

The Hex of Text

With “87 percent of teenagers [texting] when driving,” I can nearly guarantee that everyone my age has texted while driving or has witnessed another fellow teen doing it (Hageman). Despite the obvious ramifications that these actions may precipitate, young people continue to regard their little glowing screens as a higher priority than the road, if only for a “few seconds.” These few seconds, however, are so crucial that a way to preserve them is necessary by implementing software that will disable certain cell phone applications while in a car. The solution to ending teenage texting while driving lies in legislation and technology.

The current method to stopping texting while driving is through legislation, generally bans. Although these laws have good intentions, they are ineffective. The efficacy of a law depends on the authorities’ ability to enforce it. People can be pulled over for texting while driving largely due to exhibiting wayward driving. Excluding that situation, an officer would have to actually observe someone in the process of texting. This would require the cop to be at just the right angle in his car at a long enough time to actually see the person text, rather than dial numbers, which is legal (Dexheimer). The improbability of finding someone texting and driving is considerable, and the extent of effort that an officer must go through to check is ridiculous. Though these laws seem great in theory, they are impractical in practice. This isn’t due to the skill of the police force; the situation just needs more. Like a child whose parents don’t enforce their rules, teenagers won’t take these texting bans seriously. Studies in North Carolina and New

York, where texting bans were enacted, found that although texting decreased initially, it ultimately picked back up in the end (Cooper). This shows that teens disregard laws if they feel that they are not enforced, as well as the obvious attachment that teens have to their cell phones to a point where they still use them despite it being prohibited. Lastly, a report by Progressive Corporations and Geico Group found that in Louisiana and California, texting bans might have *increased* the number of accidents. A plausible reason could be that “the bans only led drivers to hold their devices below dashboard level to avoid tickets, taking their eyes off the road for longer periods” (Kerber). It is human nature to “defeat the system,” which would in this case mean avoid getting caught. If the law leads down the path of people avoiding it, which consequently puts them in danger, then doesn't that null the purpose of the law? The law, in this case, is not enough.

The solution to this crisis is technology, with legislative backing. With teenagers not responding to legal restrictions, it is the responsibility of car manufacturers and the government to stop teen texting while driving. Government mandated cell phone disabling systems should be implemented in all new car models. Several versions of such a system exist. Dallas-based WQN Inc sells an operating system that is able to detect whether the car is moving through a GPS system. A software program by Aegis Mobility in Canada works similarly, and even automatically sends calls or texts notifying to the caller or texter that the owner of the phone is driving and cannot answer the phone. However, these systems do have flaws. The current technology is unable to distinguish between the phone of the driver and that of a passenger, therefore disabling *all* phones in the car (“New Technology to Block Car Phone Use Far From Perfect”). Nonetheless,

with today's technology, a glitch like that can easily be overcome. If we have sent people to the moon and back, why couldn't we make this work?

In addition, there is compelling evidence that the prefrontal cortex does not completely develop in teens until their mid-20's. The prefrontal cortex is the part that "controls decision making, judgment and impulse control, all of which are involved in multi-tasking" (Kotulak). This multi-tasking is definitely applicable to texting while driving. With teens already being at a driving disadvantage due to inexperience, there is now evidence that they are inherently less able to multi-task. Between the time when most people start driving and when their brains are completely developed is approximately ten years. Ten years of being even more likely to crash. With cell phone disabling devices in automobiles, we would be eliminating a considerable source of distraction and temptation, making our roads safer.

Some may say that this solution gives the government too much power, that this infringes upon the people's rights. Perhaps it does, but the government's job is to maintain the general welfare of the people. The benefits the population would receive would be immeasurable. Many lives would be saved and much heartache would be prevented.

In essence, the threatening danger of teenage texting while driving requires drastic measures to solve this problem. If crucial seconds can be preserved, that could be the difference between a teen's (a countless others') life and death. With our current legislation not producing the desired effect, it is clear that something new and innovative needs to happen- cell phone disabling devices. Through this law, we can protect our teens and make American roads a safer place to drive.

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