ADOLESCENT PERCEPTIONS OF
HELD-INTENDED ACTS
OF PEER HELPERS

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Abstract

Adolescent perceptions of the counsellor effectiveness of peer helpers were examined by studying perceptions of videotaped simulated interviews. The subjects were 143 grade eleven students. The effects of training (trained versus untrained) and role label (friend versus peer counsellor) were tested. Counsellor effectiveness was assessed using the following measures: *Counselor Rating Form* (Barak & LaCrosse, 1975), *Tape Assisted Recall Categories of Help-Intended Acts* (Elliot, 1979), and *Helpfulness* (Cooker & Cherchia, 1976) and standardized interviews. Significant results for the effect of training were found on the following five variables: understanding ($p < .001$), attractiveness ($p < .004$), reassuring ($p < .005$), gathering information ($p < .001$), and guiding ($p < .001$). Data indicates that adolescents perceive trained peer helpers as more facilitative than untrained helpers, supporting the training and use of adolescent peer counsellors.

Résumé

A partir d'enregistrements magnétoscopiques d'entrevues simulées, cette recherche consiste à étudier les perceptions qu'ont les adolescents de l'efficacité en counselling d'aidants de leur âge. Les sujets sont des étudiants de 11e année (N = 143). Les analyses tiennent compte des effets de la formation (conseillers formés *versus* non formés) et du rôle assumé (ami *versus* conseiller du même âge). Le *Counselor Rating Form*, (Barak & Lacrosse, 1975) le *Tape Assisted Recall Categories of Help-Intended Acts*, (Elliot, 1979) le *Helpfulness* (Cooker & Cherchia) et des entrevues standardisées servent à évaluer l'efficacité du conseiller. L'effet de la formation s'avère significatif en rapport avec les cinq variables suivantes: compréhension ($p < .001$), attrait ($p < .004$), le fait de réassurer ($p < .005$), de recueillir de l'information ($p < .001$) et de guider ($p < .001$). Les données révèlent que les adolescents perçoivent les aidants de leur âge qui ont reçu une formation comme plus efficaces que ceux qui n'ont pas été formés et, par conséquent, témoignent du bien fondé de former des conseillers adolescents et de recourir à leurs services.

Current literature on peer counselling supports the use of peer counsellors in secondary schools to provide an outreach counselling service and support system for adolescents attending school (Carr, 1981, Note 1; Buck,

1977; Kaplan, 1978, Note 6; Rockwell, 1979). The benefits which have been attributed to the implementation of a peer counselling program include decreased absenteeism, drop-out rate, vandalism (Johnson, 1978), improved attitudes towards learning and school (Rapp, 1978), support for students experiencing difficulty who would not usually visit the school counsellor (Carr, 1980; Sparks, 1977), and preventive education and intervention to assist adolescents in coping with developmental concerns such as loneliness, friendships, sexuality, drugs, drinking, career choice, family and other school concerns. Carr, McDowell and McKee (1981; Note 2), Saunders

(1982; Note 8) and Varenhorst (1974) reported that peer counsellors enhance the existing counselling services for students by intervening to provide the school population with trained helpful peers who are considered to be approachable by other adolescents.

The benefits and the increasing number of peer counselling programs are frequently reported in current literature, and yet there has been no research to investigate adolescent perceptions of trained peer helpers. The purpose of this study was to test the following assumptions on which adolescent peer counselling is built: (a) trained peer counsellors are perceived as attractive and trustworthy helpers, (b) trained age mates are perceived as effective helpers, and (c) the help-intended communications of trained peer counsellors are perceived as facilitative. It has been argued that it is the helping process as the client understands and experiences it which results in client growth and change (Rogers, 1957). In order to understand the therapeutic process from the adolescent's point of view the adolescent perceptions of peer helpers were examined in this study.

The success of peer counselling lies not only in the approachability of the peer counsellor but also in the quality of the relationship between the help-seeker and the peer counsellor. One assumption of peer counselling is that by training adolescents to use the skills of empathy, warmth and respect the probability increases that the peer counselling relationship will be viewed as effective by the adolescent help-seeker. The effective helper is perceived by the help-seeker as expert, attractive and trustworthy (Egan, 1975). It is particularly important to adolescents who are seeking help that trust and security are present when they are discussing inner thoughts and feelings (Conger, 1977). Adolescent peer counsellors are trained to use their facilitative skills of empathy, warmth, genuineness and unconditional regard to establish a relationship of openness, trust and caring. However, little is known about how adolescents perceive this helping relationship between an adolescent help-seeker and a peer counsellor.

A second assumption of adolescent peer counselling is that an adolescent experiencing frustration will generally seek out a friend or peer to discuss this personal concern. Recent research indicates that adolescents will disclose a personal concern to friends or peers and not usually to a school counsellor (Sparks, 1977; Swager, 1981; Carr & Saunders, 1980, Note 3).

Adolescents often cultivate relationships which offer a safe climate in which the intense emotions associated with adolescent development can be freely disclosed and discharged providing a unique opportunity for growth which cannot be provided by adults (Conger, 1977). High school students describe a friend "as a person who listens, helps and communicates in depth" (Carr, 1981; Note 1), which also characterizes the qualities of a trained peer counsellor. However, friendship communications tend to differ somewhat from helping relationships (Whalen & Flowers, 1977). Therefore, there is a need to examine (a) if adolescents do perceive differences between the helping communications of a friend and those of a trained peer counsellor, and (b) how do adolescents perceive friends and peer counsellors as helpers.

A third assumption of adolescent peer counselling is that by training age mates in the skills of empathy, warmth and respect the probability increases that communication between peers will be perceived as facilitative. The helper engaged in facilitative communication focuses on the help-seeker's thoughts and feelings, rather than on the presented problem (Carkhuff, 1969; Carkhuff & Berenson, 1977; Egan, 1975). Peer counsellors are trained not to give advice but to facilitate self-exploration mainly through the use of empathic listening. The helper is effective if the empathic responses are interchangeable in affect and meaning with those of the help-seeker (Carkhuff, 1969). A peer counsellor uses reflecting listening skills to help a troubled friend or acquaintance express and explore their emotions, doubts and anxieties. Discussions with friends also seem to help adolescents deal with their own emotions and concerns (Conger, 1977). While some adolescent friendships may be naturally facilitative, recent research shows that the making and keeping of friends is a major concern for high school students (Carr, 1981; Note 1). Since adolescent friendships are often in a state of flux, there is a definite need for trained peer helpers. Although it is clear that adolescents can benefit from peer relationship and that there is an intrinsic attractiveness to discuss personal concerns with an age mate, it is not clear how adolescents view the helping skills used by a trained peer counsellor.

The intention of this study is to provide counsellors, teachers, and peer counsellors with pertinent information on how adolescents view the helping process. Adolescent perceptions of friends as helpers were compared

to adolescent perceptions of peer counsellors as helpers. The perceptions of the help-intended communications of trained peer counsellors were compared to the perceptions of untrained peer helpers. This research clarified some aspects of the helping process between adolescent friends and peers and has provided feedback on the use of trained adolescent peer counsellors.

Method

Subjects

The students used as helpers in the simulated interviews on video tape were randomly selected from an existing group of nine trained peer counsellors (2 male, 7 female). The two female and two male peer counsellors were randomly selected and assigned to the coached clients. The untrained helpers were randomly selected from a group of students who expressed an interest in joining the peer counselling program but had received no training.

Eight clients were randomly selected from a group of volunteers from a grade eleven psychology class at the same high school. Coached clients were randomly assigned to helpers just prior to the filming. One hundred and forty-three students from a second local high school were the adolescent raters.

Procedure

The adolescent perceptions of the help-intended communications of peer helpers were examined by having potential clients view and give their perceptions of simulated helping interviews. Classroom groups of raters were randomly assigned to each of the four conditions. The subjects viewed and rated the videotape after being given the instructions that the helper was either (a) a friend, or (b) a peer counsellor. The subjects did not know whether the helpers were trained or not. They were however given the instructions that the helper was a "friend" or a "peer counsellor".

The first measure administered was the Counsellor Rating Form which the subjects rated after each helping episode. The standardized Tape Assisted Recall method was used after the third and fourth episode to guide the subjects in describing his or her perceptions of the helper's communication. Following each tape assisted recall, the subject was asked to rate on a 9-point Likert scale

the helpers of excerpts 4 and 5, the degree of helpfulness. Finally, a random sample of 6 subjects from the four conditions received a structured interview on their perceptions of the help-intended communications. These interviews provided a sample of subjects' perceptions for descriptive purposes.

Design

The study examined the influence of the two factors, training (untrained peer counsellor versus trained peer counsellor) and the label assigned ("friend" versus "peer counsellor") on adolescents' perceptions of peer helpers. The relationships between perceived counsellor effectiveness and training and labelling of peer helpers, were tested.

Mean scores between groups were tested on the three measures of perceived counsellor effectiveness: (a) subjects' ratings of helper/counsellor expertness, attractiveness and trustworthiness, (b) subjects' descriptions of perceived intentions of the helper's communication behaviors and (c) subjects' ratings of helpfulness. Furthermore, a random sample of subjects' descriptive statements of perceived helper/counsellor behavior in a structured interview were compared on each of the four conditions.

The first independent variable was tested by assigning the role label of "friend" or "peer counsellor" to the peer helper prior to the subjects' assessment. The subjects were asked to rate the perceived effectiveness of a peer helper labelled either "friend" or "peer counsellor" helping in an interview with a troubled student. The second independent variable, training, was tested by assigning one-half of the viewers to segments of tapes showing trained peer counsellors who had received thirty hours of training in the communication skills of attending, empathy, questioning, self-disclosure, feedback, and decision-making. The other half viewed tapes showing peer helpers who were interested in peer counselling training but had received no formal communication training.

Data Collection

The data from the first three measures were collected from each group in one hour of class time. Immediately following the rating of the videotape, a random sample of subjects was interviewed for fifteen minutes. Equivalent situations for all groups were maintained by (a) having the experimenter administer the

measures to all groups, (b) conducting the study in the subject's school, and (c) standardizing the basic instructions to each group.

Instrumentation

Counsellor Rating Form. The Rating Form was used to identify the subjects' perceptions of the effectiveness of peer helpers. One-half of the items from the original measure were used because of the time constraints involved in using classroom time. Six items from each of the three dimensions were randomly selected to form and 18-item measure.

The Rating Form was developed by Barak and LaCrosse (1975), based on Strong's (1968) hypothesis concerning the existence of three perceived dimensions of counsellor behavior: expertness, trustworthiness and attractiveness. The original scale consists of 36 items which present bi-polar descriptors on a 7-point response scale. Each dimension contains 12 items with a score range from 12 to 84. The reliability of the scales was assessed by the split-half method. The reliability coefficients for the scales across counsellors were .874 for expertness, .850 for attractiveness, and .908 for trustworthiness (LaCrosse & Barak, 1976).

Tape Assisted Recall. This standardized recall procedure was used to assist their perceptions of the third and fourth helpers. The procedure involved replaying the videotape excerpts to the groups of subjects. The videotape was stopped at predetermined helper responses and the subjects were asked, "What do you think the helper was trying to do in saying that?" The subjects wrote their responses on a standardized form.

The students' descriptions of perceived intentions were assigned according to Elliott's descriptions (1977; Note 4 & 5) of the following categories: (a) guiding, (b) reassuring, (c) understanding, (d) explaining, (e) information, (f) using self.

The inter-rater reliability of the scoring of categories in this study was established by computing Pearson product-moment correlations for the ratings assigned to fifty-one subjects by two independent judges. All six coefficients are statistically significant, $p <$ .001, and in excess of .89. It was concluded that the rating method was reliable.

Perceived Helpfulness Scale. This 9-point descriptive scale is similar to that used by Carkhuff (1969) to rate the effectiveness of communication in individuals. This scale was designed by Cooker and Cherchia (1976) for high school students to rate their peer group facilitators. Cooker and Cherchia reported a reliability correlation coefficient of .68 between 5 expert judges ratings and 60 peer ratings.

Structured Interview. A random sample of 24 subjects participated individually in structured interviews which followed the formal outlined by Good (1972). Three male and three female students from each of the four conditions were interviewed for ten minutes. These interviews were audiotaped to provide additional information on adolescent perceptions of peer helpers that might otherwise have been missed by the paper and pencil measures.

Results

Data Analysis

The data from the four different conditions were treated in a four-way factorial design. The four factors considered were training (untrained versus trained), label assigned ("friend" versus "peer counsellor"), gender of the subject (male versus female rater) and membership of subject group. A four-way analysis of variance was conducted on the scores of the following eleven measures: 3 Counsellor Rating Scales (trustworthiness, expertness, attractiveness); 6 Recall Categories (understanding, reassuring, gathering information, guiding, explaining, using the self); and 2 Helpfulness scales. Descriptive phrases from the interview were compared to analyse the subjects' perceptions in each of the four conditions.

Effect of Training

The first research question was concerned with whether or not adolescent raters would discern differences in counsellor behavior between the trained and untrained helpers. It was hypothesized that the trained peer counsellors would receive higher ratings of counsellor effectiveness on each of the counsellor behaviors measured by the dependent variables.

Significant mean differences between the trained and untrained groups were found in the expected direction on five out of the eleven dependent variables. These significant differences between the mean scores of the two

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groups occurred on the following five dependent variables: attractiveness, $F(3,139) = 8.37$, $p < .004$ (Table 1); understanding, $F(3,139) = 102.5$, $p < .001$ (Table 2); reassuring, $F(3,139) = 8.4$, $p < .005$ (Table 2); guiding, $F(3,139) = 292.7$, $p < .001$ (Table 3) and gathering information, $F(3,139) = 20.6$ $p < .001$ (Table 2).

Table 1

Mean Ratings of Peer Helpers on the Counselor Rating Form

Subscale	Group	Rater's Gender	PC*	N	F*	N	Total	N
Expertness	Trained	M	133.5	18	115.1	15		
		F	130.3	17	118.7	16	124.9	66
	Untrained	M	121.4	17	115.4	23		
		F	126.0	17	126.6	20	121.7	77
	Total		127.9	69	119.0	74		
Trustworthiness	Trained	M	131.4	18	118.0	15		
		F	131.7	17	132.3	16	128.6	66
	Untrained	M	125.4	17	119.8	23		
		F	130.4	17	132.2	20	126.3	77
	Total		129.7	69	125.3	74		
Attractiveness	Trained	M	131.6	18	118.4	15		
		F	131.3	17	133.1	16	128.9	66
	Untrained	M	118.8	17	116.0	23		
		F	124.6	17	125.7	20	120.8	77
	Total		126.7	69	122.6	74		

*PC = Peer Counsellor; F = Friend.

Table 2

Mean Percentage Ratings of Peer Helpers on Tape Assisted Recall Categories: Understanding, Reassuring, Gathering Information

Subscale	Group	Rater's Gender	PC*	N	F*	N	Total	N
Understanding	Trained	M	27.0	18	29.7	15		
		F	32.1	17	36.0	16	31.1	66
	Untrained	M	2.6	17	5.7	23		
		F	9.5	17	7.5	20	6.3	77
	Total		17.9	69	17.3	74		
Reassuring	Trained	M	17.4	18	15.7	15		
		F	15.0	17	14.6	16	15.7	66
	Untrained	M	8.6	17	10.9	23		
		F	7.1	17	11.3	20	9.8	77
	Total		12.1	69	12.9	74		
Gathering Information	Trained	M	8.8	18	11.9	15		
		F	11.6	17	11.7	16	11.0	66
	Untrained	M	4.5	17	3.0	23		
		F	4.0	17	2.9	20	3.5	77
	Total		7.3	69	6.6	74		

*PC = Peer Counsellor; F = Friend.

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Table 3

Mean Percentage Ratings of Peer Helpers on Tape Assisted Recall Categories:
Guiding, Explaining, Using The Self

Subscale	Group	Rater's Gender	PC*	N	Label F*	N	Total	N
Guiding	Trained	M	19.4	18	23.2	15		
		F	16.6	17	13.0	16	18.0	66
	Untrained	M	59.2	17	64.0	23		
		F	59.1	17	58.4	20	60.5	77
	Total		38.8	69	43.7	74		
Explaining	Trained	M	20.0	18	10.3	15		
		F	11.3	17	9.1	16	12.9	66
	Untrained	M	11.4	17	8.7	23		
		F	13.9	17	11.0	20	11.0	77
	Total		14.2	69	9.7	74		
Using The Self	Trained	M	2.9	18	6.7	15		
		F	3.5	17	7.2	16	4.9	66
	Untrained	M	7.4	17	6.8	23		
		F	8.3	17	5.6	20	6.9	77
	Total		5.5	69	6.5	74		

*PC = Peer Counsellor; F = Friend.

A significant mean difference occurred on the variable of helpfulness of the third excerpt; however, this result was not replicated on the rating of the fourth excerpt. There were no significant mean differences between the trained and untrained groups on the following five dependent variables: trustworthiness and expertness (Table 1); explaining (Table 3), the helpfulness rating of the fourth excerpt (Table 4) and using the self (Table 3). The effect of training interacted significantly with labelling condition in the perceptions of expertness and with gender on the rating of "explaining".

Table 4

Mean Ratings of Peer Helpers on Helpfulness Scale

Subscale	Group	Rater's Gender	PC*	N	Label F*	N	Total	N
Third Excerpt	Trained	M	3.1	18	2.6	15		
		F	2.7	17	13.0	16	2.7	66
	Untrained	M	3.7	17	3.7	23		
		F	3.9	17	3.8	20	3.8	77
	Total		3.4	69	3.3	74		
Fourth Excerpt	Trained	M	3.4	18	2.6	15		
		F	3.4	17	3.9	16	3.4	66
	Untrained	M	2.9	17	3.3	23		
		F	3.1	17	3.5	20	3.2	77
	Total		3.2	69	3.4	74		

*PC = Peer Counsellor; F = Friend.

Effect of "Peer Counsellor" and "Friend" Labels

The second research question was concerned with whether or not adolescents would perceive differences between the help intented communications between "friends" or "peer counsellors". The second hypothesis stated that adolescent helpers labelled "peer counsellor" when compared to those labelled "friend" would receive higher ratings of counsellor effectiveness.

For the purpose of clarity when reporting the following results on the labelled effect, the term "peer counsellor" refers to the student helpers who were assigned this label regardless of training. Similarly, the term "friend" refers to all helpers given this label, regardless of training.

Significant differences were found between the mean scores of the peer counsellors and friend on only two of the eleven dependent variables. These differences between the two groups occurred on the ratings of expertness, $F\ (3,139) = 14,2$, $p < .001$ (Table 1) and explaining, $F\ (3,139) = 5.9$, $p < .017$ (Table 3). No significant mean differences were found on the following nine variables: attractiveness, trustworthiness, understanding, reassuring, guiding, information gathering, using the self, helpfulness of the third and fourth helper. The labelling condition interacted significantly with the gender of the rater on the ratings of trustworthiness and helpfulness of the fourth excerpt.

Discussion and Conclusions

The Effect of Training

Data from the qualitative and quantitative results support the first hypothesis that trained peer helpers are rated more effective in terms of counselling behaviors. The trained helpers were perceived as more facilitative on the following five of eleven dependent variables: attractiveness, reassuring, understanding, gathering information and guiding.

Table 5

Responses to the Question:

"What did the helper do when trying to help the troubled student?"

Condition	Descriptors Used
1	— figure out her problem
	— bring it out into the open
	got her feeling out
	he helped her talk about her feelings
	— he said things back that she said and sometimes questionned to make sure he understood, he seemed to interpret
	— find out exactly what the problem was
	let her do most of the talking
	— he got her to talk more, he would summarize
	— he said what she said only in a way to clarify what she meant.
2	— he was concerned with her thoughts and feelings
	— he listened, tried to understand her feelings and encourage her
	— he tried to draw her out and help her make up her own mind
	— he was trying to get all her feelings about what the thought was going on
	— trying to help her to help herself just by listening and clarifying how she felt
	— really listened
3	— he put himself in her position and told her what to do
	— he put out what he tought he would do in her situation
	— he listened, gave suggestions, reassured her and told her to look at everything possible
	— he tried to make a choice, a decision for her, what to do in the future
	— explain to her she'll just have to go at it and tell her if the work gets too much to take a year off
	— he gave her an idea about her plans, he told her what he was thinking of doing and gave her some more ideas
4	— gave her suggestions
	— gave new ideas
	— made suggestions and gave ideas
	— gave examples about what he was doing
	— gave advice and solutions, talked about his own experience
	— he gave his opinion, he tried to sort out the problem

Condition   1 = Trained "Peer Counsellor"   3 = Untrained "Friend"
                      2 = Trained "Friend"   4 = Untrained "Peer Counsellor"

The trained helpers were perceived as more attractive as helpers when compared to the untrained helpers. The communication skills of the peer counselling training has enhanced the attractiveness of the helping interactions. The students interviewed confirmed this finding and added that they found the trained students open and non-judgmental (Table 5). The trained helpers were described as demonstrating warmth, enthusiasm, closeness, friendliness and interest. Attractiveness is an essential characteristic of an effective helper and important in the operation of an outreach peer counselling program. Attractiveness is a highly significant finding in adolescent peer counselling because students are often the first to know when another is experiencing difficulty and are in a position to act as a bridge to professional help.

The trained peer helpers were rated higher in terms of communicating almost five times as frequently as the untrained helpers. The skills of empathic listening and seeing the world from the clients' point of view are closely related and essential to effective helping (Carkhuff, 1969). An effective helper must be able to communicate to the help-seeker, in such a way to show he has listened and understands the client (Peavy, 1977; Note 7). The comments from the interviews also describe the trained helpers in facilitative terms of reflecting the thoughts and feelings of the troubled students. The trained helper's actions were described as "he was concerned with her thoughts and feelings," and "she tried to draw him out and help him make up his own mind" (Table 5). These comments correspond with the emphasis in the peer counselling program to encourage self-exploration and self-understanding.

The trained peer helpers were perceived as gathering information in their responses three times more frequently than the untrained helpers. Elliott (1979) defines gathering information as "descriptions of the helper seeking or obtaining information or understanding about the client or client's situation." It was predicted that the trained students would be perceived as using open questioning skills to gain understanding of the client's world and to facilitate problem exploration.

The trained helpers were seen as non-directive when compared to the untrained peer counsellors who were perceived as directive. As shown in Table 3, untrained peer helpers were perceived as guiding the troubled student more than three times as frequently as the trained students, $F(3,139) = 292.7, p < .001$.

This is an important finding when discussing facilitative behavior. The facilitative helper focuses on the person's thoughts and feelings rather than the person's problem (Egan, 1975). A non-directive or exploratory approach assists students in identifying thoughts, feelings and behavior patterns, in resolving the difficulty in accordance with the individual's values and learning strategies for solving problems in the future. In comparison, untrained helpers were perceived as extremely directive and were described as giving a lot of advice. Adolescents definitely perceived the trained peer helpers as more facilitative than the untrained in terms of the helping approach.

Trained peer helpers when compared to untrained helpers were perceived as more effective in terms of the core counselling skills. The trained helpers were perceived as more understanding, attractive and supportive. The untrained helpers were perceived as making fewer understanding responses, fewer reassuring responses, more directive statements and as being less attractive as helpers. These results indicate that students trained in the communication skills involved in peer counselling training are perceived as facilitative by adolescent raters.

There were no significant differences between the trained and untrained on the following four variables: explaining, using self, trustworthiness and expertness. The ratings on the two overall helpfulness scales were inconsistent and considered unreliable findings. Further research into the behaviors which adolescents describe as helpful is necessary. The interview comments added little insight into the similar ratings of explaining and using the self. The interviews, however, do indicate some possible explanations for the scores on trustworthiness and expertness.

Adolescents rated the trained students as very similar to the untrained students on trustworthiness which indicates that training did not interfere with the natural trustworthiness of a peer. In the interviews students frequently added the condition of knowing the person before they felt confident to say whether they would trust the helper. This conditionality suggests adolescents may normally consider trust a function of friendship. The interview comments on trust and friendship support the peer counselling assumption that adolescents turn to their social network for support. These comments and ratings indicate a need to research the

trustworthiness of peer helpers in an *in vivo* peer counselling setting.

When considering the level of expertness, interviewed students frequently referred to the nature of the problem as being a factor in determining the preferred skill level. When a problem was purely academic, the level of expertness was not an issue. Conversely, with a highly personal issue, such as suspected pregnancy, students mentioned preferences for a high skill level. These results demonstrate a need for further research to determine how adolescents' preference for levels of expertness are related to particular adolescent concerns.

While examining perceptions of expertness, it is interesting to note how the effect of labelling interacted with training on the expertness ratings. Adolescents perceived the helpers as more expert when the training was combined with the role label of "peer counsellor". This suggests that the role label, when combined with the trained helping behaviors, leads adolescents to perceive higher levels of expertness. An important topic for future research would be to determine what relationship there might be between the type of personal concern disclosed to a labelled, trained peer counsellor, as compared to those topics disclosed to non-labelled, untrained helper.

The Effect of Labelling

Data from the qualitative and quantative results do not support the second hypothesis. The second hypothesis stated that adolescent helpers labelled "peer counsellor" when compared to those labelled "friend" would receive higher ratings of counsellor effectiveness. The labelling of "peer counsellor" or "friend" had no significant effect on the majority of variables. The helpers labelled "peer counsellors" were rated higher on expertness and explaining.

Adolescent perceived the helpers with the "peer counsellor" label as alert, clear, dependable, insightful, intelligent, prepared and skilled. It is important that a helper is perceived as someone who has the tools and skills to help (Egan, 1975). In order to establish an effective helping relationship in peer counselling, it is essential that the helper is perceived as skillful. The interview comments confirmed the importance of believing the helper is capable. Students frequently responded they would disclose to someone who was knowledgeable and often determined the approachability of a

helper in terms of whether he "knew that he was talking about." These findings suggest that adolescents perceive helpers with the role label of "peer counsellor" as more expert and more capable of helping. The implication is that the "peer counsellor" labelling has a positive effect of identifying helpers to potential clients.

The helpers labelled "peer counsellor" were perceived as engaging in explaining more often than those labelled "friends". Elliott (1979) describes explaining as the helper is perceived as pointing out connections and attempting to increase the client's understanding of himself or herself. The interview comments indicate that explaining behaviors are expected of peer counsellors. In contrast, the interview comments revealed that a more active involved solution-oriented approach was expected from "friends". The helpers with the assigned label of peer counsellor were perceived as more effective in terms of expertness and explaining behaviors.

In retrospect, the lack of influence of labels on the other variables is a positive finding. It is particularly important that the labelling did not have any effect on the perceptions of the attractiveness or trustworthiness of peer helpers. Since adolescents often turn to peer when they have a personal concern, it is crucial that the role lable of peer counsellor does not interfere with this natural attraction. These findings imply that it is important that trained peer counsellors do not receive an elevated status which might set them apart from their peers. An area to study further would be an investigation of the adolescent perceptions of peer counsellors in terms of counsellor effectiveness within their own school environment. A particular question to answer is whether or not a close association with counsellors and teachers influences the perceptions of adolescents. In conclusion, this study found that labelling does not affect the perceptions of the help-intended acts of peer helpers.

The Interaction Effect of Training and Labelling

In considering the combination of training and labelling, the only significant interaction was found on the rating of expertness. The interaction effect, therefore was not supported.

In summary, the results strongly support the first hypothesis confirming that trained peer helpers were perceived as more effective than the untrained, in terms of essential

counsellor behaviors. The second hypothesis which was concerned with the effect of labelling was not supported. In retrospect, this is a positive finding as it is clearly evident that the assigned peer counsellor label does not jeopardize the innate attractiveness of adolescent peer relationships. The third hypothesis which predicted an interactive effect of combining training with labelling was not supported.

These findings demonstrate the type of training adolescents received in communication skills enhanced the perceived quality of the helping relationships which adolescents naturally form. The results, therefore support the assumptions behind peer counselling. Adolescents do perceive the peer counselling relationship as an effective helping relationship. Adolescents indicated in their ratings and interviews that they are attracted to peers when they have personal concerns. Students do discern differences between the help-intended acts of friends and peer counsellors. In conclusion, adolescents perceive the helping skills used by trained peer counsellors as more facilitative than those of untrained helpers.

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Ms. McDowell has nine years experience as an elementary school teacher, teacher trainer and peer counsellor trainer. She is currently completing a Ph.D. program in Educational Psychology at the University of Victoria. The dissertation research will examine the effects of adolescent peer counselling on social competency skills. Current research activities include developing naturalistic research techniques using audio-visual tapes for documentation and studying perceptions of social exchanges. Ms. McDowell is co-director of Peer Counselling Canada.