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But Too Much Coverage

JFK JR TRAGEDY ATTRACTS HUGE AUDIENCE

News of the disappearance and death of John F. Kennedy Jr. attracted a large news audience last week, but most Americans think that news organizations over-covered the story. More than eight-in-ten paid attention to news of the tragedy, and as many as 54% paid very close attention. It ranks as one of the most closely followed news stories of recent years, and only second in 1999 to interest in news about the school shootings in Littleton, Colorado, which was followed very closely by 68% of the public. Interest in JFK Jr.'s death was comparable to news about the death of Princess Diana two years ago.

Most Americans (52%) believe that news organizations gave too much coverage to the story; only 42% think the media gave the tragedy the right amount of coverage. By a 55%-to-29% majority people say the news media covered it as much as they did because it was an interesting story that would attract big audiences, rather than because it was big news that people needed to know. However, fewer think the JFK Jr. story was over-covered by the media than felt that way about the OJ trial (90%), the

Attention to Personal Tragedy and Major Celebrity Stories

<i>News story</i>	Following <u>"Very Closely"</u> %
Little girl in well in Texas ('87)	69
<i>John F. Kennedy Jr.'s death</i>	54
Princess Diana's death ('97)	54
Murder of Col. Higgins ('89)	49
O.J. Simpson arrest ('94)	48
Attack on Nancy Kerrigan ('94)	45
Plane crash with 7 year-old girl trying to fly across the U.S. ('96)	44
Richard Nixon's death ('94)	36
Ron Brown's death ('96)	34
Mike Tyson's rape trial ('92)	32
Caning of Michael Faye ('94)	32
Charles Stuart's suicide ('90)	29
Central Park jogger attack ('89)	29
William Kennedy Smith trial ('91)	27
Hank Gathers' death ('90)	26
Lorena Bobbitt's trial ('94)	26
Gianni Versace's death ('97)	24
Mickey Mantle's death ('95)	24
Michael Jackson's problems ('94)	19
Joe DiMaggio's death ('99)	18
Arthur Ashe ill with AIDS ('92)	18
Frank Sinatra's death ('98)	17
Murder of abortion doctor ('98)	16
Vincent Foster's suicide ('93)	13
Michael J. Fox's illness ('98)	13
Jerry Garcia's death ('95)	9
Kurt Cobain's suicide ('94)	7

William Kennedy Smith trial (71%) or the Lewinsky scandal (69%). The Pew Research Center survey of 753 respondents was conducted July 23-26, 1999.

Americans of all ages paid close attention to JFK Jr.'s disappearance, even those not old enough to have clear personal memories of President Kennedy. As many as 48% of those under age 45 paid very close attention to news about the tragedy. Interest was greater among those ages 45 to 59 (54%) and greater yet among people ages 60 and older (70%). Women were much more attentive than were men (60% to 48%).

Men and women also reacted differently to the tragedy. A 53% majority of women felt upset and saddened by the news, compared to only 25% of men, most of whom felt sorry but not personally affected by what happened. Older people were also more emotionally caught up in the news than were people under 60 years of age.

ABOUT THIS SURVEY

Results for the main survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates among a nationwide sample of 753 adults, 18 years of age or older, during the period July 23-26, 1999. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 4.0 percentage points.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS
JFK JR NEWS INTEREST INDEX
FINAL TOPLINE
July 23 - 26, 1999
N=753

Q.1 Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bill Clinton is handling his job as President? **[IF DK ENTER AS DK. IF DEPENDS PROBE ONCE WITH: Overall do you approve or disapprove of the way Bill Clinton is handling his job as President? IF STILL DEPENDS ENTER AS DK]**

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
Late July, 1999	63	29	8=100
July, 1999	58	31	11=100
June, 1999	55	35	10=100
May, 1999	56	34	10=100
April, 1999	56	38	6=100
March, 1999	62	31	7=100
February, 1999	64	30	6=100
Mid-January, 1999	66	29	5=100
January, 1999	63	30	7=100

Q.2 Now I will read a list of some stories covered by news organizations this past month. As I read each item, tell me if you happened to follow this news story very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely? [INSERT ITEM; ROTATE ITEMS]

	<u>Very Closely</u>	<u>Fairly Closely</u>	<u>Not too Closely</u>	<u>Not at all Closely</u>	<u>DK (VOL)</u>
a. The death of John F. Kennedy Jr., his wife and sister-in-law in a plane crash near Martha's Vineyard	54	29	13	4	0=100
b. The debate and discussion in Washington over how much to cut taxes	14	34	21	31	*=100
c. Increasing tensions between China and Taiwan	8	20	25	47	*=100
d. The Reform Party convention in Michigan	1	8	15	75	1=100

Q.3 Do you think news organizations gave too much coverage to the disappearance and death of John F. Kennedy Jr., too little coverage to his death, or the right amount of coverage?

52 Too much coverage
 4 Too little coverage
 42 Right amount of coverage
 2 Don't know/Refused
 100

Q.4 Why do you think news organizations covered the story of John F. Kennedy Jr.'s disappearance and death as much as they did? Do you think it was because they thought it was a big story that people needed to know about, or do you think it was because they thought it was an interesting story that would attract large audiences?

29 A big story
 55 Attract large audiences
 11 Both (VOL.)
 4 Neither (VOL.)
 1 Don't know/Refused
 100

Q.5 Which of the following best reflects your personal reaction to the disappearance and death of John F. Kennedy Jr.? I was very upset and saddened by it, I was sorry to hear about it but it didn't really affect me, OR it didn't matter that much to me.

40 Upset and saddened
 54 Sorry but not really affected
 6 Didn't matter that much
 * Don't know/Refused
 100