

Riley Kirkpatrick
Grade 11– Chagrin Falls High School

Technology: a Vaccine for the Epidemic of Texting While Driving

One in four car accidents involve texting while driving (Hopkins). The epidemic began with the 1973 invention of the cell phone, a device more than 95 percent of Americans own today (“Mobile Fact Sheet”). Unfortunately, dopamine, a feel good chemical in the brain, makes cell phones highly addictive, which other countries recognize as a public health threat (Wallace, “Half”). To overcome addiction, technology must fix the problem it created, and while many apps have tried, they have a large fault: the off button. Thus, in order to solve the problem of texting and driving, automobile and cell phone companies must integrate technology that eliminates the chance for cell phone addiction to control the roads.

To prevent texting while driving, we must recognize the austerity of smartphone addiction. Half of teens and 27 percent of parents feel addicted to their phones (Wallace, “Half”). The addiction stems from unpredictability; dopamine levels rise every time a phone rings in anticipation. Once the validation of a text rewards a person, the pleasure seeking habit forms, so addicts look at their phone even when driving, putting other people at risk as their attention strays from the road (Weinschenk). Few people admit that they account for smartphone addiction statistics, but a recent study found that 90 percent would fall into this category (Wallace, “10”). Cell phone addiction also results from perpetual need for connectivity. Parents feel obligated to stay available for their children and jobs, so they stay close to their phones. In fact, 69 percent of parents and 80 percent of teens check their phones hourly (Wallace, “Half”). People want to stay connected at all times, which explains why 61 percent sleep next to their phones; they check them as they wake up and fall asleep (Wallace, “10”). People make excuses to justify their obsession, but they must wait for an appropriate setting.

We must remove the temptation to text and drive by incorporating technology in automobiles and smartphones that prohibits such behavior. Car companies have begun taking the initiative to prevent texting while driving with programs such as Apple CarPlay. Drivers can give Siri verbal commands to read incoming messages and send responses. A growing number of automobile companies support CarPlay, and others intend to make similar aftermarket systems available (Loveday). We must give all cars have access to similar technology so drivers can access everything on their phones without physically using them. Although this does not eradicate distraction completely, it allows drivers to keep their eyes and hands where they belong, reducing the likelihood of accidents. In addition, phone programming can fix the problem; software that blocks apps and notifications while in motion terminate the urge to text while driving. Cell Control, for one, blocks the driver’s phone while letting passengers use theirs, but it comes at a hefty price: 129 dollars (Knutsson). Cellular companies must design a similar program already programmed into their phones that also includes a feature which sends automated responses to the sender while the recipient drives. Some people feel this takes away rights, but it only helps enforce laws already in place.

Texting and driving presents a serious dilemma in modern society. Consequently, addicts must spend time away from their phones to form a healthy relationship with technology. If so, they will not panic without them while driving. Additionally, cell phone and automobile companies should develop technology that prohibits the ability to text while in a moving vehicle. This will result in a population of drivers that focus all of their attention on their primary task, driving, and thus less accidents due to texting and driving. I believe that texting and driving will continue due to selfish individuals, jeopardizing others’ safety, until technology forbids it.

Works Cited

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