



What potential role do siblings play in young drivers' driving styles?



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ABSTRACT

Siblings' contribution to young drivers' driving styles has received little attention. This study examined the unique and combined contributions of sibling relations and perceived sibling's driving style to the self-reported driving styles of young drivers. Three hundred and fifty one young drivers (17–22 years old) completed scales assessing their own driving styles (MDSI; Taubman – Ben-Ari, Mikulincer, & Gillath, 2004), the driving styles of an older sibling, and their relationship with that sibling (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985). The findings revealed significant associations between the driving style of the young driver and their sibling, and significant contributions of both sibling relations and perceived sibling driving style to the self-reported driving style of the young driver. The results indicate the potentially overlooked importance of siblings in determining how young drivers choose to drive, strengthening previous evidence regarding the strong influence of the family's global climate on the dynamics surrounding youngsters' driving.

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1. Introduction

Studies conducted in the past decade have attested repeatedly to the important model provided by parents' driving behavior and the socialization processes they instill in their offspring to the youngsters' driving. Parents' involvement in traffic violations and car crashes, as well as their reported driving styles, have been shown to be associated with their children's involvement in similar behaviors (Bianchi & Summala, 2004; Ferguson, Williams, Chapline, Reinfurt, & De Leonardi, 2001; Miller & Taubman – Ben-Ari, 2010; Prato, Lotan, & Toledo, 2009; Prato, Toledo, Lotan, & Taubman – Ben-Ari, 2010; Taubman – Ben-Ari, Mikulincer, & Gillath, 2005; Wilson, Meckle, Wiggins, & Cooper, 2006). Furthermore, the parent-child relationship in general, and in regard to driving in particular, have similarly been found to be related to the way the young driver behaves behind the wheel (e.g., Ginsburg, Durbin, García-España, Kalicka, & Winston, 2009; Simons-Morton, 2007; Taubman – Ben-Ari & Katz – Ben-Ami, 2013). But young drivers are not exposed only to their parents. They also interact with other members of the family, especially older siblings who may have been driving for some time before the young driver gets a license. Surprisingly, however, scant research has thus far been devoted to siblings' potential contribution to the driving styles of their younger sisters and brothers.

Siblings have considerable influence on one another's development throughout childhood, and may function as agents of socialization. They learn from one another, examine their similarities and differences, and are influenced by each others' choices and behaviors. The behaviors, skills, and attitudes children learn from their siblings may be different from those they

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learn from their parents. According to one approach, sibling socialization occurs through observational learning and instruction, with younger siblings emulating their elder siblings' behaviors, and this modeling explains why siblings often engage in similar behaviors (East, 2009; Kramer & Conger, 2009).

Sibling relations may take different forms in different families, and even in the same family. They may be close and harmonious or distant and asymmetrical in terms of status and power, competitive or cooperative, and so on. One way to characterize these relations was proposed by Furman and Buhrmester (1985), who suggest four dimensions of the sibling relationship: *warmth*, reflecting intimacy, prosocial behavior, companionship, admiration, perceived similarity, and affection; *conflict*, relating to quarreling, antagonism, or competition; *relative status/power*, i.e., dominance by or over the sibling or nurturance; and rivalry, also referred to as *parental partiality* (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985). Previous studies have produced interesting findings regarding these dimensions. For example, sibling conflict was found to be a significant predictor of adolescents' internalizing behavior (such as withdrawal, somatic complaints, and anxiety and depression), behavioral closeness had a protective effect on the younger sibling's substance use and was particularly important in opposite-gender sibling pairs, and emotional closeness had a protective effect on the younger sibling's substance use especially in sibling pairs with a younger sister (Moser & Jacob, 2002; Samek & Rueter, 2011). The importance of siblings continues later in life as well, with affectionate sibling relationships found to moderate the association between stressful life events and later adjustment (Gass, Jenkins, & Dunn, 2007). These and other studies reveal a complex connection, in particular between deviant behaviors (substance abuse, smoking, and others) and sibling relations (e.g., Kramer & Conger, 2009).

Notwithstanding the strong impact parents have on how young drivers behave, some authors have already pointed to siblings as another possible influence within the family. Lahatte and Le Pape (2008), for instance, found that parents have more influence on a young driver when no sibling has a driving license, essentially indicating the considerable significance of siblings who drive when they do exist. Similarly, Prato and his colleagues (2009) found that whereas the driving risk index of young male drivers (established by an in-vehicle driving recorder) was only related to that of their fathers, among young female drivers it was related to both their mothers' and their siblings' risky driving. It is important to note, however, that these studies looked solely at aspects of driving, without considering the qualities of the sibling relationship. In addition, they examined global driving, rather than a multidimensional set of behaviors and cognitions, such as driving styles.

The term "driving style" refers to the manner in which the driver chooses to drive or to their customary driving mode, including features such as assertiveness, speed, headway distance, and attentiveness (Elander, West, & French, 1993). Four fundamental styles have been identified. *Reckless and careless* drivers ignore the rules of safety and look to driving to provide sensations. They drive at excessive speed, tailgate, and overtake on a solid white line. *Anxious* drivers are threatened by the very act of driving, are characterized by high levels of stress, and find it difficult to remain calm. They are fearful, unsure of themselves, and hesitant on the road. *Angry and hostile* drivers tend to display aggressive and antagonistic attitudes and behaviors, such as cursing, flashing high beams, or using the horn. For them, the road is an arena in which they must prove themselves and compete with others. Finally, *patient and careful* drivers adapt their driving to road conditions. They use caution, exercise judgment, and are aware of the implications of their driving. These four driving styles, as measured by the Multidimensional Driving Style Inventory (MDSI; Taubman – Ben-Ari, Mikulincer, & Gillath, 2004; Taubman – Ben-Ari & Skvirsky, 2016), have also been found to correlate with performance measures collected in a simulator (i.e., driving speed, number of driving maneuvers, passing gaps; Farah, Bekhor, Polus, & Toledo, 2009; Taubman – Ben-Ari, Eherenfreund-Hager, & Prato, 2016).

In view of the literature, the present study aimed at examining the associations between the self-reported driving styles of young drivers and both the perceived driving style of an older sibling and the sibling relationship. It was hypothesized that higher warmth in the relationship and higher perceived patient and careful driving by the older sibling would be associated with a higher report of the patient and careful driving style by the young driver. In contrast, a more conflictual and status-driven sibling relationship, as well as higher endorsement of maladaptive driving styles (anxious, reckless and careless, angry and hostile) by the older sibling, would be associated with a higher report of maladaptive driving styles by the young driver.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedure

The sample consisted of 351 young drivers (106 men and 245 women) from diverse geographical areas in Israel who ranged in age from 17 to 22 ($M = 19.54$, $SD = 1.59$) and had held a driving license for 3–60 months ($M = 23.22$, $SD = 17.54$). None of the participants were the first-born child in their family, with 36% being the second, 35% the third, and the rest the fourth or over. In terms of occupation, 30.6% were high school students, 27% were college students, 24.5% were doing their compulsory military service, and the others were working. Following the approval of the Institution Review Board, they were recruited via convenience sampling. In most cases, the materials (in Hebrew) were given to undergraduate students from all over Israel who distributed them to friends, acquaintances, and family members and asked them to complete the questionnaires. Additional participants were recruited through social media. All the young drivers in the sample volunteered to take part in the study.

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