The influence of passengers on driving in young drivers with varying levels of experience
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Introduction
Young drivers are at disproportionately higher risk of crashing. Their risk of collision is especially high when they are with young passengers. In-vehicle conversations may interfere with driving ability.

Research Questions
1. Does a neutral conversation with a peer-aged stranger affect driving?
2. Does the mere presence of a passenger affect driving ability?

Methods
Participants
44 young drivers (20 females, 24 males) completed the study. Of these there were 22 Novice drivers (drivers with an Ontario G1 learner’s permit) and 22 were Experienced (drivers with a full Ontario G full license).

Apparatus
Drive Safety DS-600c driving simulator. • 300 degree viewing screens

Stimuli
Three unique but comparable 12-minute long scenarios. Each drive contained 9 hazards (pedestrians, cyclists, animals, or cars that emerged from the periphery) and a way-finding task that required participants to remember two sets of directions to get to their destination: a landmark building (e.g., hotel) and town name (e.g., Kimball).

Procedures
The three conditions were:
• Talking – Peer aged female research intern passenger asked the driver a series of neutral, scripted questions (e.g., What is your favourite movie?)
• Silent – Peer aged female research intern passenger remained silent
• Absent – No passenger present

Measures
• Hazard Response Time (HRT)
• Collisions
• Standard Deviation of Lateral Position (SDLP)
• Driving speed
• Way-finding performance

Results
Although novice drivers always had longer HRT’s than more experienced young drivers, this only translated into a notable increase in collisions in the Talking condition.

Discussion
Research Question 1: Yes. Safety was compromised for young novice drivers when their passenger engaged them in a series of neutral questions as compared to the Experienced drivers, as indicated by a marked increase in collisions.

Research Question 2: No. There appears to be no effect of silent passengers on driving ability for either novices or more experienced young drivers.

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