

Jaymiah Stanton

Professor Sloggie

English 110C

24 June 2023

Killing Old Habits

Keeping our roads safe is something that we hear all the time on commercials, from political propaganda, and from each other, but why is it that we still see people making simple mistakes and ending up in life threatening situations? The answer is robust. Some attribute it to being alcoholism, while others may discuss that there are too many distractions on the road. Although both factors are crucial when trying to keep our roads safe, I believe that retesting all drivers over time, not just when we become elderly, could help protect us even further. If we require all drivers to be retested after five or so more years, we will be able to prevent some accidents from drivers of all age groups, new and old, and drivers will have a fresh memory of the road laws.

I had a moment of reflection this past year that has changed my perspective on driving, and I am sure that many other drivers may be able to relate in some way as well. My partner had been in truck-motorcycle collision that almost cost his life; through months of rehab and surgery to fix the bones he had broken from his shoulder blades down to his feet, I began to reflect on my driving skills and the importance of being alert. If the driver of the truck would have known that a “left turn yield on green” meant that they would have to yield to oncoming traffic, there would not have been an accident in the first place. This incident made me more cautious of my surroundings while driving, but also of the simple, small actions that I have seen all age groups do that cause panic on the road. I know that many of us drivers have seen people do not so

thoughtful things while driving such as forgetting to put on a turn signal, not having their lights on at night, not adhering to traffic lights, cutting others off to reach a lane, and tailgating. These small actions may not have led to anything more than a “damn idiot!” However, in other instances, that may not have been the case; it could have caused a serious incident to unfold, and as a daily driver, this is why we need to start making changes now.

To begin, most of the retesting argument around the country is focused on the elderly population; however, I would argue that the problem lies with all age groups. There is a stigma about older adults and how their senses decline as they age which leads to more emphasis on checkups for their vision and so forth; however, regarding their driving habits, most of them are self-aware of their skills (Lyle). In fact, in an article written by a traffic judge about their perspective on senior drivers they state, “[A]ccording to the NHTSA and the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety statistics, the safest drivers of any age group are those between 64 and 69 years old: seniors” (Lyle). This may be the case nowadays, but in the past, senior drivers were one of the growing populations that caused many accidents particularly after they reached the age of seventy (Dorn 105). This gives evidence that although there may be less accidents with elders nowadays, there is still concern about the safety of having senior drivers on the road in general. They are still prone to be in accidents; currently, they are just outnumbered by younger age groups in regard to incidents on the roadways.

When reviewing some of the statistics of accidents caused by specific ages, there was a clear pattern of the type of people that were more prone to accidents. For example, in a Japanese article that analyzed accidents from different age groups using the Institute for Traffic Accident Research database, they found that drivers with a history of numerous accidents were more likely to cause car crashes across all ages (Nishida 5). They further state,” [r]elative accident ratio

tended to be higher among young drivers in the 25–34 age group who have more accident experience and drivers in the 45–54 age group who have more accident and apprehension/violation experience” (Nishida 4). It is a bit unnerving to see the age disparities between the number of accidents caused not just in America, but around the world; the fact that these patterns can be seen across the globe raises concern. From looking at data provided in 2020 by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, NHTSA, they found that younger males from fifteen to twenty years old were more involved in fatal crashes at 56.59 percent as compared to other age groups (“Young Drivers” 4). They then showed that as the age groups got older, the percentage of drivers involved in fatal crashes decreased to 22.17 percent for males over the age of 65 (“Young Drivers” 4). After reviewing this data, there is obviously a need of action not just from our government, but from other drivers on ways to prevent these horrific incidents from happening. One way to do achieve this is by freshening up on basic road skills through reexaminations.

Thinking back to when I was preparing for my permit and driver’s license, I felt that I was studying solely to pass. It was not in hope to remember every rule for my own safety in the future, but more so that I could hold my license in my hand and say, “I did it!” I am certain that many other drivers felt the same way as I did, and that as long as they remembered the basics of the road, traffic signs, and how to merge, then that would be sufficient enough to drive safely in today’s age. Furthermore, what intrigues me is how driving habits can be seen in various locations, and how that affects the way people abide by driving laws in their own state and outside of it. Think about it; how many times have you seen a driver with an out of state license plate and thought, “oh, that’s why they drive like that.” As someone who has been to New York, specifically the inner-city areas, the driving etiquette there is way different than how we drive in

Virginia, specifically Chesapeake. With that being said, there seems to be certain habits that people carry over time as drivers that can affect how they navigate around road laws.

It has been confirmed that the basic road laws in the United States are the same across all areas, however, there are discrepancies in the punishments for different laws that are broken (*Are All Driving Laws in the United States the Same*). Since laws are interpreted differently state to state, this could explain why people are more inclined to engage in bad driving habits especially when out of state. With a retest of a driver's knowledge over time, this issue could be eliminated to make the roads safer for everyone. Another factor that should affect how much knowledge we remember when on the road is due to the preparation for our exams. In one article, an insurance company conducted a study in 2011 which found that nearly one in five drivers could not pass a written exam, similar to one that we have taken to get our license, on simple driving knowledge (Kiger). Though this may not seem like a big deal since four in five people did pass, there were discrepancies in areas of the test that were alarming to researchers. They further stated that, "Eighty-five percent of those tested, for example, couldn't name the correct thing to do when approaching a yellow traffic light, and only one in four knew how to calculate the safe distance for following a vehicle (Kiger). It just goes to say that there are not enough programs to help maintain good driving strategies on the road, which can be where retesting drivers may aide in these circumstances.

In conclusion, it is of great importance for us as drivers to be more aware of our own skills when driving; these attributes can be further enhanced if we engage in retesting every few years to help us freshen out memory on critical road skills and to help prevent accidents from all age groups. Although there are many factors that cause accidents, I believe that this extra step in

maintaining our driver's license would serve as a huge benefit to not only my state's driving community, but also across border lines.

Works Cited

- “Are All Driving Laws in the United States the Same?” *Morgan & Morgan Law Firm*, 8 June 2023, www.forthepeople.com/practice-areas/auto-accident-attorneys/are-all-driving-laws-in-the-united-states-the-same/#:~:text=In%20the%20United%20States%2C%20some,to%20that%20is%20%E2%80%9Cno.%E2%80%9D.
- Dorn, Lisa. *Driver Behaviour and Training: Volume 2*. Routledge, 2005. <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.odu.edu/10.4324/9781315094786>
- Kiger, Patrick J. “Should Licensed Drivers Be Tested Periodically?” *HowStuffWorks*, 5 Mar. 2019, auto.howstuffworks.com/car-driving-safety/auto-safety-testing/should-licensed-drivers-be-tested-periodically.htm.
- Lyle, Freddrenna M. "Senior Drivers: A Traffic Judge's Perspective." *Experience : the Magazine of the Senior Lawyers Division, American Bar Association* 24.1 (2014): 35,37,42. ProQuest. Web. 16 June 2023.
- Nishida, Yasushi. "Analyzing accidents and developing elderly driver-targeted measures based on accident and violation records." *IATSS research* 39.1 (2015): 26-35.
- “Young Drivers: 2020 Data.” *National Center for Statistics and Analysis*, crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813313. Accessed 18 June 2023.