

# **Media Multitasking Among American Youth**

Prevalence, Predictors and Pairings

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# The Multitasking Generation



**gen m** They're e-mailing, IMing and downloading while writing the history essay. What is all that digital juggling doing to kids' brains and their family life? By Claudia Wallis

IT'S 9:30 P.M., AND STEPHEN AND GEORGINA COX know exactly where their children are. Well, their bodies, at least. Piers, 14, is hunkered up in his bedroom—eyes fixed on his computer screen—where he has been logged into a MySpace chat room and AOL Instant Messenger (IM) for the past three hours. His twin sister Brenna is planted in the living room, having commandeered her dad's iMac—as usual. She, too, is busily IMing while chatting on her cell phone and chipping away at homework.

By all standard space-time calculations, the four members of the family occupy the same three-bedroom home in Van Nuys, Calif., but psychologically each exists in his or her own little universe. Georgina, 31, who works for a display-cabinet maker, is tidying up the living room as Brenna works, not that her daughter notices.

Stephen, 48, who juggles jobs as a squash coach, fitness trainer, event planner and head of a cancer charity he founded, has wolfed down his dinner alone in the kitchen, having missed supper with the kids. He, too, typically spends the evening on his cell phone and returning e-mails—when he can nudge Brenna off the computer. "One gets obsessed with one's gadget," he concedes.

Zooming in on Piers' screen gives a pretty good indication of what's on his hyperkinetic mind. O.K., there's a Google Images window open, where he's chasing down pictures of Mena Suvari. Good ones get added to a snazzy Windows Media Player slide show that serves as his personal e-album to the actress. Several IM windows are also open, revealing such penetrating con-

Photograph for TIME by Aaron Goodman

# What is Media Multitasking?

Engaging in more than one media activity over any specified half hour period.

# Prevalence of Media Multitasking

- About 4 out of 5 young people media multitask
- 19% do not media multitask in a typical week
- Among kids who do media multitask, 26% of media time is spent with more than one medium

(Diary Data from 2<sup>nd</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders)

# Prevalence of Media Multitasking

Proportion of 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders who say that they  
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# Who is Media Multitasking?

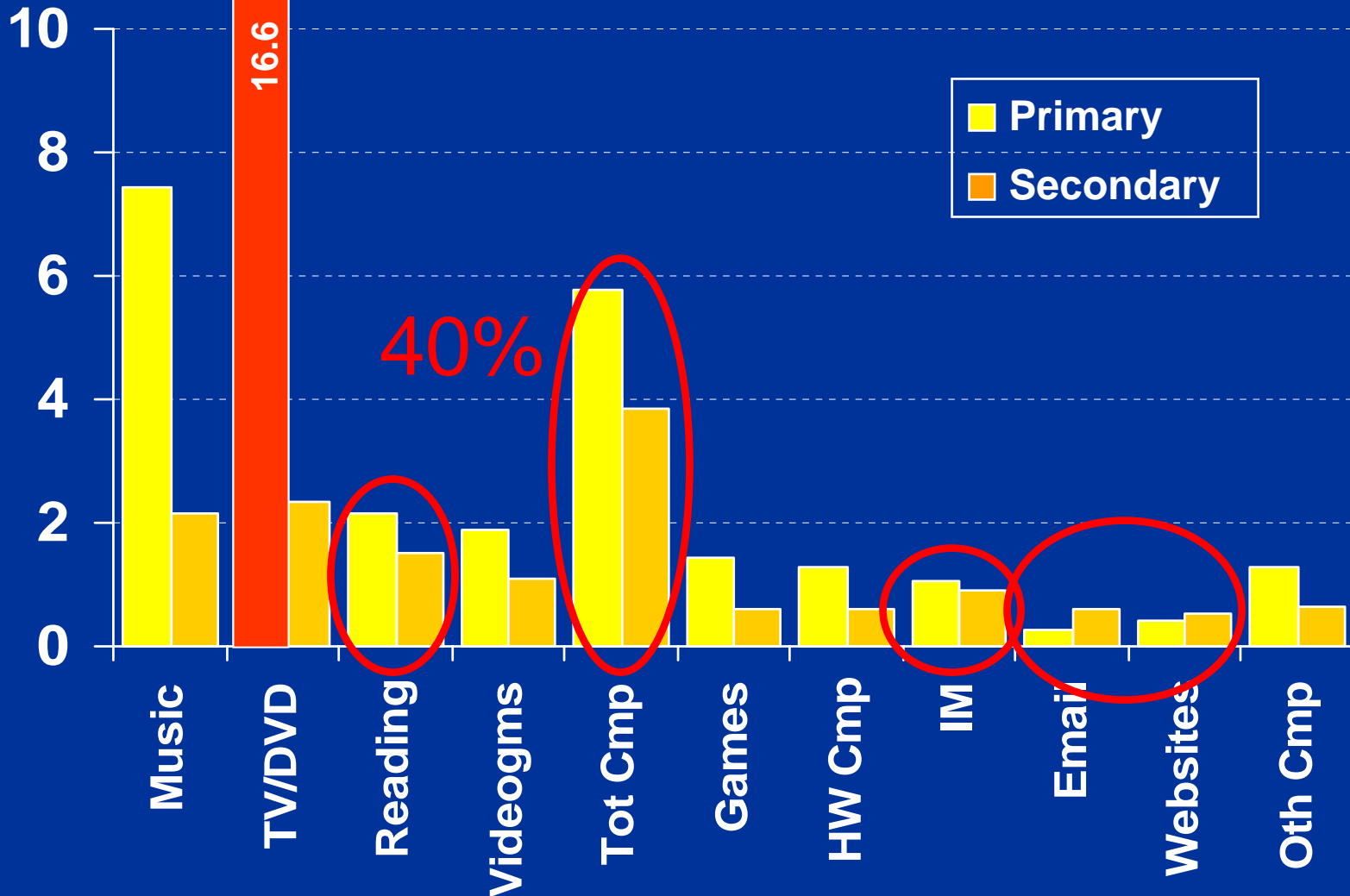
1. Those with the **opportunity**
  - High TV orientation
    - TV on most of the time
    - TV usually on during meals
    - No rules about TV

# Who is Media Multitasking?

1. Those with the **opportunity**
  - High TV orientation
  - Have a computer
  - Have computer with TV visible
2. Girls
3. Sensation seekers
4. Those with the **need** to media multitask
  - Highest users of media

# Media Pairing

Average weekly hours with each medium (from diary)



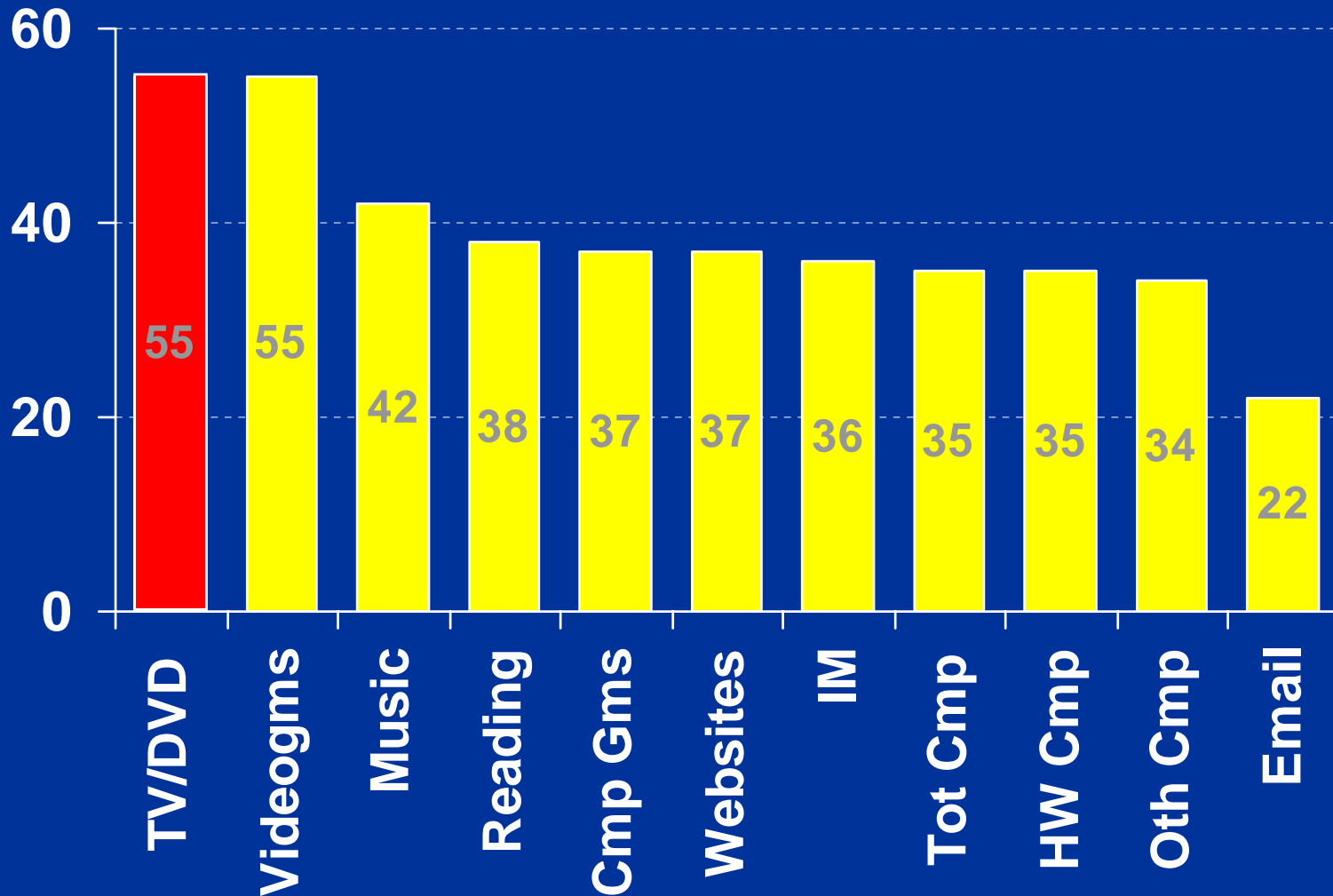


# Television

- Dominance in time and focus

# Television

Proportion of time, for each primary medium, devoted to doing "Nothing Else"



# Television

- Dominance in time and focus
- Most likely to be included in media multitasking mix
- Interesting role in media multitasking
  - Focus, yet most common pair

When watching TV, a young person is less likely to be sharing media time than with any other medium, and when they *are* media multitasking, TV is the most likely medium to be a part of the mix.

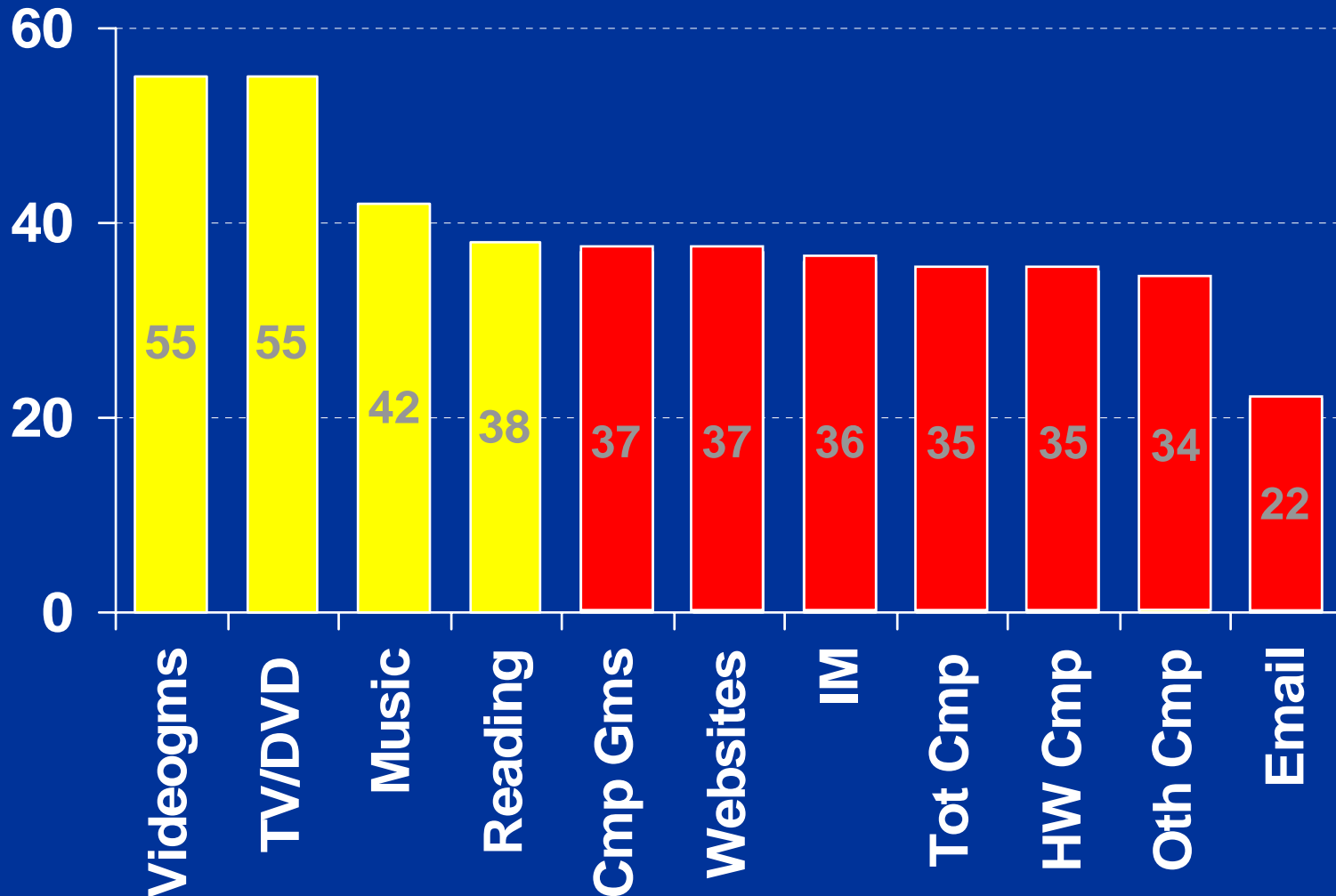
- Implications for convergence

# Computer

- Major media multitasking promoter

# Computer

Proportion of time, for each primary medium, devoted to doing "Nothing Else"



# Computer

- Major media multitasking promoter
- Most likely secondary activity is another computer activity
- Media activities are most common partners – unlike TV.

# Main Points

- An overwhelming majority of kids spend some time media multitasking. On average, those who media multitask do so a quarter of their media time.
- TV is a mighty force, in time and focus.
- Computer as a media multitasking station
- Importance of opportunity

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