TEN YEARS OF THE PEW NEWS INTEREST INDEX

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An analysis of public attentiveness to more than 500 news stories over the last ten years confirms that the American public pays relatively little attention to many of the serious news stories of the day. The major exceptions to this rule are stories dealing with natural and man-made disasters and U.S. military actions.

The news interest database is built from an ongoing series of questions which asks people how closely they have followed certain news stories during the previous month... "very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely?" The stories, 554 in all, represent a wide range of subjects from politics to sports to science and technology. They are compiled from 65 separate nationwide surveys including interviews of over 80,000 respondents.

A examination of nearly 200 information questions collected over the same ten year period provides some insight into the extent to which major news stories are understood and absorbed by the public. This analysis shows that there are significant gaps in knowledge between men and women and among people of different generations. Women and young people (those under 30) are less well-informed on basic facts about current events. These gaps are less evident in news interest, suggesting that interest and attentiveness do not necessary translate into knowledge.

The Appeal of Disaster

Overall, the public is not particularly engaged by the large majority of stories covered by the news media. On average, one fourth of the public followed the stories measured by the Center "very closely," another 32% "fairly closely", and fully 43% not closely at all. There are, however, exceptions to this general disinterest. Chief among these are stories about disasters, natural and man-made, and U.S. military interventions, which garner great attention.

Most Followed Stories
(% Followed Very Closely)

Story:	%
Challenger disaster	80
San Francisco earthquake	73
Rodney King verdict/riots	70
Crash of TWA Flight 800	69
Little girl in well, Texas	69
End of Persian Gulf War	67
Hurricane Andrew	66
Iraq's invasion of Kuwait	66
Floods in Midwest	65
Earthquake in Southern California	63
Iraq's occupation of Kuwait	63
Increase in price of gasoline (10/90)	62
Invasion of Panama	60
Hurricane Hugo	60
Oklahoma City bombing	58
US air strike on Libya	58
Olympic Park bombing	57
Outcome of presidential election	55
United Airlines crash/Sioux City, IA	53
US forces sent to Somalia	52
Exxon oil spill in Alaska	52

The list of most closely followed stories of the past ten years is topped by the Challenger disaster, which was followed very closely by 80% of the American public. Second on the list: the San Francisco earthquake of 1989, followed very closely by almost three-fourths of the population. The remaining stories in the top 25 are also primarily about man-made or natural disasters, along with several stories about wars and military actions. Three stories from 1996 made the top 25 list: the crash of TWA Flight 800, the Olympic Park bombing, and the 1996 Presidential election outcome (interestingly, the only political item in this group)[1].

The list of *least* closely followed stories provides a sharp contrast to the above. Featured prominently here are stories dealing with foreign governments and foreign politicians, such as the dismissal of Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan, the civil war in Cambodia, and political unrest in the Soviet Republics. Somewhat surprisingly, the lowest of the low are celebrity scandal stories. Again, there are three new additions to the list from 1996 and 1997: the Helsinki summit between President Clinton and Russian President Yeltsin; the debate over NATO expansion; and the marital problems of England's Prince Charles and Princess Diana.

Least Followed Stories (% Followed Very Closely)	
Story:	*%*
Political unrest in Soviet Republics	6
Helsinki Summit (Clinton/Yeltsin)	6
Elections in Romania	6
Vaclav Havel visit to US	6
UN Children's Summit/NYC	6
Barney Frank scandal	6
US officials trip to China	6
Japanese Prime Minister scandal	6
Stock Market crash/Japan	6
William Bennett and the RNC	6
Conflict in Yugoslavia (12/91)	5
Debate over NATO expansion	5
National Service Act passage	5
Scandals with British royals	5
Civil War in Cambodia	4
Prince Andrew and Fergie split	4
Dismissal of Bhutto/Pakistan	4
Woody Allen and Mia Farrow breakup	3
Charles and Di's marital problems	3
Tom Cruise's split from wife	2

Grouping stories by subject matter provides a broader picture of the types of stories Americans choose to follow, confirming the insights gleaned from looking at the top and bottom stories alone (see Table on page 3). Overall, the most widely followed categories of news stories were natural and man made disasters (followed very closely by 45% and 44% respectively), next were stories about the U.S. military or terrorism involving the United States (41%). In comparison, business and economic stories are followed very closely by three-in-ten Americans, and campaigns and elections by only 23%. Stories involving people and places outside the U.S. have a much smaller audience than any of the above topics. Finally, few Americans say they pay close attention to stories about political or celebrity scandal, or to those focusing on entertainment. As we will soon point out, however, knowledge about this latter group of topics is

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[1] Note that a similarly worded question was not asked about the other Presidential elections held in this time period. Presumably we would have found similarly high attention in those years.

relatively high.

Worth keeping in mind in an analysis of most followed stories is the fact that what Americans choose to follow is at least partially dictated by what the media chooses to cover. It is hard, in other words, to miss the coverage of a major earthquake. It is not so hard to miss news about Cambodia. However, there are instances where news stories which receive quite extensive and continuous coverage simply fail to attract public interest. An example of this is the civil war in Bosnia, which on average has been followed very closely by 15% of the public.

Average News Interest By Subject Category
(Top Individual Items in Each Category Shown)

	Very Closely %	Fairly Closely %	Not too Closely %	Not at all Closely %	DK %
Natural Disaster (15 stories)	45[2]	35	13	7	*=100
San Francisco earthquake (73%, Nov '89)					
Hurricane Andrew (66%, Sept '92)					
Floods in the Midwest (65%, Aug '93)					
Man Made Disaster (16 stories)	44	34	15	7	*=100
Challenger disaster (80%, July '86)					
Crash of TWA Flight 800 (69%, July 96)					
Little girl in well in Texas (69%, Oct '87)					
Military/Terrorism -- US (43 stories)	41	35	16	8	*=100
End of Persian Gulf War (67%, March '91)					
Iraq's invasion of Kuwait (66%, Aug '90)					
Iraq's occupation of Kuwait (63%, Oct '90)					
Court Rulings (9 stories)	30	33	21	15	1=100
Supreme Court ruling/flag burning (51%, July '89)					
Supreme Court ruling/abortion (47%, July '89)					
Supreme Court ruling/ PA abortion law (28%, May '92)					
Economy/Business (52 stories)	30	33	20	16	1=100
Increase in price of gas (62%, Oct '90)					
Reports on U.S. economy (49%, March '93)					
Stock Market crash (40%, Oct '87)					
Crime (29 stories)	27	32	22	18	1=100
O.J. Simpson case (48%, June 94)					
Attack on Nancy Kerrigan (45%, Jan '94)					
Arrest of Unabomber suspect (44%, April '96)					
Social Issues (25 stories)	26	32	22	20	*=100
Rodney King case/verdict and riots (70% May '92)					
Videotaped beating of Rodney King (46%, March '91)					
Gays in the military/lifting ban (45%, March '93)					
Domestic Policy (67 stories)	25	33	22	19	1=100
Clinton's economic plan (49%, March '93)					
Clinton's health care plan (49%, Sept '93)					
Bush Administration/U.S. drug crisis (40%, Sept '89)					

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[2]   How to read table: On average 45% of respondents followed natural disaster stories "very closely."

	Very Closely %	Fairly Closely %	Not too Closely %	Not at all Closely %	DK %
Physical/Science (13 stories)	25	31	22	21	1=100
Cold weather in the Northeast (51%, Jan '94)					
Flight of space shuttle (50%, Oct '88)					
Hot weather/greenhouse effect (42%, Aug '88)					
Sports (15 stories)	24	25	20	30	1=100
Summer Olympics in Atlanta (45%, July '96)					
Winter Olympics (33%, Feb '92)					
World Series (31%, Oct '88)					
Campaigns and Elections (37 stories)	23	34	24	19	*=100
Outcome of presidential election (55%, Dec '96)					
News about presidential campaign (43%, Oct '88)					
Presidential election campaign (42%, Sept '92)					
National Politics (35 stories)	21	30	24	24	1=100
Federal government shutdown (42%, Jan '96)					
Bush's heart problems (38%, May '91)					
Oliver North's sentencing (37%, July '89)					
International Policy (83 stories)	20	32	25	22	1=100
Opening of Berlin Wall (50%, Nov '89)					
Political upheaval in China (47%, July '89)					
Breakup of Soviet Union (47%, Oct '91)					
Political Scandal (31 stories)	17	29	27	26	1=100
Congressional check bouncing scandal (36%, April '92)					
Arrest of DC Mayor Barry (28%, Feb '90)					
Gary Hart withdrawal/Donna Rice (28%, Sept '87)					
Celebrity Scandal (16 stories)	16	26	27	30	1=100
Jim Bakker guilty verdict (33%, Oct '89)					
Mike Tyson's rape trial (32%, Feb '92)					
Banishment of Pete Rose (30%, Sept '89)					
Military/Terrorism -- Non-US (49 stories)	14	31	29	25	1=100
Failed coup in Panama (29%, Oct '89)					
Revolution in Romania (28%, Jan '90)					
Gas attack in Tokyo subway (26%, March '95)					
Personality/Entertainment (16 stories)	14	22	25	38	1=100
Nixon's death and funeral (36%, May '94)					
Networks and television violence (26%, Aug '93)					
Roseanne Barr singing national anthem (21%, Aug '90)					

Men, Women, and the News

Men and women are equally likely to say that they followed the average news story very closely (26% of men and 24% of women), but there are some moderate differences in the *type* of news stories each tends to follow. Men are more likely to follow stories about: military action, be it American or foreign; international politics; business and finance; political scandal; and most of all, sports. Some of the stories which attracted significantly more men than women include: the U.S. Navy escorting Kuwaitis in the Persian Gulf in October 1987 (21% point gap), the U.S. air strike on Libya (20% point gap), and the 1990 NFL playoffs (19% point gap).

Women, on the other hand, are somewhat more likely to follow disaster stories and stories about court rulings (many of which concern abortion policy). Particular stories which showed a gender gap in attentiveness in favor of women included the court ruling on the fate of baby Jessica (21% more women than men paid very close attention), this year's controversy over mammograms (19% point gap), and the 1989 Supreme Court ruling on abortion (14% point gap).

News Attentiveness by Gender % Who Follow Each "Very Closely"	Men %	Women %
All News Stories	26	24
Military/Terrorism -- U.S.	43	38
Natural Disaster	41	46
Business & Financial	33	27
Man-made Disaster	42	46
Domestic Policy	26	24
Social	25	27
Sports	28	21
Crime	25	28
Physical/Science	24	25
International Policy/Politics	23	17
Campaigns & Elections	23	21
National Politics	23	20
Political Scandal	19	15
Court Rulings	26	33
Military/Terrorism -- Non-U.S.	17	12
Personality/Entertainment	12	14
Celebrity Scandal	16	17

The large gender gap displayed in the most recent Presidential elections does not extend to news *attentiveness* in these areas; men are only 2% points more likely to follow stories about domestic policy and election campaigns, and 3% points more likely to follow stories about national politics in general.[3]

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[3] When asked in a survey how closely they follow "political figures and events in Washington" in general, however, women were 11% points less likely to answer *very closely*. It is interesting to note that the gender gap is smaller when the differences were measured on actual questions rather than on the abstract category. See "TV News Viewership Declines," Pew Research Center for The People & The Press, May 1996.

Older Americans More Tuned In

Americans over age 50 are much more attentive to a variety of types of news, particularly when compared with those under age 30. This comes across clearly in the attention paid to politics and policy. Those over 50 are almost twice as likely as members of Generation X to say they follow national politics and domestic policy very closely, and 10% points more likely to follow election campaigns and international politics. Almost one quarter of those over 50 say they follow stories about political scandal very closely, compared to only 11% of those under 30. Older Americans are also much more likely to follow stories about disasters, and about business or finance.

	50 and older	30 - 49	Under 30
News Attentiveness by Generation % Who Follow Each "Very Closely"			
	%	%	%
All news stories	30	23	20
Military/Terrorism -- US	46	41	38
Natural Disaster	53	40	38
Business & Financial	36	29	22
Man-made Disaster	50	42	38
Domestic Policy	32	23	18
Social	28	24	25
Sports	24	23	28
Crime	30	24	26
Physical/Science	30	24	22
International Policy/Politics	25	18	15
Campaigns & Elections	28	20	18
National Politics	28	19	15
Political Scandal	23	15	11
Court Rulings	33	29	26
Military/Terrorism -- Non-US	18	14	11
Personality/Entertainment	15	12	14
Celebrity Scandal	18	15	16

Correspondingly, Generation Xers trail behind their elders in news attentiveness on many subjects. The only category in which they lead both age groups is sports. In general, Americans in the 30 to 49 age group find themselves somewhere in the middle on news attentiveness, though their consumption patterns are more like younger Americans than those older than themselves. This generational pattern is likely affected by both time and interest, with senior citizens in particular the beneficiaries of larger amounts of free time for news consumption.

Knowledge of the News

In addition to tracking news interest, the Center has, over the past ten years, periodically tested the public's knowledge of current events on a range subjects from entertainment news to sports to world events. On average 43% of the public has answered these *information* questions correctly. This is higher than the proportion that follows major news stories "very closely" (25%), suggesting that some information gets to those segments of the public that do not consider themselves highly attentive to the news. Information questions are a valuable tool for measuring the extent to which certain facts and occurrences penetrate the public psyche and become part of the base of knowledge from which Americans formulate their opinions.

The question that has drawn the highest percentage of correct answers since we began polling in 1987 is, "Can you tell me which president had to resign because of the so-called Watergate scandal?" In May of 1994, 91% of the public were able to identify Richard Nixon in that context[4]. Other information questions that made it into the top five were knowledge that: the United States has a trade deficit rather than a surplus with Japan (83%), General Manual Noriega hid in the Vatican embassy during the 1990 U.S. invasion (82%), the federal government spends more money than it takes in (81%), and the reason Zsa Zsa Gabor was in the news in the fall of 1989 was because she was arrested in Beverly Hills (80%).

The information questions at the bottom end of the scale, that is those that were known by the smallest percentages of the public, cover an equally wide range of subjects. The one question we have asked over the past ten years which has drawn the *lowest* percentage of correct answers is, "Do you happen to know what proportion of privately owned U.S. real estate is owned by foreign investors?" In 1989, only 4% were correct in choosing *less than 5%* on this multiple choice question. Other little known facts included the meaning of the term "politically correct." Seven percent answered this open-ended question correctly in 1991, in the midst of the public debate over affirmative action and multiculturalism. Less than one in ten (9%) knew that the "peace dividend" referred to the money we may save on defense spending because of the reduction in tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Equally small percentages were able to identify such news makers as Samuel Pierce, John Major, and Vaclav Havel (10% for each).

Of the nearly 200 questions in the knowledge database, 59 involve identifying specific people. After Richard Nixon, the individual most readily identifiable by the public was William Kennedy Smith. In May of 1991, 75% of the public could identify the famous Kennedy nephew in

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4 Note: this is one of the few historical questions in the data base, the vast majority deal with current events.

an open-ended question. Nearly as many (70%) were able to identify the slain child beauty queen JonBenet Ramsey earlier this year, as many as could name the current Vice President in 1994. Nearly two-thirds (65%) were able to identify Lance Ito as the judge in the O.J. Simpson case, and an equal number knew who Corazon Aquino was.

Public knowledge of current events varies significantly across different subject categories. While the news interest index suggests that the public pays little attention to news stories about celebrities and scandal, our knowledge data suggests that the public *knows more* about these types of stories than it does about virtually any other category of news. On average the public answered 60% of the questions dealing with scandal, entertainment and crime correctly.[5] The items included in this category range from: 'who is JonBenet Ramsey?', to 'why has televangelist Jim Bakker's trial been delayed?', to 'which country recently built a new Disney amusement park?'

Well less than half of the public (43%) correctly answered questions dealing with the military and terrorism where the U.S. was directly involved. Similar proportions correctly answered questions about domestic policy, business and finance, national politics, and military and terrorism where the U.S. is not involved. The public is less well informed about international policy and campaign news. Fewer than four in ten correctly answered questions on these topics.

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[5]   Because of the limited number of items in the knowledge database, questions dealing with crime, political scandal, celebrity scandal, and personality and entertainment were combined into one category with a total of 14 items.

Average Knowledge By Subject Category

(Range of Items in Each Category Shown)

	% Correct
ALL ITEMS (189)	43

Scandal, Entertainment/Personality, Crime (14)   60

       Watergate scandal President? (91%)
       Reason Nadia Comaneci in the news? (58%)
       Reason Sinatra has been in the news? (30%)

Military/Terrorism, US (14)   43

       Noriega hiding place? (82%)
       US forces in Philippines? (42%)
       What is "peace dividend"? (9%)

Domestic Policy (34)   43

       Federal government running a deficit? (81%)
       Clean air legislation passed? (43%)
       Size of annual budget deficit? (18%)

Financial/Business (10)   43

       US trade deficit with Japan? (83%)
       US trade deficit with Western Europe? (38%)
       Amount of real estate owned by foreigners? (4%)

National Politics (29)   43

       Vegetable Bush won't eat? (76%)
       Who's Jim Wright? (40%)
       Who's Samuel Pierce? (6%)

Military/Terrorism, Non-US (10)   42

       What happened to Ceausescu? (70%)
       Reason for fighting in Bosnia? (40%)
       Country with prolonged civil war? (21%)

International Policy/Politics (39)   38

       Winner of South African election? (68%)
       Change in control of Panama Canal? (36%)
       Who's Noboru Takeshita? (12%)

Campaign-Related (18)   37

       Who won GOP New Hampshire primary? (62%)
       Candidate campaigning against NAFTA (37%)
       Candidate critical of Bush on Gulf war? (14%)

Other (21)   48

       What is Voyager 2? (74%)
       New network broadcasting NFL games? (47%)
       Meaning of "politically correct (7%)

Gender, Generation and Knowledge of News Events

While the gender gap in news interest is not pronounced, the gap in knowledge is wide and far-reaching. On average men have answered nearly half (49%) of our information questions correctly. This compares with only 37% of women. The biggest gaps in knowledge can be seen on questions dealing with international policy and politics where on average 46% of men and 29% of women answered the questions correctly. The gap is equally large on questions dealing with military and terrorism where the U.S. is not directly involved (50% of men and 34% of women answered these questions correctly).

The Knowledge Gap % Who Answered Each Item Correctly		
	Men	Women
	%	%
All Items	49	37
Crime, Scandal, Personality	62	58
Military/Terrorism, U.S.	50	38
Military/Terrorism, non-U.S.	50	34
National Politics	50	38
Domestic Policy	47	38
International Policy/Politics	46	29
Campaign-Related	44	30
Financial/Business	43	37
Other	53	43

Significant gaps also exist on campaign-related questions (14% point gap), military and terrorism where the U.S. is involved (12% point gap), national politics (12% point gap), and domestic policy (9% point gap). The gap is smaller on questions dealing with business and finance. The only news category about which men and women are equally knowledgeable is crime, scandal and personality.

It is possible, of course, that other factors, such as socio-economic status, may be driving the differences between men and women. However, a separate analysis of Pew data suggests that education does little to mitigate the differences in levels of knowledge between women and men. College-educated men are significantly more knowledgeable than any other group. College-educated women are only slightly more informed that men *without* college degrees. Women without a college degree are the least knowledgeable, except with regard to entertainment news. In this case, non-college educated women are more knowledgeable than women with degrees.

This analysis also found that life situation factors have some influence on levels of knowledge for both women and men. Women who are employed full time are no more knowledgeable than women who are employed part time or not at all. However, educated women who work full time are more knowledgeable than educated women who do not work full time. The

same holds true for men.[6]

Generation gaps in knowledge are as substantial and as persistent as gender gaps. The great divide seems to be between those over 30 and those under 30. On average 36% of those under 30 answered the information questions correctly, this compares with 45% of those age 30-49 and those 50 and over. The biggest generation gaps can be seen on questions dealing with campaigns and elections and national politics. Only 26% of

Knowledge by Generation
% Who Answered Each Item Correctly

	50 & Older	30 - 49	Under 30
	%	%	%
All Items	45	45	36
Crime, Scandal, Personality	58	64	56
National Politics	48	44	32
Domestic Policy	46	43	35
Financial/Business	44	44	40
Military/Terrorism, U.S.	43	47	38
Campaign-Related	42	38	26
Military/Terrorism, non-U.S.	41	46	36
International Policy/Politics	40	39	28
Other	45	52	45

young people answered our campaign-related questions correctly, this compares with 38% of those 30-49 and 42% over those 50 and over. On national politics, young people averaged 32% correct, compared to 44% of middle aged Americans, and 48% of those 50 and older.

Big gaps also exist on international politics and policy, domestic policy, and military and terrorism. The gaps are smaller on crime, scandal and personality issues. Young people are nearly as well informed as their older counterparts when it comes to business and finance.

A 1990 Times Mirror study entitled *Age of Indifference* analyzed these generational gaps in depth and reported that young people have not always lagged behind in terms of knowledge.[7] Survey results from the 1940s through the 1970s revealed that previous generations of younger

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[6]   These conclusions are based on research conducted by Georgetown University political scientist Diana Owen who analyzed a total of 159 information questions asked by the Center from 1989 to 1993. (See "The Times Mirror News Interest Index: 1989-1995," Pew Research Center for The People & The Press, December 1995). Her analysis is supported by the research of Michael X. Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter (1992) who found that, even after controlling for income, education and employment status, the gender gap in knowledge remains significant. These authors argue that the gap persists because girls and women continue to be socialized to roles and behaviors that are not necessarily compatible with many forms of political involvement. The authors also point out that on certain issues of special urgency to women, such as abortion, the gender gap in knowledge is nearly nonexistent.

[7]   "The Age of Indifference: A Study of Young Americans and How They View the News," Times Mirror Center for The People & The Press, June 1990.

people knew as much as, if not *more than*, older members of the population.

In spite of the persistent generation gaps in the current data, there are some interesting examples of instances where Americans under 30 *do* know more than those over 30. One question where young people knew more than both middle aged and older Americans involved the minimum wage. In April of 1996, 49% of those under 30 know the current minimum wage was $4.25. This compares with 42% of those age 30 to 49 and only 38% of those 50 and older.

In several other cases young people displayed higher levels of knowledge than those 50 and older, but still trailed those in the middle age group. Some examples include questions about the Internet, Windows 95, the judge in the O.J. Simpson criminal trial, a 1989 Supreme Court ruling on abortion, the TV sitcom that Dan Quayle criticized during the 1992 campaign, and the spacecraft Voyager 2.

The under 30 group only out-smarted those 30 to 49 on a few information questions. The biggest such gap appeared in 1990 when 53% of young people knew that the Social Security system was currently taking in *more* money than it was paying out. Those over 50, many of them recipients of Social Security benefits, were equally well informed on this point (51%). However, only four in ten (41%) of 30 to 49 year olds were aware of this.

Concluding Thoughts

Both the knowledge and attentiveness series are an attempt to answer the question: how engaged are Americans with the important (and not so important) news stories of the day. Yet each measurement strategy provides slightly different results. We are left, then, trying to make sense of these patterns in order to make use of our data.

In a general sense, the two measurements do not map onto each other in any obvious way. For most categories of news, people are *more likely* to be able to answer a knowledge question than they are to pay very close attention to the stories.[8] This, perhaps, is not surprising, since it is often possible to pick up the gist of a story without following it on a day to day basis.

A particularly conspicuous example of this is the difference between professed attention and knowledge of stories involving entertainment, scandal and crime. These stories fall at the bottom

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[8]The only category which is an exception is stories about the military or terrorism involving the U.S., in which the percentage following the average story very closely is almost identical to the percentage able to correctly answer questions in the area.

of the news attentiveness scale, but at the top of the knowledge scale. There are at least three possible explanations for this. First, the news attentiveness figures might be depressed by a social desirability effect, in which people are loathe to admit they are following less serious stories. Second, it is possible that these stories are conceptually less challenging, and so easier to grasp even without a major investment of attention. For example, it takes some work to understand the situation in Bosnia, while the plotline of the Michael Kennedy story is fairly straightforward. Finally, this result could be driven by intense coverage of entertainment and scandal stories, so that even if one is not paying close attention, it is hard to miss the point.

Another interesting difference between the two measures is the fact that the gender gap is relatively small and erratic in news attentiveness, but large and consistent in the knowledge questions. We know from previous research that this latter difference is not about education or work status individually. Perhaps the discrepancy could be attributed to a difference in socialization, where men continue to be socialized to treat news information as important in terms of memory retention whereas women dismiss the information more easily. On a more prosaic note, it is also possible that the the knowledge questions are the more valid measure, since it is difficult to exaggerate on these questions, but altogether possible to do so on the news attentiveness questions. An alternative methodological explanation is that by only looking at differences in the response category "very closely" in news attentiveness we are missing larger gender differences in the bottom categories. Whatever the explanation, this difference seems worth exploring.

TABLES

Most Followed Stories by Year

(1990-1996)

<u>% Very Closely</u>

1996

1.	Crash of TWA flight 800	69
2.	Olympic Park bombing	57
3.	Outcome of presidential election	55
4.	East coast blizzard	48
5.	Summer Olympics in Atlanta	45

1995

1.	Oklahoma City Bombing	58
2.	Floods in California	37
3.	Medicare debate (Sept.)	31
4.	Proposals to reform Medicare (June)	28
5.	Reports on the U.S. economy (March)	27

1994

1.	Earthquake in Southern California	63
2.	Cold weather in the Northeast	51
3.	O.J. Simpson case (June)	48
4.	Attack on Nancy Kerrigan	45
5.	News about election outcome	41

1993

1.	Floods in the Midwest	65
2.	U.S. forces sent to Somalia	52
3.	Waco, Texas incident	50
4.	Clinton's economic plan (March)	49
5.	Reports on the U.S. economy (March)	49

1992

1.	Rodney King verdict and riots	70
2.	Hurricane Andrew	66
3.	Reports on the U.S. economy (March)	47
4.	Presidential election campaign (Sept.)	42
5.	Congressional check bouncing scandal	36

1991

	% Very Closely
1. End of the Persian Gulf War	67
2. Iraq's occupation of Kuwait	59
3. Release of U.S. hostages (Jan.)	51
4. Breakup of Soviet Union	47
5. Videotaped beating of Rodney King	46

1990

1. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait (Aug.)	66
2. Iraq's occupation of Kuwait (Oct.)	63
3. Increase in price of gas (Oct.)	62
4. Invasion of Panama	60
5. U.S. hostages in Iraq and Kuwait (Sept.)	57

Least Followed Stories by Year

(1990-1996)

	% Very Closely

1996

1. Charles and Di's marital problesm	3
2. Russian presidential election	7
3. Possible life on Mars	8
4. Protests in Belgrade	10
5. GOP presidential candidates	10

1995

1. Time Warner-Turner merger	6
2. Perot's UWSA convention	7
3. CBS's firing of Connie Chung	8
4. United Nations Women's conference in China	8
5. Civil War in Bosnia (Feb.)	8

1994

1. Kurt Cobain suicide	7
2. Bobby Inman's withdrawal	7
3. Debate over GATT agreement	8
4. IRA cease-fire agreement	8
5. World population conference in Cairo	9

1993

1. National Service Act passage	5
2. G7 summit meeting in Tokyo	7
3. Asian summit in Seattle	7
4. Voter referendum in Russia	10
5. Israeli expulsion of 400 Muslims	10

1992

1. Woody Allen and Mia Farrow breakup	3
2. Prince Andrew and Fergie breakup	4
3. Scandals with British royals (Sept.)	5
4. Stock market crash in Japan	6
5. John Gotti trial	7

	% Very Closely
1991	
1. Conflict in Yugoslavia (Dec.)	5
2. William Bennett and the RNC	6
3. Pat Buchanan to run for President	7
4. Nancy Reagan biography by Kitty Kelly	8
5. John Sununu resignation	8
1990	
1. Tom Cruise's split from wife	2
2. Dismissal of Bhutto in Pakistan	4
3. Civil war in Cambodia	4
4. U.S. officials' trip to China	6
5. United Nations children's summit in New York	6

Top Ten Knowledge Items

Question	% Correct
Can you tell me which president had to resign because of the so-called Watergate scandal? *(5-94)*	91
Do you think the United States has a trade surplus or a trade deficit with Japan? *(2-89)*	83
Do you happen to know where General Manual Noriega took refuge to escape capture by American troops? *(1-90)*	82
Do you happen to know if the federal government is spending more money than it is taking in this year or spending less? *(2-89)*	81
Can you tell me why Zsa Zsa Gabor has been in the news a lot recently? *(10-89)*	80
In the past ten years, would you say there has been an increase in foreign investments in U.S. companies and property, a decrease, or has it stayed about the same? *(2-89)*	78
To the best of your knowledge, in what way did Clinton ease the ban on homosexuals in the military? *(8-93)*	77
President Bush recently announced that he did not like and would no longer eat a certain vegetable. Do you happen to know what vegetable that was? *(4-90)*	76
To the best of your knowledge, are news reports from the Gulf being censored by the American military? *(1-91)*	76
As you may have heard, O.J. Simpson was ordered by the jury in his civil trial to pay damages to the family of Ronald Goldman. Tell me if you happen to know which of the following comes closest to the amount of money Simpson was order to pay... *(2-97)*	75

Bottom Ten Knowledge Items

Question	% Correct
Who is Boutros Boutros Ghali? *(1-94)*	13
What is your impression... How much of the federal budget is devoted to aid to other countries? Would you say five percent or less, about ten percent, about 25 percent, or a third or more? *(8-90)*	12
Do you happen to know who Noboru Takeshita is? *(5-89)*	12
Do you happen to know who Barney Frank is? *(10-89)*	12
Do you happen to know who Vaclav Havel is? *(1-90)*	10
Do you happen to know who John Major is? *(1-91)*	10
Do you happen to know who Samuel Pierce is? *(10-89)*	10
What is the peace dividend... would you say it is (1) the money we may save on defense spending because of the reduction in tension between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, (2) the growing revenues we earn from the interest that accrues on Social Security, or (3) the increase in the interest rate people get from government savings bonds? *(2-90)*	9
Can you tell me what the term "politically correct" means? *(5-91)*	7
Do you happen to know what proportion of privately owned U.S. real estate is owned by foreign investors?	4

Top Ten Personal Identifications

Question	% Correct
Do you happen to know who William Kennedy Smith? *(5-91)*	75
Do you happen to know who JonBenet Ramsey is? *(2-97)*	70
What is the name of the current Vice President of the United States? *(2-94)*	70
Do you happen to know the name of the judge in the O.J. Simpson murder trial? *(2-95)*	64
Do you happen to know who Corazon Aquino is? (12-89)	64
Do you happen to know who won the presidential election in Nicaragua last week? Was it the UNO candidate, Violeta Chamorro or was it the Sandinista candidate, Daniel Ortega? *(3-90)*	63
Do you happen to know which Republican candidate won the New Hampshire primary? *(2-96)*	62
Do you happen to know which Republican candidate has been spending millions of dollars of his own money to finance his presidential campaign? *(2-96)*	61
Do you happen to know who John Poindexter is? *(4-90)*	60
Last week one of the top Democratic contenders for the presidential nominations dropped out of the race. Do you happen to know who that was? *(3-92)*	57