescent was living at

home. In addition, adolescents who expected to receive emotional support from their best male friends were also more willing to seek help from their male friends. It is possible that when adolescents perceive emotional support from their best friends it feels comforting, supportive, and non-judgmental, and may make them more likely to expect that same type of support from other individuals of the same gender. Further, individuals who expect to receive emotional support from their best female or best male friends may have higher perceptions of available social support from other individuals of the same gender since they may expect others to respond in the same way. Studies have found that perceptions of the importance and availability of support are related to adolescents' well-being and outcomes, such as self esteem and depression (Cheng, 1998; Demaray & Malecki, 2003; Reinhardt et al., 2006).

It is also possible that expectations of emotional support are related to specific helper qualities. Previous research has found that some barriers preventing adolescents from seeking help from others are fears of their helpers breaching confidentiality and passing judgment when they seek help (Jackson, 2002; Wilson & Deane, 2001). Further, when adolescents do seek help, friends are perceived as good helpers when they demonstrate qualities, such as being a good listener who is nurturing, supportive, and trustworthy (Bukowski et al., 1994; Hetherington & Stoppard; 2002; Sullivan et al., 2002). Perhaps when helpers provide emotional support or are expected to provide emotional support, they are demonstrating these types of helper qualities that make adolescents feel supported and nurtured, and this in turn, leads to greater willingness to seek help in the future. Further, it is more likely that older adolescents will perceive their friendships as more positive and intimate than younger adolescents since perceptions of

friendship quality increase with age across adolescence (Way & Greene, 2006). A limitation of the present study is that it did not examine specific helper qualities that may affect adolescents' willingness to seek help, which may act as a moderator. Future research should examine the extent to which specific helper qualities impact adolescents' willingness to seek help.

It is interesting that while findings suggested that, overall, perceptions of emotional support from adolescents' best female friend and best male friend increase their willingness to seek help from friends of the same gender, when divided by gender, perceptions of emotional support from adolescents' best female friend was only found to be statistically significantly related to greater willingness to seek help from their male friends for females, but not for males. One possibility is that females are more comfortable receiving emotional support from their male friends than males are, and that males need to expect this type of support before they are willing to seek help from their male friends. This is consistent with previous literature that suggests that there are certain barriers, such as upholding their reputation, that make it difficult for adolescent males to seek help from their male friends (Sears et al., 2005). However, few previous studies have made the distinction between types of support and between seeking help from female friends versus male friends. It is also possible that this difference reflects males' preference to receive emotional support for a dating problem from their best female friends. That is, when males expect to receive emotional support from their female friends they may be less willing to turn to their male friends because they would rather receive emotional support from their female friends. In other words, given the choice, males prefer seeking help from their female friends than from their male friends, and

simply having the expectation of receiving emotional support from their female friends may open the door for them to do so. This in turn might further reduce their willingness to turn to their male friends. It is important to note that these findings do not suggest that males who expect to receive emotional support from their best female friends are not willing to seek help from their male friends. Instead, the results suggest that they are not as willing to seek help from their male friends as they are from their female friends when they expect to receive emotional support from their best female friends.

Instrumental Support

Findings from the present study suggested that higher expectations of instrumental support from best female friends were related to greater willingness to seek help from female friends, for both genders. However, expectations of receiving instrumental support from best male friends were related to willingness to seek help from female and male friends for females only. This finding was surprising because previous research has found that receiving instrumental support is helpful for males. For example in a study examining perceptions of social support and depression in Chinese adolescents, Cheng (1998) found that a lack of instrumental support for males was related to depression. However, this particular study did not differentiate between perceptions of support from female and male adolescents or examine a dating-relationship problem specifically.

A possible explanation for the finding in the present study is that males do not perceive the receipt of instrumental support from their best male friend as an overly positive or helpful experience when faced with a dating problem. This may influence them in such a way that when they expect instrumental support from their best male

friends they are not as willing to seek help from either gender. Further, for adolescent males, expecting to receive instrumental support from their best male friends may lead them to expect this type of support from others as well, which could impact their desire to seek, and thus, receive instrumental support. This is an interesting finding in that the type of support expected from male friends is important in terms of males' willingness to seek help from friends of both genders.

Sullivan and colleagues (2002) found that relational features, such as trust, warmth, and care are often present in friendships with females, and that these features can increase adolescents' expectations of receiving nurturance from their friends. Expecting nurturance from friends can lead to a greater willingness to select them as helpers. It is possible that this expectation of nurturance from female friends increases adolescents' desire to turn to them for support over their male friends. In addition, this type of support may provide males with the opportunity to develop their friendships with female friends as they may not feel threatened to disclose their problems. The opportunity to develop relationships was found to be a key aspect of seeking help from friends (Sullivan et al.). Similarly, adolescent females may be more likely to demonstrate the helper qualities (i.e., non-judgmental) that are consistent with the definition of emotional support, and thus, just having an expectation of receiving any support from females is related to greater willingness to seek help from other female friends for individuals of both genders. Regardless of their expectation of the type of support, adolescents may expect to receive nurturance from their female friends. On the other hand, when males expect instrumental support from their male friends they may not expect nurturance to be present. As a result, they might feel more threatened when disclosing their problems which would affect their

willingness to seek help. It is also possible that assistance in solving a dating problem is not what males would like from their male friends, given a choice, but that it is most often the type of support that male friends provide.

As stated previously, the findings do not suggest that males who expect to receive instrumental support from their best male friends are not willing to seek help from their female and male friends. Instead the findings suggest that, for males, the expectation of receiving instrumental support from their female friends, as opposed to their male friends, has a greater impact on their willingness to seek help from both their female friends and their male friends. Findings from the present study suggest that expectation of support is an important factor in adolescents' willingness to seek help from female friends and from male friends. Further examination into how adolescents' expectations of social support impact their willingness to seek help from members of one's social network is necessary.

Adolescents' Willingness to Seek Help from their Same-Sex and Other-Sex Friends

Descriptive results of the present study indicated that, on average, adolescents were willing to seek help from both female friends and male friends between *sometimes* and *often*. Further, mean willingness scores illustrated a preference to seek help from female friends compared to male friends for individuals of both genders. This is consistent with the finding that over three quarters of adolescents (76.9%) reported that they would rather speak with a female friend than a male friend about a problem. This preference for seeking help from female friends may reflect an expectation for females to provide assistance in a way that is stereotypically appropriate for their gender roles (e.g., being nurturing, a good listener, etc.). Perhaps this is the type of support that adolescents

desire when seeking help for a dating-relationship problem (Hetherington & Stoppard, 2002; Sullivan et al., 2002).

Results which indicated that adolescents are willing to seek help from their female and male friends, at least *sometimes*, are consistent with previous studies that suggest that adolescents prefer to seek help from informal sources of support such as friends, than formal sources of support, such as counselors (Boldero & Fallon, 1995; Raviv, Sills, Raviv, & Wilansky, 2000). However, while other studies have reported that many adolescents, males in particular, are not seeking help (i.e., Bal et al., 2003; Boldero & Fallon; Sears et al., 2005), the present study suggests that adolescents are quite willing to seek help. For example, of the individuals who reported having experienced a dating-relationship problem within the past six months, 90.9% reported having spoken to someone about the problem. In addition, while previous research suggests that females are more willing and more likely to seek help (e.g., Ciarrochi & Deane, 2001; Dubow et al., 1990; Raviv et al.; Simmering & Sears, 2006), the ANOVA results from the present study suggested that females and males were similar in their willingness to seek help for a dating-relationship problem from their female friends.

There are a number of possibilities that could explain this inconsistency with past research. One possibility is that both female and male adolescents are recognizing help seeking from their female friends as an adaptive method of coping within which they are willing to engage. Another possibility is that a gender difference was not detected as a result of a low number of males in the sample. Alternatively, it may be that this similarity in willingness to seek help from female friends by gender is a function of the type of problem (i.e., a dating-relationship problem) that the present study investigated.

Descriptive results of the present study suggested that a number of adolescents (60.3%) experienced a dating problem within the past six months. This is consistent with previous studies that have found that interpersonal problems, such as dating problems, are commonly experienced, and that adolescents are more likely to seek help for these types of problems than, for example, family problems or personal problems (Boldero & Fallon, 1995; Dubow et al., 1990; Grover & Nangle, 2003; Sullivan et al., 2002). Other research suggests that helper selection varies as a function of the type of problem (Sears, 2004; Wintre et al., 1988). It is possible that, for a dating-relationship problem, females and males are actually quite willing to turn to a female friend for assistance. In the focus-group study conducted by Sears and colleagues (2005), adolescent males reported being more willing to turn to others for help with a specific problem, such as a dating problem. The gender differences reported in previous research could also be the result of including friends as a general group without making the distinction between female friends and male friends. It is possible that measuring willingness to seek help from female friends, as distinguished from willingness to seek help from male friends, illustrates a more similar pattern of willingness to seek help from female friends across gender than willingness to seek help from male friends.

The present study also found that adolescents who had previously sought help for a dating problem were more willing to do so from their female friends than adolescents who had not. This suggests that the experience of seeking help from a female friend was helpful and that it may increase adolescents' willingness to seek help from their female friends, especially if this experience was positive. This finding has clinical relevance in terms of promoting the use of this method of coping. If male and female adolescents are

encouraged to seek help from their female friends, even once, they may be more willing to do so again in the future. Further, if adolescents perceive seeking help from informal sources to be helpful, it may be more likely and more feasible for them to engage in this method of coping, as opposed to seeking help from professionals. This may lead them to engage in other adaptive forms of coping, since adolescents who actively seek help are more likely to do so (Cowie et al., 2002).

However, the results also indicated that while females who had previously sought help for a dating problem were more willing to do so from their male friends, males who had previously sought help for a dating problem were actually less willing to seek help from their male friends. It is possible that males who previously sought help had a negative experience, which negatively impacted their willingness to seek help again from their male friends. It is interesting to note this discrepancy in adolescent males' willingness to seek help from their female friends as opposed to their male friends. The findings seem to reflect males' preferences for seeking help for a dating-relationship problem from their female friends. This preference may be related to the type of support that is expected from females or that females tend to provide, or specific helper qualities that are exhibited more often from female friends. In sum, males may not receive the type of support that they desire from their male friends for a dating-relationship problem. Deeper examination into adolescent males' seeming preference for seeking assistance from female friends compared to male friends is needed to gain a better understanding of this issue. Research in this area is clinically relevant as it may be beneficial and practical to develop interventions to educate adolescents about how to help their friends and how to ask their friends for the type of support that they would like for their particular

problem. This may reduce the risk of not receiving the desired type of support or help. Promoting help seeking from informal sources of support may increase the likelihood of positive help-seeking experiences, and in turn, more adolescents may engage in this method of coping.

Again, it is important to note that the variation in adolescents' willingness to seek help in the present study may be a function of the type of problem (dating problem) and the sources of support (female friends and male friends) that were included. It is possible that adolescents would not demonstrate the same willingness to seek help for other types of problems or from other sources of support. Given that the majority of adolescents experience interpersonal problems, report finding these problems to be distressing, and frequently turn to their peers for help it is likely that the present study represents a relatively normative view of adolescent help seeking. However, future research should consider other types of problems and other informal sources of support to gain a deeper understanding of normative help-seeking behaviours during adolescence. In addition, to clarify why males who previously sought help were less willing to seek help from their male friends in the future, research should investigate their previous help-seeking experiences in more detail, such as, from whom help was sought and what type of support was provided.

*Adolescents' Perceptions of the Most and Least Helpful Aspects of Seeking Help from
Female Friends and Male Friends*

One focus of the present study that has not been examined in previous research is identifying which aspects of adolescents' most recent help-seeking experiences are considered the most and the least helpful. Overall, the results of the present study

suggested that adolescents perceived emotional support from their female friends as more helpful than instrumental support. These results are in line with the findings that expectations of emotional support are related to greater willingness to seek help from female friends. It seems that this type of support is desired for a dating-relationship problem and that adolescents expect to receive emotional support from their female friends. Perhaps when adolescents experience dating-relationship problems they prefer to have their female friends listen to them without expressing judgment, as opposed to being provided with instrumental support (e.g., provided with advice). Further, because these types of problems often involve other individuals (i.e., a dating partner), it may be difficult for adolescents to seek help in the future if they do not receive what they consider to be helpful advice. It may be beneficial to educate adolescents in providing emotional support to their peers.

Results of the present study also suggested that adolescents perceived emotional support from their male friends as more helpful than instrumental support; however, these findings were less clear once separated by gender. It may be that adolescents do find it helpful to receive emotional support from their male friends, but they may not actively seek or expect to receive this type of support from their male friends. Another possibility is that receiving emotional support from males does not fit with their stereotypical gender role for males at this stage, and as a result, males may not often provide emotional support to their friends when they are approached for assistance. Again, these findings reflect adolescents' strong preference for receiving emotional support as opposed to instrumental support from their female friends. Adolescents' preferences for seeking help from their male friends were not as clearly identified. Interestingly, although the results

suggested that both females and males preferred emotional support to instrumental support from their female friends, males reported finding the most helpful aspect of their previous help-seeking experience from a female friend to be *receiving advice* – a form of instrumental support. It may be that as stated earlier, it is not the actual form of assistance that is provided, but the specific helper qualities that make the experience positive or negative. It is possible that when males seek help from their female friends, that they consider either type of support to be helpful and, generally speaking, that they perceive the experience as positive. It is also possible that, for a dating problem in particular, males see their female friends as experts because of their gender and are therefore more willing to seek help from them. Perhaps for adolescent males the type of received support from their female friends is not the most salient factor in determining whether this experience was a positive one.

On the other hand, females selected *getting my feelings out* as the most helpful aspect of their previous help-seeking experience from a female friend, which is an aspect of emotional support. This finding is consistent with previous research that has suggested that adolescents may turn to their same-sex friends or other-sex friends for different types of support or what they feel that the need to cope with the specific problem. For example, adolescent females may turn to their female friends for nurturance or their male friends so that they can “vent” about their problem (Sears et al., 2005; Sullivan et al., 2002). In addition, adolescents have identified disclosure and support as important characteristics of their friendships with female friends (Hetherington & Stoppard, 2002). Therefore, regardless of the type of support that is provided, females from whom adolescents seek help may generally provide emotional support, even when offering advice or other forms

of instrumental support. Overall, both females and males seek help from their female friends most often, possibly to receive emotional support, whereas, they may seek help from males for the sake of receiving instrumental support because they generally expect to receive instrumental support from their male friends.

The modal response for the most helpful aspect of seeking help from male friends for both genders was *receiving advice*. It is possible that regardless of whether they would prefer to receive emotional support, which may be the case for females, they do not see this as a possibility when seeking help from male friends. A limitation of the present study is that it did not consider which types of support adolescents would *want* to receive for a dating problem from their female friends and male friends. Instead, the present study examined which aspects of their most recent help-seeking experience were considered to be the most helpful. If in many cases males only provided instrumental support, we would not be able to determine whether this truly was the desired form of support from male friends. Females identified *getting my feelings out* (emotional support) as the most helpful aspect of seeking help from their male friends following *receiving advice*.

An interesting finding of the present study is that adolescents' modal response for the least helpful aspect of support was *nothing*, which was selected by both genders. The finding that no aspect of support stood out as not being helpful is consistent with past research that identifies help seeking as an adaptive method of coping that adolescents perceive as helpful (Gourash, 1978; Hunter et al., 2004). Females selected *receiving advice* as the next most frequent response for the least helpful aspect of their recent help-seeking experience from their female friends, whereas, males' responses were relatively

even across the remaining selections. It seems that, while for most females there is nothing about their recent help-seeking experience that stands out as unhelpful, others do not want to receive advice from their female friends. This is interesting considering that *receiving advice* was also frequently selected by females as the most helpful aspect of their recent help-seeking experience. Perhaps a possible explanation for females' high nomination of *receiving advice* for both the most helpful and the least helpful aspects of their recent help-seeking experience is the result of females not receiving the type of advice that they wanted or were looking for, or perhaps the advice was not offered from their female friends in a way that was emotionally supportive. In terms of the least helpful aspect of females' recent help-seeking experience from males, it seems that following *nothing* there was no aspect of the experience that stood out as unhelpful for females. This suggests that, while some females may not want to receive advice from their female friends, they do not seem to mind receiving this type of assistance from their male friends.

The finding that there is no aspect of males' recent help-seeking experiences that they perceive as least helpful from both their female friends and male friends is interesting. This suggests that males, generally speaking, find the help-seeking experience to be helpful from individuals of both genders. However, we should bear in mind that promoting positive help-seeking experiences for adolescents is beneficial, as males who seek help from their male friends and have a negative experience may be less willing to do so again in the future. Again, it could be that characteristics of the actual helpers are very important in terms of whether the experience was considered positive. Perhaps the negative experience did not depend on the type of support proffered, but

instead depended on the characteristics of their helper. Although the results suggested that adolescents find emotional support to be more helpful than instrumental support for a dating-relationship problem, in particular from female friends, neither type of support was identified as less helpful than the other. In sum, the results of the present study provide support that most adolescents who seek help consider this experience to be helpful. Refer to Table 13 for a gender-specific synopsis of the findings from the present study.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

A number of limitations of the present study should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results. Firstly, the low number of males that participated in the study relative to the number of females may have impacted the results, in particular, the gender comparisons. There was also little variation in terms of ethnic breakdown, as the majority of the participants reported their ethnicity as Caucasian. This study should be replicated with individuals of different ethnicities and a more even distribution across genders to see if the results are consistent.

The majority of the participants were attending their first year of university; therefore, their responses may not be representative of individuals of the same age group who are not in school. It is possible that adolescents, and males in particular, who are in university are more willing to seek help than is typical. Further, because the age range of the individuals in the present study was so narrow and there appear to be developmental trends in help-seeking behaviours throughout adolescence, these results may not apply to different age groups. Adolescents' friendships also tend to increase in intimacy and quality as they grow older (Way & Greene, 2006), which may be reflected in more

Table 13.

Gender-Specific Synopsis of the Results

Variables	Females	Males
	Positive relations among:	Positive Relations among:
Expectations of Support and Willingness to Seek Help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations of emotional support from best female friends and willingness to seek help from female friends • Expectations of emotional support from best female friends and willingness to seek help from male friends • Expectations of emotional support from best male friends and willingness to seek help from male friends • Expectations of instrumental support from best female friends and willingness to seek help from female friends • Expectations of instrumental support from best male friends and willingness to seek help from female friends • Expectations of instrumental support from best male friends and willingness to seek help from male friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations of emotional support from best female friends and willingness to seek help from female friends • Expectations of emotional support from best male friends and willingness to seek help from male friends • Expectations of instrumental support from best female friends and willingness to seek help from female friends • Expectations of instrumental support from best male friends and willingness to seek help from male friends

(table continues)

Table 13. (continued)

Variables	Females	Males
Gender, Previous Help Seeking, and Willingness to Seek Help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adolescents who previously sought help for a dating problem were more willing to seek help for this type of problem from their female friends • Females who previously sought help for a dating problem were more willing to seek help for this type of problem from their male friends than females who had not 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adolescents who previously sought help for a dating problem were more willing to seek help for this type of problem from their female friends • Males who previously sought help for a dating problem were less willing to seek help for this type of problem from their male friends than males who had not
Modal Response for the Most Helpful Aspect of Seeking Help from Female Friends	• “Getting my feelings Out”	• “Receiving Advice”
Modal Response for the Most Helpful Aspect of Seeking Help from Male Friends	• “Receiving Advice”	• “Receiving Advice”
Modal Response for the Least Helpful Aspect of Seeking Help from Female Friends	• “Nothing”	• “Nothing”
Modal Response for the Least Helpful Aspect of Seeking Help from Male Friends	• “Nothing”	• “Nothing”

willingness to seek help from friends than for other age groups. It may be useful to replicate this study with adolescents of different ages to see whether the results are comparable. It is expected that there would be variation in adolescents' willingness to seek help across the period of adolescence as an increasing focus is placed on friends and dating partners with age.

Another limitation of the present study is that only one type of problem was considered. It could be that adolescents' expectations of social support and their willingness to seek help differ depending on the type of problem with which they are faced. Examining other types of problems would also allow comparisons of the perceived severity of the problems, and how this impacts adolescents' help-seeking perceptions and behaviours. Similarly, the present study only examined adolescent help seeking from female friends and male friends and did not consider additional sources of support, such as parents, siblings, or dating partners. This would also provide information about the extent to which adolescents' perceptions of social support and their willingness to seek help differs as a result of the type of problem and the source of support.

Another limitation of the present study is that it did not take into account specific helper qualities that may impact adolescents' perceptions of social support and their willingness to seek help. It is possible that there are specific helper qualities that are valued by adolescents of this age group, and that these may act as salient factors in adolescent help seeking. These specific helper qualities may be related to adolescents' perceptions of whether their help-seeking experiences are helpful, and may be more influential than the type of support, type of problem, or source of support. Investigation of specific helper qualities that are perceived as helpful or not helpful and influence the

overall help-seeking experience is needed to better understand this process. For example, adolescents' preference for receiving emotional support from their female friends may be related to helper qualities (i.e., nurturance) that are more commonly demonstrated by females as they fit with females' stereotypical gender roles.

Another area of interest that was not considered in the present study is whether there are differences in adolescents' perceptions of social support and their willingness to seek help based on their perceived locus of control. On average, the participants in the present study demonstrated a more internal locus of control. When adolescents adopt a more internal locus of control, they have a greater sense of responsibility and control over their problems, which may impact their help-seeking behaviours (Schonert-Reichl & Muller, 1996). It would be interesting to compare adolescents who are identified as having a more internal locus of control and adolescents who are identified as having a more external locus of control to see whether this impacts their willingness to seek help. For example, are individuals with a more external locus of control less willing to seek help for a specific type of problem as a result of feeling like there is little point in actively trying to cope with their problems or change their situations?

Finally, more research is needed to determine which aspects of support are considered helpful as well as the barriers that prevent adolescents from seeking help. It is possible that not perceiving emotional support from a potential helper may act as a help-seeking barrier for adolescents. This information can be used to gain a better understanding of the specific factors that contribute to adolescents' willingness to seek help for problems so that we can develop strategies to promote the use of this coping method and to increase the likelihood for these experiences to be positive. The findings

from the present study contribute to our understanding of adolescent help seeking and should be used to promote help seeking among adolescents.

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APPENDIX A: Informed Consent

Title of Study: Adolescents' Perceptions of Social Support and their Willingness to Seek Help for a Dating Problem from Same-Sex and Other-Sex Friends.

You are invited to participate in a Master's thesis research study conducted by Mary Simmering and her supervisor Dr. Patti Fritz from the Psychology Department at the University of Windsor. The Research Ethics Board (REB) at the University of Windsor has given permission for this research study to take place.

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, or would like any additional information, please contact Mary Simmering through email at simmeri@uwindsor.ca, or Dr. Patti Fritz through email (pfritz@uwindsor.ca) or by telephone (519-253-3000, ext. 3707).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to find out more about the type of support students receive from their friends, about students' experiences of talking with their friends about their problems, and the aspects of these experiences that students find to be the most and the least helpful.

PROCEDURES

If you agree to take part in the online study, you will be asked to fill out an online survey about the support you receive from friends, help-seeking behaviours, and previous experiences with problems. You will complete the questionnaires online at the location and time of your choice and will take approximately 10 – 20 minutes to complete. All of your answers will be kept private and will not be seen by your parents, teachers, or other students, and your names will not show up in the results of the study.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There is a possibility that you may feel embarrassed or uncomfortable about some of the questions you will read in the survey. You do not have to answer any questions in the survey that you do not want to answer, and you can stop participating in the study at any time without penalty.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

Taking part in this study will help us learn more about some of the ways that students deal with their problems and some of the things they find most and least helpful when they talk to their friends. We want to learn more about how students feel about these experiences so that we can better understand their point of view.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

Students who participate in this research study will not receive payment; however, for those who choose, their names will be entered into a draw to win an iPod.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All of the information that you fill out in the survey will be kept confidential and will only be seen by researchers directly involved with the study. The survey responses will be identified using a code number, not names. Once the surveys have been submitted, your responses will not

be attached to your name. If you would like to be entered into the draw for the iPod, your name will be separated from your survey and stored in a secure place.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can decide whether or not you wish to participate in this study. If you choose to volunteer for this research study, you may stop participating at any time without any consequences and you may refuse to respond to any items in the survey that you do not wish to answer and still remain in the study. Volunteering for this study or deciding not to fill out all of the questionnaires will not change your school grades in any way. The researcher may withdraw you from this research study if there are circumstances in which this would be necessary.

FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE SUBJECTS

When this research study is finished, we will write a summary of the study results that you can access by visiting the website:

<http://web4.uwindsor.ca/units/researchEthicsBoard/studyresultforms.nsf/VisitorView?OpenForm>.
The results are expected to be available by December 2007.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw consent for participation at any time for any reason without consequence and may refuse to answer any items in the survey. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in our study, please contact: Linda Bunn, the Research Ethics Coordinator at the University of Windsor, through email (lbunn@uwindsor.ca) or by telephone (519-253-3000, ext. 3916).

By clicking "I agree" at the bottom of this page, I am stating that I have read and understood the information above and agree to participate in this survey study.

SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

There is a possibility that the results from this study will be used in future research.

If so, do you give consent for the subsequent use of the data from this study? Yes No

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw consent for participation at any time for any reason without consequence and may refuse to answer any items in the survey. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in our study, please contact: Linda Bunn, the Research Ethics Coordinator at the University of Windsor, through email () or by telephone (519-253-3000, ext. 3916).

By clicking "I agree" at the bottom of this page, I am stating that I have read and understood the information above and agree to participate in this survey study.

APPENDIX B: Information Sheet

Because we have learned that teenagers sometimes experience different problems, it is interesting for parents, teachers, professionals, and teens themselves to find out more about how they deal with these problems. Past research has suggested that teenagers value their friendships and lean on their friends when they have problems. The survey you filled out will help us learn more about the support teenagers get from their friends when they have problems.

We hope that this research will give us a better understanding of what you go through when you have problems, how you deal with these problems, and what role your friends play in making this experience better or worse for you. We would like to thank you for participating in our study today and for helping us find out more about this topic.

Please do not hesitate to contact me () or my supervisor, Dr. Patti Fritz () if you have any additional questions or concerns or if you would like a hard copy of this information sheet.

Once this study is completed, you will be able to access a report on the findings through this website:
<http://web4.uwindsor.ca/units/researchEthicsBoard/studyresultforms.nsf/VisitorView?OpenForm>.

Sometimes when teenagers have questions or problems they may not know who to talk to or where to get help. We have included a list of services that are available to teenagers in your area. If you, a friend, or a family member have questions, would like someone to talk to, or need help with a problem, one of these resources may be able to help.

Teen Health Centre (THC)
 1585 Ouellette Ave.
 Windsor, ON N8X 1K5
 Tel: (519) 253-8481

Windsor Regional Children's Centre (RCC)
 3901 Connaught St.
 Windsor, ON N9C 4H4
 Tel: (519) 257-5212

Bulimia Anorexia Nervosa Association (BANA)
 2109 Ottawa Street, Suite 400
 Windsor, ON N8Y 1R8
 Tel: (519) 969-2112

Sexual Assault Crisis Centre of Essex County (24 hours)
 Email:
 Tel: (519) 253-9667

Essex Youth Centre
 242 Talbot Street North
 Essex, ON N8M 2E1
 Tel: (519) 776-9000

Amherstburg Community Services (ACS)
 400 Sandwich St. S, Unit 31
 Amherstburg, ON N9V 3L4
 Tel: (519) 736-5471

Belle River & District Community Information Centre
 Tel: (519) 728-1435

Maryvale Adolescent & Family Services
 3640 Wells Street, Windsor, ON
 Tel: (519) 258-0484

Kids Help Phone
 National Toll-Free hotline for children and youth. Tel: 1-800-668-6868

Windsor-Essex Youth Line
 Tel: (519) 973-7671

Lesbian Gay Bi Youth Line
Tel: 1-800-268-YOUTH
(Can call from anywhere in Ontario)

Drouillard Place Youth Programs
1102 Drouillard Rd.
Windsor, ON N8Y 2R1
Tel: (519) 253-1073; (519) 253-4446

Distress Centre of Windsor-Essex County
Crisis Phone: (519) 256-5000
For persons in distress

AL-ANON/ALATEEN Family Groups
Windsor/Essex County
After Hours/Crisis Phone: Answering service
Tel: (519) 252-8474
241 Lacasse Blvd
Tecumseh, ON N8N 2B7

**The Youth & Family Resource Network of
Essex County**
1 Main Street West, Unit 7
Kingsville, ON, N9Y 1H2
Tel: (519) 733-8983

Windsor-Essex County Family YMCA
500 Victoria Ave.
Windsor, ON N9A 4M8
Tel: (519) 256-7330

Youth Employment Services
547 Victoria Avenue
Windsor, ON N9A 4N1
Tel: (519) 253-4661

**Windsor-Essex County Health Unit
Parenting Hotline & Family Health**
Tel: (519) 258-2146, ext. 1350

VITA AUCTORIS

Mary Simmering was born in 1982 in Ottawa, Ontario. She graduated from Albert College in 2001 and obtained a B.A. in Psychology (Honour's) from the University of New Brunswick in 2005. She is currently a candidate for the Master of Arts degree in Child-Clinical Psychology at the University of Windsor and hopes to graduate in June 2008.