

VIJAY DIXIT & ANTONIA FELIX, *ONE SPLIT SECOND: THE DISTRACTED DRIVING EPIDEMIC. HOW IT KILLS AND HOW WE CAN FIX IT* (Wisdom Editions, 1st ed. 2016).

Wisdom Editions, Minneapolis, MN, USA, 2016. ISBN: 978-1-939548-44-3 (paperback)
Price: \$14.99; Page Length: 208

Keywords: Distracted Driving, Cell Phones, Distracted Driving Laws

Reviewed By: Melissa Dobstaff
Journal of High Technology
Suffolk University Law School

The Distracted Driving Epidemic: Examining the Disease and Searching for a Cure

“The legal approach to distraction caused by cell phones and other devices is making ground, but just as in the case of seatbelts and drunk driving, effective laws come gradually and take years of work.”¹

The use of cell phones has taken the world by storm to such an extent that many will go so far as to call it an addiction. This inability as a population to disconnect from our cell phones has led to an increase in distracted driving related accidents and fatalities. In *One Split Second: The Distracted Driving Epidemic-How It Kills and How We Can Fix It*, authors Vijay Dixit and Antonia Felix explore the crisis at hand in an attempt to educate the masses to better prepare us to make the right choices and change our behavior behind the wheel.² Dixit and Felix examine the issue of distracted driving to illustrate exactly how cell phones have severely exacerbated the problem. They then discuss variables such as education, technology, and laws that are working to correct the problem.

Author Vijay Dixit graduated from the Indian Institute of Technology before moving to the United States to pursue graduate studies. Dixit now works as a management and business

¹ See Vijay Dixit & Antonia Felix, *One Split Second: The Distracted Driving Epidemic-How It Kills and How We Can Fix It* 112-13 (2016).

² See Dixit & Felix *supra* note 1, at 1.

process design consultant, but it was only through the personal tragedy of losing his daughter, Shreya Dixit, that he became an advocate ready to tackle distracted driving head-on. Following the loss of his daughter, Dixit created a memorial foundation in her honor and even established the first ever Adaptive Massive Open Online Course for combating distracted driving. Felix received her MFA in creative writing from Wichita State as well as an MA in English Literature from Texas A&M. She now works as an adjunct instructor at Hamline University and is a *New York Times* bestselling author of sixteen nonfiction books. Most recently Felix wrote *Sonia Sotomayor: The True American Dream*, a political biography. Together Dixit and Felix take a closer look at the impact distracted driving has on our roadways and discuss how to better effectuate change.

This book is broken up into two separate parts: Moments of Truth and Working Knowledge, which are composed of three and five chapters respectively. Part one focuses on Dixit's personal experience of losing a daughter as the result of distracted driving. Through this story, the reader is brought to understand how grief and the healing process drove Dixit to launch a memorial foundation in Shreya's honor, and even to become an advocate who strives to educate the masses on the distraction epidemic. Part two of this book shifts the focus to the distracted driving epidemic itself and clearly explains why it has become such a serious problem. After discussing the problem of distracted driving, Dixit moves on to discuss how technology, educational programs, and the law are being used to combat the epidemic. Through this organizational setup the reader is able to understand exactly what the problem is, what is being done to make a change, and why there is still so much work to do if we truly expect to put an end to distracted driving.

This book comes across as written for educational purposes in the sense that the authors primarily aim to educate readers about the dangers of distraction. The written approach of this book is structured so the reader will understand the potential impact that distracted driving has upon the lives of everyone involved. The authors then consider how we can use our knowledge to end distraction and ultimately change the world. Knowledge is the jumping off point here, because in order to change the behavior of drivers we need them to make the choice to drive without distraction, which is where the challenges truly lies. Dixit explains that while there are technologies available to restrict cell phone use by motorists, as well as laws that ban use by drivers, the problem is that people are still making the choice to ignore them. The thesis of this book sets out that the best possible chance for a working solution just might be through the use of education, technology, and the law.

The way in which the book is structured is what ultimately gives the reader a complete understanding of the distracted driving epidemic. What I like best about this book is that everything was straightforward and informative, it did not appear to be geared towards any particular audience. In the first chapter the reader is introduced to Shreya's story and Dixit's personal experience with loss as a result of distracted driving. Chapter two discusses how the Dixit's began to heal and how Shreya herself was reborn into a movement to end distracted driving. The description of the healing process continued into chapter three where Dixit explains how he was given the opportunity to help another with the healing process, an individual who himself had caused the death of another by choosing to succumb to distraction. This portion of the book lets the reader know how real the epidemic is and how quickly it can change so many lives. When an individual is distracted behind the wheel and a fatal accident results, the lives of countless people are irreparably changed forever.

Part two of this book walks readers through working with the knowledge we have concerning this epidemic, and using that knowledge as power to find a solution. Chapter four goes over the distracted driving epidemic without limiting the discussion to cell phone use, but instead touches on a wide variety of distractions driver's face. When looking at the distractions that pull our attention away from the road, Dixit and Felix bring a bit of cognitive psychology into the discussion. As a law student, psychology was never my strong suit, but the way in which this book ties in the cognitive psychological aspect of distracted driving, gave me a better understanding of the epidemic itself. We think of distraction as just taking our eyes off the road to send or read a text, but in reality it is so much more. Our eyes may only be off the road for a few seconds, but when we look back up we still need a bit more time for our brains to transition back over to the task of driving, a fact most drivers fail to consider.

Chapter five moves on to discuss combating distracted driving with technology. This chapter while informative in a number of ways is one area where the authors could have included a bit more discussion about technology used to combat cell phone use. There is a fair bit of discussion about the dangers of infotainment centers in automobiles today, but the technology introduced here really only includes apps through cell phone providers that limit ones ability to send or receive texts while the vehicle is in motion. There are other technology options available to limit cell phone use by drivers, but these apps are the only ones people may know about without doing a bit more research themselves. By far one of the best chapters of this book was chapter six, which discusses the law. This chapter explains that while there are laws in place to protect against distracted driving, it takes time for them to truly become effective. Here a comparison is drawn between drunk driving and distracted driving, which helps illustrate why the laws in place are not as effective as they could be. A large part of the problem with the legal

aspect is that officers need proof that a driver was texting behind the wheel in order to issue a ticket for the offense. A breathalyzer or radar technology can let an officer know if someone is driving drunk or speeding, but there is no technology available to help them catch people on their phones. Oftentimes the proof needed to issue a citation is impossible to get, and until people believe that they will be caught and punished for distracted driving there is simply no legal reason for them to choose to put their phones away.

The final two chapters of the book evaluate moving forward and using education to help us move away from our distracted tendencies. We live in an age of distraction, and education alone may not be enough, but Dixit and Felix hope that readers will understand the stories and experiences presented in their book, and essentially learn from the past mistakes of others. Education is likely the first step towards change, and by educating the younger generations we are instilling good habits in them, but the epidemic will persist unless this message gets through to everyone. How exactly can we get the message across? In the end we likely need three familiar things: education, technology, and the law.

The thesis of this book sets out that the best possible chance for a working solution to the distracted driving epidemic might be through the use of education, technology, and the law. This book is written in a manner where the reader is first educated about distracted driving and the misconceptions that many people have, which indicates that education associated with distracted driving is insufficient. Technology as one of the major sources of distraction behind the wheel is yet another topic that drivers are not fully educated on. Today we have become so accustomed to our vehicles having technological features such as touch screen dashboard displays, and hands free calling/texting features, but we don't consider how much these features pull our attention away from the road. We are addicted to technology and remaining connected at all times, thus it

is likely that one of the best ways to get people to disconnect would be by implementing new technology that would make it impossible to text/call while driving. The need for better education and new technology in order to handle this growing problem is well documented and supported in this book, and my own research results echo the thesis that Dixit puts forward.

The last element that Dixit suggests is crucial to curing the distracted driving epidemic concerns the law. Distracted driving is not all too different from drunk driving when it comes to traffic fatalities and attempts to reduce those numbers, but as was the case with Drunk Driving, the law needs to catch up. Drunk Driving was illegal, but until the punishments became harsher and the breathalyzer test normalized, the law was not entirely capable of making a discernible impact. Dixit does a great job of highlighting the need for better laws and tools to help law enforcement actually enforce the laws that are in effect, but aside from stating that need and how legislators are addressing the problem, this is the one element of the thesis that appears to fall flat. The argument therein, that education, technology, and the law as a potential cure, is supported by legislators in New York who are working to equip law enforcement with technology to help them determine whether a driver has used their phone in violation of state laws while behind the wheel. Discussion of this new technology for law enforcement certainly would have strengthened the thesis, but it is extremely new and likely was unknown to Dixit prior to publishing his book.

Overall this book was both informative and enjoyable, as well as a quick and easy read. Anyone could pick up this book, read it and walk away having learned something. I very much liked the way in which the book was laid out because it incorporated personal stories of those who have caused or experienced loss as a result of distracted driving. These personal stories really help drive home the severity of the epidemic, because while we tend to think that we have

it under control, the truth of the matter is that there is no guarantee of that should you choose to drive distracted. Again, as I mentioned earlier I think a bit more could have been incorporated into the 'combating distraction with technology' section simply because I know there are a variety of other technologies available to curb cell phone use by drivers. Despite the technology portion missing a bit of information, I would easily recommend this book to anyone who drives or is learning to drive, because I think this book does a great job of educating the reader about the dangers of choosing to drive distracted. After reading this book I would expect that those already on the road might find themselves seriously reconsidering their behavior on a daily basis. As for those who are about to become licensed drivers, I believe this book would inspire them to disconnect and make smarter choices when getting behind the wheel, and ultimately I think this is exactly what Dixit and Felix were hoping for.