

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:  
Wednesday, July 18, 2001**

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:  
Andrew Kohut, Director**

## **MISSING INTERN STIRS MEDIA FRENZY, LUKEWARM PUBLIC INTEREST**

Despite the news media's intense focus on the disappearance of Chandra Levy and her relationship with Rep. Gary Condit, public interest in the story is relatively low, particularly when compared to other celebrity scandal cases in recent years that have attracted massive media attention.

The latest Pew Research Center survey, conducted July 2-12, finds that only about half the public (49%) is closely following news of the former intern, with 16% paying very close attention to the story and 33% following it fairly closely. Not only is this far less than the peak audiences for the major scandal stories of the past decade – the O.J. Simpson case (77%) and former President Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky (72%) – but it is also below public interest in a range of cases including the arrest of former Washington mayor Marion Barry and the rape trial of William Kennedy Smith.

### **High-Profile Celebrity Scandals**

<i>Percent who followed stories closely ...</i>	<u>Very</u> %	<u>Fairly</u> %
O.J. Simpson case (6/94)	48	29
Clinton/Lewinsky scandal (9/98)	36	36
Jim Bakker guilty verdict (10/89)	33	39
Mike Tyson rape trial (3/92)	32	37
Arrest of Marion Barry (2/90)	28	40
William Kennedy Smith trial (12/91)	27	39
Ethics charges against Gingrich (1/97)	23	35
Michael Jackson problems (1/94)	19	30
<b>Chandra Levy disappearance (7/01)</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>33</b>
Ethics charges against Jim Wright (5/89)	15	30
Vince Foster Suicide (8/93)	13	25
Keating five investigation (3/91)	12	22
Barney Frank scandal (10/89)	6	19

Indeed, the investigation into Levy's disappearance was not even the month's most closely followed story. More than seven-in-ten (73%) paid at least fairly close attention to news of the Houston woman who allegedly drowned her five children.

Between July 2-8, 44% paid at least some attention to news of Levy's disappearance (13% following it very closely and 31% following it fairly closely). That number grew to 55% between July 9-12 (20% very closely, 35% fairly closely) subsequent to news reports that Condit had confirmed to authorities he had an affair with Levy. With Levy still missing, it is possible that public interest in this story will continue to increase.

***Upper Middle-Class Appeal***

College graduates and those with annual family incomes of at least \$75,000 showed the most interest in news about Levy; six-in-ten in each group followed this story at least fairly closely. Americans under age 30 paid relatively little attention to this news, with just over a third (34%) following news of Levy's disappearance. A majority (53%) of those over age 30 expressed at least some interest in the story. Republicans and Democrats showed comparable levels of interest in this story.

The diverging levels of interest among various demographic groups highlight another major difference between the Levy case and other stories that became media events, particularly Simpson's and Clinton's. In their initial phase, those stories attracted broad interest from virtually all demographic groups.

\*\*\*\*\*

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE AND THE PRESS  
 JULY 2001 FAVORABILITY SURVEY  
 — FINAL TOPLINE —  
 JULY 2-12, 2001  
 N = 1,003  
 ± 3.5%**

Q.4 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]**

		<u>Very Closely</u>	<u>Fairly Closely</u>	<u>Not too Closely</u>	<u>Not at all Closely</u>	<u>DK/Ref</u>
a.	The disappearance of Chandra Levy, a former Washington, DC intern	16	33	25	24	2=100
b.	The special United Nations session devoted to the AIDS crisis	6	19	27	45	3=100
c.	A Houston woman who allegedly drowned her five children	31	42	16	9	2=100