

Talking on your cell phone while driving may be hazardous to your close relationships

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Warnings about the dangers of distracted driving while using a cell phone are prevalent these days, but cell phone use while driving may also put family relationships in jeopardy, says University of Minnesota professor Paul Rosenblatt.

The same factors that make using a [cell phone](#) while [driving](#) more hazardous -- longer reaction times and impaired attention -- can also make [family communication](#) in that situation more risky, says Rosenblatt in an article in the current issue of *Family Science Review*. The article, authored by Rosenblatt and graduate student Xiaohui Li, provides a speculative [theoretical analysis](#) on the topic. Rosenblatt is a family social science professor in the university's College of Education and Human Development.

"If we assume that the relationship risks involved in talking on a cell phone while driving are similar to the driving risks -- both tasks involve divided attention and distraction -- we can develop ideas about how a family relationship may be impaired," Rosenblatt says in the article.

For example, studies have indicated that cell phone use while driving leads to slower reaction times on the road. This could translate to the driver's cell phone conversation as well.

"A delay in the conversation could be a problem if the person (spouse or partner) on the other end of the conversation interprets the delayed reaction as an indicator of ambivalence, of not having a ready answer or

of hiding something. This all leads to upsetting the partner," Rosenblatt says.

And, what if the driver misses important details of the conversation? This could lead to misunderstandings and more hard feelings, he says.

"In general, cell phone usage while driving might lead to missed relationship stop lights, slow reactions to dangerous relationship circumstances, loss of control of one's part of the interaction, and interaction mistakes that could lead to conflict, hurt feelings, misunderstandings, and possibly even serious damage to the relationship," Rosenblatt says in the article.

The partner who is not driving might be worried about the driver's safety and may cut a conversation short so the driver can concentrate, but the driver might interpret that in a negative way.

In addition to the relationship problems created by talking on cell phone while driving, a number of problems arise that both people have when one of them is driving while talking on a cell phone.

The lack of visual cues including gestures, facial expressions and posture creates challenges. Poor cell phone reception and the noise from the automobile and the road can all contribute to misunderstandings, he says.

In the article, Rosenblatt explores five hypothetical examples of possible relationship problems that could arise when a driver is talking with a family member via cell phone. The examples he explores include the partner asking the driver to run an errand; a family member calls with good news; a family member calls with bad news; arguments over the phone and apologies over the phone. Each of the scenarios can be wrought with frustration and [misunderstanding](#).

Most relationships can manage the added difficulties related to cell phone use.

"However, for couples in which things have been so difficult that they both are considering ending the relationship, problems arising from a difficult phone conversation, may push their [relationship](#) to the tipping point," Rosenblatt says.

Provided by University of Minnesota

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