Experiences of Teen Drivers and Their Advice for the Learner License Phase

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Objective: Teen drivers remain at considerable risk of injury and fatality during the earliest years of independent driving. Multistage licensing programs, such as graduated driver licensing (GDL), have been implemented in numerous jurisdictions as a form of exposure control, mandating minimum practice periods and driving restrictions such as night driving and passenger limits. However, the teen driver’s experiences of GDL during the learner phase, and the driving and other advice they recommend be shared with all learners, remains unknown at this time.

Methods: Thirty-seven learner drivers (aged 16–18 years, mean = 16.7, mode = 16; 9 males) from 2 high schools (one private, 3 males; one public) participated in one of 2 (group 1: private school, n = 17) 45-min group discussions.

Results: Two themes emerged: (1) learning to drive and (2) supervision of the learner driver. A wealth of experiences and advice pertaining to the subthemes of supervisor behavior, GDL, road environment, vehicle logistics, and interacting with other road users were shared by learners. Numerous recommendations are made pertaining to each subtheme, such as clear instruction and feedback, tips for negotiating complex infrastructure, and normalizing of outcomes like stalled vehicles when first learning to drive. Furthermore, it appears that current approaches of issuing supporting literature at the commencement of the learner phase are insufficient.

Conclusions: The wealth of experiences and advice shared by the learner drivers should be considered in refining the content and process of the learner license phase. Moreover, the nonuse of learner resources suggests that alternative mechanisms of engagement and information dissemination need to be explored.

Keywords: driver, driver behavior, graduated licensing, interventions, licensing, psychology, teenagers, young drivers

Introduction

Despite decades of intervention, youth remain overrepresented in road crash statistics, with road crashes the leading cause of death for persons aged 15–29 years (World Health Organization 2013). In Queensland, Australia, in the year ending December 31, 2013, young persons aged 17–24 years contributed 18.8% of the road toll and 24.1% of the hospitalized casualties (Department of Transport and Main Roads [DTMR] 2014a) despite comprising 14.0% of the licensed driving population (DTMR 2013a). It is also widely recognized that the earliest stages of independent driving (during the intermediate, provisional license phase) are associated with the greatest risk. In this same time period, 5.2% of the population held a learner license and 4.1% of fatalities and 4.3% of hospitalized casualties during the previous year arose from crashes involving learner drivers/motorcycle riders. In comparison, 5.3% of the population held a provisional (intermediate) license and 12.9% of fatalities and 19.2% of hospitalized casualties arose from crashes involving provisional drivers/riders (DTMR 2013a, 2014a).

Reducing Teen Risk: Graduated Driver Licensing and the Teen Driver

Multistage licensing programs such as graduated driver licensing (GDL) mitigate crash risks facing all young novice drivers by controlling driving exposure through measures such as minimum practice requirements and driving restrictions throughout the learner and provisional license phases, with moderated graduation to unrestricted driving in the open license phase. In addition, GDL programs encourage more driving practice over an extended period of time, and an oft-implicit element of GDL programs is a gradual exposure to increasing risk over time from low-risk to high-risk driving circumstances during the learner period as a prelude to independent driving in the provisional period. This graduation can be bolstered through
higher-order instruction (such as hazard detection and anticipation) by supervisors. In-car recording of the conversations and driving behaviors of learners and supervisors suggests, however, that over the initial 4 months of supervision and instruction, learners appear to receive less instruction regarding operating vehicles and only limited higher order instruction (Goodwin et al. 2014).

It is noteworthy that GDL programs vary widely between jurisdictions. For example, in Australia, whereas learners must record 50–120 h (except in Northern Territory) during a 6- to 12-month minimum duration with multi-stage provisional licensing in all states and territories, in New Zealand learners must hold their learner license for a minimum of 6 months with minimum practice requirements (www.nzta.govt.nz); and in the United States, most states have a minimum learner practice requirement (typically 6–12 months’ duration with 30–60 h practice requirements; www.ghsa.org/html/stateinfo/laws/license_laws.html). Queensland’s GDL was considerably enhanced in 2007, with key features including a 12-month minimum learner (L) phase during which 100 h of supervised driving practice must be certified in a logbook (a minimum of 10 h must be at night), with a 16-year minimum age eligibility; a 2-stage provisional phase (P1 1-year duration, minimum age 17 years; P2 2-year duration, minimum age 18 years) including a hazard perception test to graduate from P1 to P2; and late-night passenger (P1), high-powered vehicle (P1, P2), and audible mobile phone (L, P1) restrictions (DTMR 2013b).

In Queensland, there is no formal mandatory driver education or training, with the majority of education and training falling upon parents as the most common supervisor (Bates et al. 2010; Scott-Parker, Bates, et al. 2011a). To support and inform young drivers and their parents, numerous resources are issued by the Queensland state licensing authority (DTMR). It is noteworthy that at no point in the GDL progression (L, P1, P2, open/unrestricted) is additional advice provided to parents, or novice drivers, by DTMR. Before taking the learner theory test, teens purchase (currently $18.15, or access online for free) “Your Keys to Driving in Queensland” (DTMR 2014c), containing information regarding Queensland’s GDL program, road rules, safe road use, offenses and penalties, vehicles, and organ donation. After paying the testing fee (currently $20.80), the teen takes the learner theory test. Upon passing, the learner driver kit “Road Trip to Your Licence, a Bootful of Info” (DTMR 2014b) is issued, containing the Logbook (including tips for completing the logbook), the “Road Trip for Learner Drivers” pamphlet (tips for completing supervised hours and the logbook, GDL conditions, some illegal driving behaviors and penalties, advice regarding the Q-SAFE practical driving test, and the web address [http://www.qld.gov.au/transport/licensing/getting/index.html] for additional online resources recommended for the learner and the supervising driver), and the “Road Trip for Supervisors” pamphlet (supervisor eligibility, lesson planning, logbook requirements, professional driving instructors, checking vehicles, Q-SAFE practical driving test, and the web address [http://www.qld.gov.au/transport/licensing/getting/education/supervisor/index.html] for the additional online resources). Further driver education and training support throughout the learner phase can also be accessed through professional driving instructors and the state automobile club (Royal Automobile Club of Queensland).

Empowering Teens to Reduce and/or Manage Their On-road Risk

Central to empowering teens such as young novice drivers to reduce and/or manage their on-road driving risk is education regarding their on-road driving risk. The fundamental need for 2-way communication regarding health risk more generally has been recognized for 2 decades, and the following considerations are vital: (a) one-way communication (that is, from expert to novice) is ineffective; (b) timely information is more likely to be retained; (c) language and other resources used during the 2-way communication are crucial; and (d) the information should be related to a need of the targeted person (Korsch 2001). However, there has been limited research exploring the specific health education needs of the teen: teen needs have been considered within particular illnesses (e.g., cancer; Lyons et al. 2014), puberty (Ryan et al. 1996), and sexually transmitted diseases (Clark et al. 2005), and teen views regarding accessing health resources (Marcell and Halpern-Felsher 2007) and health policies more generally (Ott et al. 2011) have also been investigated.

Consistent with literature regarding a deficit of knowledge in managing teen health risk—from the teen’s perspective—there is a dearth of peer-reviewed literature regarding the perceived needs of teens as they enter the driver licensing system, despite the earliest years of independent driving being widely recognized as the most risky phase of their driving lifetimes and thus the greatest threat to the health of teens and those with whom they share the road. Compliance with GDL conditions and restrictions have been examined both within the Queensland context (e.g., Scott-Parker, Bates, et al. 2011) and more broadly in jurisdictions such as the United States (e.g., Goodwin and Foss 2004) and New Zealand (e.g., McDowell et al. 2009) in addition to identification of factors that increase teen driving risk, such as texting while driving (Cook and Jones 2011) and vehicle ownership (e.g., Klauser et al. 2011; Scott-Parker, Watson, et al. 2011).

Some insight into the experiences of learner drivers has been gleaned through online survey research exploring the learner driver experience within Queensland’s enhanced GDL program. In a Queensland-wide survey of 1,032 learners, learners reported being an average of 17.4 years old when they passed the practical driving assessment, holding their learners an average of 16.2 months. Learners reported recording an average of 109.6 h in their logbook, that most logbooks entries are accurate (4.0% recording extra undriven hours and 12.6% rounded up their driving hours), and that learners had most commonly practiced in cars with manual transmissions. The majority of learners reported undertaking most of their driving practice at the end of the learner period (54.5%), with a small proportion only consistently practicing throughout the learner period (34.6%). A larger proportion of females than males reported difficulty accessing a driving supervisor (26.0 and 17.4%, respectively), and parents were the most common
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driving supervisor (mothers were the most common for 57.6% of female learners and 47.7% of male learners; Scott-Parker, Bates, et al. 2011). Notwithstanding this insight, much remains unknown regarding the learner experience from the learner’s perspective.

In addition, parent engagement in teen driver education (e.g., Hartos and Huffe 2008), parents’ views regarding teen driving policies (e.g., Williams et al. 2011), and parents’ experiences of the learner driver logbook have been explored (e.g., Bates et al. 2014). Interestingly, Bates et al. (2014) found that, despite the supposition that the logbook would be a convenient and accurate method of documenting supervised learner practice, parents of learners in Queensland reported that on occasion they had endorsed logbook hours that were not driven (thus, falsifying the logbook entries, consistent with the findings of Scott-Parker, Bates, et al. 2011) and that the paper-based logbook system itself was not a panacea to accruing supervised driving practice during the learner period. Rather, Bates et al. (2014) recommend education of both parents and learners regarding the benefits of accurately completing logbooks, such as enhancing communication between different driving supervisors (like parents and professional driving instructors) and consideration of an electronic logbook.

As noted above, resources are given to young drivers at various stages before and during the learner license phase. Within the realm of young novice driver road safety, it remains unknown whether the novice is accessing these resources, has read these resources, and has retained the information contained therein. Irrespective of their engagement with the resources, it also remains unknown whether they believe that they have been told exactly what they needed to know before they embarked on this first step in their driving lifetime and, as such, what experiences learners would share and advice they would recommend be given to other learners.

Methods

Participants

Thirty-seven Queensland learner drivers (aged 16–18 years; mean = 16.7, mode = 16, 9 males) from 2 high schools (one public, n = 20, 6 males; one private) participated in a 45-min group discussion during the school day. The University of the Sunshine Coast Human Ethics Committee approved the research project (A/13/504).

Procedure

Teachers with a preexisting relationship with the author consented to participate in the research project, arranging class time for the group discussions and recruiting students with a learner license. The group discussions were prompted by the opening questions: “Is there anything you wish you knew before you started driving on the road? Is there anything you would say to someone on their L’s that you wished you knew?” The students talked among themselves throughout the discussion, with much laughter throughout. The author asked questions only to clarify participants’ comments and, where relevant, to encourage the participation of all learners rather than a vocal majority. In addition, the students were highly enthusiastic regarding the discussion topic and the chance to be heard rather than talked at, with the author interjecting intermittently to remind them that only one person should speak at a time so that everyone could hear what was being said. Refreshments were served throughout the public school group discussion only. Because the allocated lesson was of 45-min duration, conversation ceased at this time. Strikingly similar experiences and advice were reported by students in both schools, suggesting saturation of responses.

Content Analysis

Group discussions were recorded via an MP3 and subsequently transcribed verbatim by a research assistant. Content analysis of transcribed group discussion text commenced with dividing the text systematically into meaning units comprising the verbatim utterances of the learner (direct quotes labeled male [M] or female [F]; see Appendix, online supplement). Condensed meaning units were developed from combining meaning units into contextually and theoretically consistent groupings, and codes were attributed to condensed meaning units that were grouped according to a focal meaning (Graneheim and Lundman 2004). Two overarching themes effectively represented the condensed meaning units and reflected the 2 main elements of the learner license phase: learning to drive and driving supervision.

Findings and Discussion

Two themes of (1) learning to drive and (2) supervision of the learner driver will be discussed according to the emergent subthemes.

Theme 1: Learning to Drive

Table A1 (see online supplement) summarizes the content analysis for the theme of learning to drive and reveals there are 21 condensed meaning units, 9 codes, and 3 subthemes.

Subtheme 1: Road Environment

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the road environment of the first lesson was pivotal in learner experiences, with strong support for comments like, “If I started on the road it would have been like actually with cars and everything, it would have been horrible. I would have been so freaked out” (F). Successfully traversing complex infrastructure configurations was reportedly daunting, including multilane roundabouts (“Freak out” [F]); particularly if they are not round (“... it is actually a square so there is 5 entry points” [F]; “Oval ... you just drive round, it’s straight then you turn then you turn again” [MJ]). Complex intersections with traffic lights were also intimidating for the learner (“Traffic lights are hard” [F]; “First time ... went on road and it was a bit of a disaster and I ran like 3 red lights because I just couldn’t look at everything and concentrate on...
what I was doing” [F]; and other driving behaviors such as overtaking (“Overtaking sucks” [F]; “Yeh, that’s scary” [F]) and traveling on highways (“Stuck in-between two massive trucks on the highway” [M]).

Recommendations relating to the first lesson were based on experiences such as “Mum took me to like an industrial kind of area where there were no cars and just like wide roads” (F), with learners also dispensing advice for multilane roundabouts: “Oh, that’s easy, you just stick to the outside lanes” (M) (note this isn’t correct advice if exiting to the right). Regarding complex infrastructure and other driving behaviors, it is recommended that the supervisor discuss what to do if the learner is unsure what to do before he or she starts driving the vehicle (i.e., stop vehicle safely on side of road at earliest opportunity). Supervisors could drive through controlled intersections slowly with the learner as a passenger while discussing where to direct attention (e.g., traffic lights, cross traffic) and why (e.g., searching for red-light runners) to help develop situation awareness skills by directing attention to salient and other important cues (e.g., Salmon et al. 2013), before having the learner negotiate these complex driving environments himself or herself. Ideally during the learner period, learners will start in simple environments before being exposed to increasingly more complex environments, ensuring a breadth of experiences prior to independent licensure. Based on the learner’s experiences, this does not always appear to be the case, suggesting that greater direction regarding learner practice needs to target novice drivers, parents, and other supervising drivers alike.

Subtheme 2: Operating Vehicle

Selecting the wrong vehicle control—ranging from minor errors like selecting window wipers instead of indicators to major errors like braking instead of accelerating—were commonly reported by learners. These errors were hilarious for both groups, with other group members joining with the learner in laughing as they shared these experiences. Other logistics pertaining to vehicle operation, such as forgetting to replace the petrol cap (“People our age forget to [put petrol cap back on] and you see them on the road” [F]), were also humorous, as were experiences of crashes (“I’ve had a few” [F]) and near-crashes. Learners had limited experience with and knowledge regarding what to do if the vehicle breaks down (“[change tyre] Get help . . . in Mum’s car . . . can do it in my Dad’s car” [F]). Learners also shared advice for general vehicle maintenance (“When you are putting oil in your car, make sure you don’t get any on [engine] . . . smells really bad” [M]; “I think you need a wheel alignment” [M]) and recommended that learners experience driving in many different vehicles (“Automatic . . . different model [Holden] Commodores . . . different cars . . . you get used to it” [M]; “Should learn in a 4WD” [M]), notwithstanding that options may be limited due to vehicle availability and accessibility (“My Dad has a really old car” [F]; “[Mum’s] car is an automatic . . . don’t want to drive it” [F]).

Though laughter may have been a coping mechanism (Nezlek and Derks 2006) it belies the potentially life-threatening consequences of some experiences (i.e., crashes/near-crashes, selecting wrong foot control). Therefore, it is recommended that learners gain as much knowledge and practice as possible regarding in-vehicle controls before on-road driving. Similar recommendations are also made in the learner literature (DTMR 2014c); however, experiences and advice shared by the participants suggest that the learner is not engaging with this material because resources are not read and, if read, the information is not retained.

Subtheme 3: Interacting With Other Road Users

Much frustration with the behaviors of older, more experienced drivers was shared by learners (“When they are trying to pass you when you’re doing the speed limit and you are like, ‘Dude, I’m doing exactly’” [M]), who felt their novice status attracted risky attention (“[On roundabout] When I was coming out . . . I just had to stop like because people always cut you off and tailgate you a lot because we are learners” [F]). Learners regularly observed other drivers not following the road rules and driving unsafely and reported considerable pressure to comply with the risky and illegal driving behavior of experienced drivers (“You just sit there thinking ‘I’m going too slow’ because everybody is overtaking you and you’re like ‘Oh what am I meant to do?’ I speed up and go with everybody else” [M]). Given their driving inexperience, this is a particularly problematic response. Overwhelmingly, learners wanted adequate space on the road to just learn, and an important part of this process is for other drivers to back off and give them that space. Learners are readily identified through the compulsory application of bright yellow decals to the front and rear of the vehicle. As such, experienced drivers within their proximity should be aware that the driver of that vehicle is an inexperienced driver who needs time and practice to learn and that part of learning is making mistakes. General education efforts for all drivers, highlighting the need to allow extra space around learner vehicles, and to exhibit patience if the learner’s driving is impeding traffic flow in some way (e.g., driving by a large margin under the speed limit), appear warranted.

Driving behavior—observed and actual—during the learner license phase should provide the foundation for safe independent driving; however, experiences shared by learners suggest that this is not always the case. Interventions that target risky and illegal behavior of drivers of all ages and license status are recommended, including on-road police enforcement (Scott-Parker and Bates). Therefore, experiences of punishment avoidance in which drivers evade punishment for illegal driving (and thus drive in a more risky manner; Scott-Parker, Watson, et al. 2011; 2013a), should be minimized for all drivers. Tips for resisting the negative influence of other drivers could also be provided to learners upon entry to the license phase. Learners also discussed a variety of interactions with police officers, “Been pulled over 3 times and like I’ve never been breathalysed . . .” (F) and that supervisors were keen to ensure that the learner maintained normal driving irrespective of anxiety experienced within the proximity of police: “If there is like coppers they (parents) are like ‘go’” (F). Such interactions serve to reinforce the legitimacy of police authority, with recent research suggesting these interactions also contribute to
improved road safety of the young driver (Scott-Parker et al. 2013a).

Learners were highly attuned to the presence and behavior of other learners and identified strongly with the on-road struggles of these comrades. In contrast, passengers such as younger siblings were seen as deliberately antagonistic toward the learner (“This morning my brother was yelling at me for looking in the mirror” [F]; “So does my brother, back seat driving” [F]), particularly when the interaction focused upon a perceived threat to the passenger’s safety. Learners reported mixed experiences regarding the distractibility of passenger conversation: some became used to it and therefore it became easy to ignore, whereas others were highly distracted and the behavior of passengers was regulated by the supervisor (“[Passengers noisy in the back seat] Dad always says be quiet” [MJ]). It is recommended that supervisors regulate passenger behavior such that it does not distract the learner, with regulation possibly commencing prior to entering the vehicle with ground rules for all vehicle occupants and maintenance as required throughout the journey. Parents who allow younger siblings to travel in the rear seat will also need to regulate passenger/driver interactions to ensure that the learner is not distracted by such highly emotive conversations.

**Theme 2: Supervision of the Learner Driver**

Table A2 (see online supplement) summarizes the content analysis for the theme of supervision of the learner driver and reveals that there are 16 condensed meaning units, 5 codes, and 2 subthemes.

**Subtheme 1: Supervisor**

Learners shared experiences and advice regarding their driving supervisor, most commonly their parents (consistent with other research; Scott-Parker, Bates, et al. 2011), and anxious supervisors increased the learner’s anxiety. Learners reported great frustration if there were two parents involved in the supervised driving (“I hate it when there is, like, two parents [in the car]” [F]), recommending that “If they are in the back seat they are not allowed to talk” (M) else the learner can receive mixed messages or be overwhelmed with instruction. A wide variety in supervision experiences were also reported, with learners commonly agreeing with comments such as “Mum is the worst, she can’t be in the car when I’m driving . . . she just freaks out and it’s naturally her to think of like the worst thing” (M). In comparison, fathers were seen as more relaxed supervisors, “My Dad’s cool but my Mum just freaks out” (M). However, the disparate supervision styles of parents led to learner frustration, such as “Dad is fun but . . . after a while you are just like, ‘Mum, take me driving’ but she does this whole thing where she holds on to the dash and you’re like ‘yeah, I’m going like 10 (km/hr) under the speed limit, I’m literally going as slow as I can’ and she’s still like holding on for dear life” (F). Furthermore, though these supervisor trends were apparent, some mothers were not overly anxious supervisors (“[Mother police officer] Better than my step-dad” [F]), and some fathers were also reportedly anxious supervisors (“Dad goes for the brake” [MJ]). In addition, suboptimal interactions were commonly reported by learners: “[Mum yells] I yell back” (M).

Mixed encouragement to drive was reported by the learners, with learners the main driving force for most supervised practice, and parents were the predominant encouragers of licensure for a handful of learners only (for example, “[4 hours in logbook] I’m just lazy, you don’t have Mum and Dad saying ‘get out there and get some hours’ . . . It should be me nagging them and I don’t” [MJ]). Accessing supervisors was also difficult for some learners (“[Too busy] on weekends . . . when they are trying to get stuff done” [F]), particularly those who had left home, with learners recommending “Don’t move out of [of the family home]” (F). “Go for my [logbook] exemption” (F) (meaning a substantial reduction in the on-road supervision requirement) was seen as the only solution to lengthy licensure delays for older learners in the group discussions. Learners also related experiences with professional driving instructors (most Queensland learners participating in a recent survey have been found to seek their supervision services; Scott-Parker, Bates, et al. 2011). Though generally the lessons were found to be helpful and the instructors “don’t yell at you” (F), cost was a prohibitive factor. In addition, feedback—which appeared dependent upon the individual instructor’s teaching style—was not always clear.

Therefore, it is recommended that a structured approach to the learner phase be undertaken (Scott-Parker, Bates, et al. 2011) to minimize the risk that learners will have difficulty accessing supervision or may need to obtain a practice requirement exemption. In addition, it is recommended that instruction and feedback be clear and consistent and, as much is possible, not emotionally charged. Rather than continuing to drive while the supervisor and/or learner are yelling at each other, the vehicle should be stopped at the side of the road as soon as it is safe to do so and calm communication practices resumed before returning to the road.

**Subtheme 2: Graduated Driver Licensing**

Learners advised that, based on their experience, the various GDL conditions and driving restrictions were beneficial for learners. Strategies to ensure they complied with GDL mobile restrictions specifically included “My phone is always on silent so I never hear it” (F) and “I chuck it in the glove box” (M). Notwithstanding this, completing logbooks was reportedly arduous and time-consuming (“I think the most annoying part of having your L’s is like figuring out the hours” [F]) and another learner responded with the advice that “You know you can get an app on your phone?” (M).

Difficulties in gaining hours, in addition to accessing supervisors as discussed earlier, included the cost of licensure, with learners contributing toward or fully responsible for licensure costs, including the learner theory test, professional instruction, and petrol. For some learners, alternatives to licensure, including cheaper public transport, further contributed to delays in obtaining supervised driving practice and thus progression from the learner license phase to independent P1 driving.

Further information regarding GDL restrictions and conditions appears warranted, however, with one learner asking,
Young drivers themselves have had no opportunity to provide changes. Since this time, the community and, most important, community forums were held to allow community members, including a peer network of learners, to share advice for other learners. It is noteworthy, however, that older learners who were not sampled in the current research project need more information regarding parental involvement in the licensorate of their novice children found to exert a positive road safety influence (Simons-Morton et al. 2006). Further, exactly what learners (and their parents, which was beyond the scope of the current research project) need more information regarding, and when, remains unclear at this time, as does how to sustain engagement of learners (and their parents; McCartt 2013). Simply gaining mandatory supervised practice requirements is not engaging young drivers. Simply issuing resources at licensure is not engaging young drivers. Simply gaining mandatory supervised practice requirements is not engaging young drivers. Simply issuing resources at licensure is not engaging young drivers. Simply gaining mandatory supervised practice requirements is not engaging young drivers. Simply issuing resources at licensure is not engaging young drivers. Simply gaining mandatory supervised practice requirements is not engaging young drivers. Simply issuing resources at licensure is not engaging young drivers.

Engagement of teens throughout the learner period, and not just at the initial license phase entry point, is strongly recommended. In an era of unpopular paper resources (“I didn’t read a thing” [MJ]) and popular smart phone technology, this could include SMS, blogs, and interactive online activities targeting young driver road safety during the learner and P1 license phases. Similarly, support and resources for parents could also be improved through such initial and sustained engagement, with continued parental involvement in the licensure of their novice children found to exert a positive road safety influence (Simons-Morton et al. 2006). Further, exactly what learners (and their parents, which was beyond the scope of the current research project) need more information regarding, and when, remains unclear at this time, as does how to sustain engagement of learners (and their parents; McCartt 2013). Simply gaining mandatory supervised practice requirements is not engaging young drivers. Simply issuing resources at licensure is not engaging young drivers.

In addition, simply normalizing some behavior, such as phoning during the car while driving could be improved through such initial and sustained engagement, with continued parental involvement in the licensure of their novice children found to exert a positive road safety influence (Simons-Morton et al. 2006). Further, exactly what learners (and their parents, which was beyond the scope of the current research project) need more information regarding, and when, remains unclear at this time, as does how to sustain engagement of learners (and their parents; McCartt 2013). Simply gaining mandatory supervised practice requirements is not engaging young drivers. Simply issuing resources at licensure is not engaging young drivers.

Prior to changing Queensland’s GDL program, community forums were held to allow community members, including parents, young drivers, and professional instructors, the opportunity to provide their input regarding the proposed changes. Since this time, the community and, most important, young drivers themselves have had no opportunity to provide feedback regarding the changes and learning to drive more generally. The current research project is the first time learners have had the opportunity to share their experiences and their advice based upon both their negative and their positive experiences. Though three quarters of the participants were female, on the whole the experiences and advice shared by male and female participants alike was very similar, suggesting that the experiences discussed and advice dispensed are relevant to learners per se, rather than to male and female learners.

As noted earlier, 2-way communication plays a vital role in improving teen health, and teens are key players in their health-related decisions and behaviors. Yet 2-way communication is largely lacking in the realm of young driver road safety, and young drivers remain largely unheard as key players in managing their health—specifically their on-road driving—risk. Further, it does not appear that learners are engaging with the current paper and/or online resources available to them, suggesting that alternative mechanisms of effective engagement and dissemination of information to maximize their learner experience should be investigated. The unique insight into learner experiences and advice gleaned through the current research can thus be used to develop, refine, implement, and evaluate the supporting resources (human and other) that are integral in learning to drive not only in Queensland’s current licensing program but in licensing programs in other jurisdictions.

Supplemental Materials

Supplemental data for this article can be accessed on the publisher’s website

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