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### Textwalking: Not Only an Uncareful Combination

Nowadays people enjoy the great convenience of using cell phones to send short text messages to friends and families, but if you text while crossing the street in the State of Illinois, you're considered as a "textwalkers" and may be given a \$25 fine according to The Illinois General Assembly bill introduced in January, 2008 (cited in Carlozo, 2008, p.112). Bill of this kind is affecting more and more people as the ownership of cell phones in the US grew rapidly from about 145 million users in 2005 to 260 million users in 2008 (cited in Foss, Goodwin, McCartt, &Hellinga,2009, p.127). The associated phenomenon of textwalking needs to be seriously addressed because this behavior threatens people's life and safety, imposes adverse social and economic impact, and harms the development of younger generations.

Textwalking is a very risky practice that can cause serious injuries, but some disagree with the threat of this kind. George Branyan, pedestrian coordinator for the District of Columbia Department of Transportation, claims that textwalking is not the main factor of street accidents; rather, it is the ignorance of traffic laws that causes most injuries (cited in Hilton, 2008, p.101). However, this simple conclusion is not confirmed by real life evidence. Textwalking indeed interrupts people from concentrating on their steps, which may incur fatal accidents. Dr. James Adams, professor and chair of the department of emergency medicine, Northwestern University says that they see injuries cases caused by people texting

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and colliding with street objects such as bikers and rollerbladers every day. “We always see someone texting or calling, who would not have been in that accident had it not been for the phone,” Adams said (American College of Emergency Physicians, n.d., p.100). Moreover, Marc Felberbaum, an emergency room doctor reports seeing more and more patients injured due to textwalking and one of his patients was almost crushed by a car after he tripped off the curb while texting (cited in Dominus, 2009 ,p.98).

What is common among the injuries caused by textwalking is that textwalkers are all involved in dual-task actions. A study by Weerdesteyn et al. (2003) suggests that when people are distracted in dual-tasking situations, they need longer response time to avoid obstacles, which indicates a higher rate of failure to evade people and potential dangerous objects during textwalking (p.116). Rene Marois and three other Vanderbilt researchers claim that they did not find response delay in single-task situations, but a delay of up to one second when participants processed two tasks at the same time (cited in Lohr, 2007, p.106). Saving one second on the street is significant to avoid a fatal accident, and taking the chance of sacrificing one’s life for a text message, although not quite usual, is surely unwise.

Besides causing specific individual injuries or deaths, textwalking is an undesirable social practice that has a much broader negative social effect. Craig Wilson (2009), who has had “head-on crashes” several times, finds himself irritated and upset by textwalkers. Wilson pointed out that textwalkers are also part of the society, but they are mostly rude and ignorant “cellphone abusers” who disengage with the world and people around them (p.99). What happened to Wilson will not help to build good social attitude of politeness among people, and the negative impression and reputation of textwalkers may create a bad stereotype that leads to more disputations. In addition, textwalking also raises the financial stress of the

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economy in different ways. To help prevent injuries from textwalking, the government in Finland spends money to build red and green lights installed on the surface of the road to warn pedestrians who're looking down (Dominus, 2009 ,p.98), but spending of this kind can be better targeted on other projects that benefits people's welfare.

Along with the adverse social effects, textwalking potentially levies a toll on the economy since textwalkers are multitaskers who are less defensive to interruptions and can be easily distracted in other economic related situations. A recent study on a group of Microsoft workers finds that people are surprisingly easy to be distracted by incoming e-mail and instant messages during work, and it takes an average of 15 minutes for distracted programmers to return back to their assignments (cited in Lohr, 2007, p.107). Furthermore, a paper presented at the conference at the National Bureau of Economic Research suggests that multitasking slows down the speed of project completion and generates less profit for companies (cited in Lohr, 2007, p.107). And according to Jonathan B. Spira, an analyst at the business research firm Basex, the productivity fall resulted from multitasking during work makes the US economy suffer a loss of an estimated 650 billion dollars a year (cited in Rosen, 2008, p.109). The practice of textwalking, if not well controlled, will contribute to a bigger population of multitaskers that harms the economy even more.

The profound negative effects of multitasking not only affect companies and their profits, but also affect young generations and their learning process in schools , since teenagers who usually textwalk or multitask with other media devices are more likely to have bad studying habits. One study by Russell Poldrack, a psychology professor at the University of California Los Angeles, shows that multitasking changes how people learn and perceive into a way that makes the brain less capable of storing and recalling information (cited in Rosen, 2008,

p.110). Today's children are exposed to unprecedented heavy media technology such as cellphones , emails, online instant messaging software and social websites, and these new forms of media technologies make children become easier to be distracted and make it harder for them to focus on single tasks. Ophir et al. (2009) find that it's more difficult for heavy multitaskers to stay concentrated in an interfered environment and that multitasking significantly makes the results of learning process less enduring (p.133). "Kids that are instant messaging while doing homework, playing games online and watching TV, I predict aren't going to do well in the long run" says neurologist Jordan Grafman (cited in Rosen, 2008, p.110). And Jane Healy, as an educational psychologist, suggests that young multitaskers may develop fast and frivolous way of thinking when they grow up (cited in Rosen, 2008, p.110). The adverse effects on young learners may impair the wisdom of the future generation, and slow down the development of the society in the long run.

Addressing the perils of textwalking is really about concerning the negative sides of multitasking. Multitasking while walking, studying or doing other tasks harms the multitaskers themselves, the people around them and the society they live in. New technologies such as voice-aided texting software or approach sensors may help people textwalk with less stress, but will not get the combined issue of multitasking in other situations solved. Addressing the issue of textwalking is a daily approach to help remind us of the importance of concentrating our attention on single tasks, which will further help us enjoy a safer, more prosperous and wiser community.

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