A car accident can occur so quickly from a short distraction. I am sure many of us have experienced close calls from driving while reading or responding to text messages. Unfortunately, others have experienced serious injury or death because of it. Texting while driving is extremely dangerous, but that fear does not seem to overcome our obsession for rapid, digital interaction. For me, texting while driving became much more difficult once I upgraded from the traditional phone keypad to full QWERTY keyboards and touch screens. I could no longer feel my way around the keys to create short messages without looking. Now, it requires my full attention and the use of both hands. Not only that, but instead of receiving a text message containing a few words, now I receive full-blown emails. Either I am looking at my phone or I am looking at the road, but it is not mathematically possible to do both at the same time.

Many states and cities prohibit texting while driving. These laws are in effect in order to prevent drivers from being distracted by their cell phones while driving. There is controversy whether these laws actually work. Some believe that these laws instill the requisite fear inside of us to stop texting—even though we should probably be more afraid of physical harm caused by a car accident than a traffic violation. On the other hand, others say that accidents increase when these types of laws are passed. It seems that people continue to text while driving, but now they hold the phone in their lap instead of in plain sight. This makes texting even more distracting for drivers because they have to take their eyes completely off of the road in order to look down and send a text. Enforcing these laws creates another issue for their effectiveness. Drivers know that it is difficult for police to catch them in the act of texting so they continue to do it.

While controversy exists over texting laws, social media campaigns are taking action to stop texting while driving. Campaigns have started up like “Don’t Text & Drive” and “Stop the Texts. Stop the Wrecks.” They inform us of some chilling statistics. For example, you are 23 percent more likely to get into an accident if you are texting; taking your eyes off the road for five seconds while travelling 55 mph is the amount of time it would take you to travel the length of a football field; and over 100,000 accidents per year are caused by drivers who were texting. Several Facebook pages and television commercials have popped up urging followers to take a pledge to never text and drive. Thousands of YouTube videos have been uploaded so that people can share their stories and warn others of the dangers of texting while driving. These stories usually come from the friends and family of a loved one who was lost in an accident that involved texting.

Large corporations and celebrities use their clout in order to promote safe driving. AT&T launched their “It Can Wait” campaign in March 2010. As part of their attempt to influence teen drivers, they recruited Nickelodeon star, Victoria Justice, to promote the campaign. Just before Apple’s release of the iPhone 5, AT&T declared a “No Text on Board” pledge day. Justin Bieber partnered with PhoneGuard (now SafeOnTheMove) to create a mobile app that automatically locks your phone when you begin to drive.
It uses a GPS signal to sense how fast you are moving in order to determine whether you are driving or not.

By now, I think we all know and accept the dangers of texting while driving. However, we need to overcome the love affair that we have with our phones. We need to break the habit of reaching for the phone every time it makes a noise or vibration. The pledge to stop texting while driving needs to become part of our lifestyle and culture. Since our lives are so connected with social media via Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, these campaigns are the key to spreading the word on the dangers of texting while driving. As we continue to idolize celebrities, it helps to know that they refuse to text and drive too. The government does not need to pass laws to save us from ourselves. We need to be accountable to each other, and making a pledge in front of our social-media family is a great way of showing your commitment to never text and drive again.