The Attention Deficits of Cell Phone Use on Pedestrians

Jonathan Gallimore (David Strayer)
Department of Psychology
University of Utah

Cell phone use is increasing and we know very little is known about the effects that cell phone use has on pedestrians. We wanted to know about the effects that cell phones had on people's ability to walk and be aware of their environment. At the University of Utah we laid out three different walking paths around campus indicated by red duct tape arrows. Participants followed the paths in one of three conditions: walking by themselves, walking with another person, or talking to another person on the cell phone. The three conditions were counter-balanced by three the different walking paths. After the three walks, participants were given a surprise recognition test of where they had been. Measures were taken from their performance on the recognition test as well as the overall time to complete each walk. An ANOVA from the results of the recognition data found a significant difference between the alone walk and the in person walk, as well as a significant difference between the alone walk and cell phone walk. An ANOVA on the overall time it took to complete each condition found a significant difference between the alone walk and the cell phone walk. It appears that pedestrians experience a significant impairment in attention to the environment while conversing and walking. There is also a disruption in walking performance while on the cell phone.