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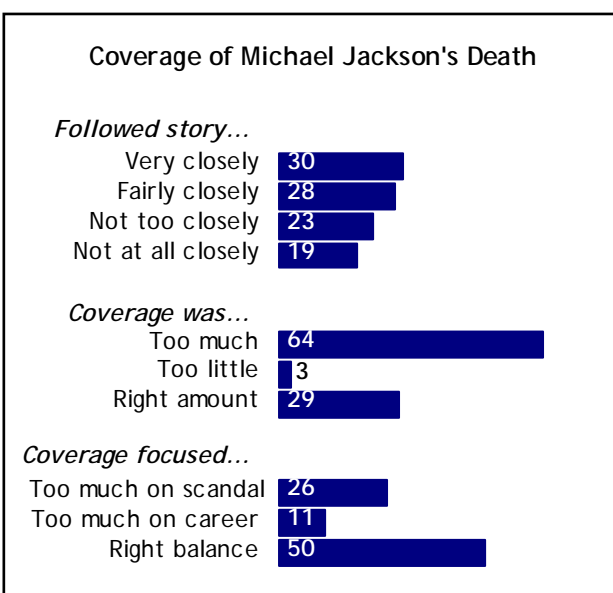
## **Blacks Track News of Icon's Death Much More Closely than Whites** **COVERAGE OF JACKSON'S DEATH SEEN AS EXCESSIVE**

The public closely tracked the sudden death of pop superstar Michael Jackson last week, though nearly two-in-three Americans say news organizations gave too much coverage to the story. At the same time, half say the media struck the right balance between reporting on Jackson's musical legacy and the problems in his personal life.

With reports about Jackson's June 25<sup>th</sup> death in Los Angeles dominating media coverage at week's end, 30% say they followed these stories very closely. A similar share (31%) say this was the story they followed more closely than any other, according to the latest weekly News Interest Index survey, conducted June 26-29 by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press.

Blacks followed the death of the African American singer – who had been on the national stage for four decades – more closely than the population as a whole. Eight-in-ten African Americans say they followed news about Jackson's death very closely, compared with 22% of whites. Women followed the story more closely than men (35% very closely compared with 26%). Close to four-in-ten (38%) of those under 40 say they followed the music icon's death very closely, compared with 27% of those between 40 and 64 and 20% of those 65 and older.

A separate analysis of media coverage by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism shows that for the entire week of June 22-28 the Jackson story and the bloody aftermath of the disputed Iranian elections received similar levels of media coverage. The



protests in Iran made up 19% of the newshole for the week, while the Jackson story took up 18%. But from the time the Jackson story broke Thursday afternoon to the end of the day Friday, 60% of the news coverage studied was devoted to his death, his life story and his legacy, according to PEJ. Iran coverage dropped to 7% of the newshole in that same time period.

About two-thirds of the public (64%) say news organizations gave too much attention to the death of the 50-year-old performer, who had been rehearsing for a major comeback tour. About three-in-ten (29%) say the coverage was the right amount. Only 3% say there had been too little coverage.

When asked about the content of the coverage, 26% say the media focused too much on the scandals and personal problems in the life of the self-proclaimed “King of Pop”; 11% say the coverage focused too much on Jackson’s successful musical career. Half say news organizations struck the right balance.

More than half of African Americans (54%) say the amount of coverage has been about right, compared with 25% of whites. Seven-in-ten whites say there has been too much coverage, compared with 36% of blacks.

	<u>White</u> %	<u>Black</u> %
Followed story very closely	22	80
Too much coverage	70	36
News focused too much on scandal	22	47
	N=848	N=78

About half of African Americans (47%) also say that the coverage has focused too much on the scandals and personal problems in Jackson’s life, compared with 22% of whites. On this question, there is little difference by gender: 28% of women say the coverage focused too much on scandal, compared with 24% of men. About a quarter of those under 40 (24%), say coverage has focused too much on Jackson’s personal problems, compared with 28% of those 40-64 and those 65 and older.

### The Week’s Top Stories

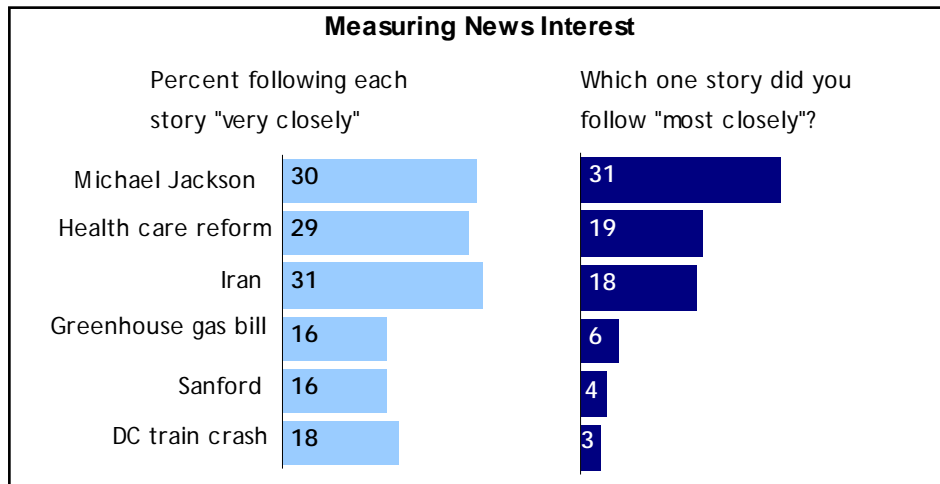
The Jackson story grabbed people’s attention late in what had already been a busy news week with continuing developments in Iran, debate in Washington on health care reform, an infidelity scandal involving South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford and a train crash in Washington, D.C., that left nine dead.

<i>Death of...</i>	<i>Followed</i>	
	<u>Very closely</u> %	<u>Fairly closely</u> %
Princess Diana (9/97)	54	31
John F. Kennedy Jr. (7/99)	54	29
Steve Irwin, “The Crocodile Hunter” (9/06)	30	36
<b>Michael Jackson (6/09)</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>28</b>
Tim Russert, “Meet the Press” host (6/08)	28	23
Mickey Mantle, baseball great (8/95)	24	36
Paul Newman, actor (10/08)	19	29
Natasha Richardson, actor (3/09)	18	28
Frank Sinatra, singer (6/98)	17	31
Heath Ledger, actor (1/08)	13	29
George Harrison, musician (12/01)	10	23
Anna Nicole Smith, model (2/07)	11	27
Jerry Garcia, musician (8/95)	9	19
Kurt Cobain, musician (5/94)	7	14

By way of comparison, the 30% that say they followed the Jackson story very closely is similar to the 28% that followed the death of Tim Russert, the NBC newsman, very closely in June 2008 and the 30% that followed the death of Steve Irwin, “The Crocodile Hunter,” very closely in September 2006. Still, interest in Jackson’s death is far less than the 54% who said they followed the sudden deaths of John F. Kennedy Jr. in July 1999 and Princess Diana in September 1997.

Meanwhile, a similar share (29%) very closely followed the announcement of criminal charges against Jackson alleging child molestation in November 2003. A smaller share (13%) said they very closely followed Jackson’s acquittal in the California case in June 2005.

In other news, about three-in-ten (31%) say they very closely followed the Iranian government’s crackdown on election protesters last week. That’s comparable to the 28% that said they were following the post-election protests in Iran very closely one week earlier and indicates continued strong interest in the story. Close to two-in-ten (18%) say they followed developments in Iran more closely than any other story.



A comparable share (29%) say they followed reports about the debate in Washington on health care reform very closely. About two-in-ten (19%) say they followed the health care debate more closely than any other major story. Those stories made up 7% of coverage, according to PEJ.

A smaller percentage (16%) say they followed Congressional passage of legislation intended to limit greenhouse gases. That story was followed most closely by 6% and accounted for 2% of the newshole.

Another 16% say they very closely followed Gov. Mark Sanford’s acknowledgement of an affair with an Argentinean woman; 4% say this was the story they followed most closely. The media devoted 11% of the newshole to stories about Sanford.

Close to two-in-ten (18%) say they very closely followed news about the crash involving two commuter trains in Washington, D.C., that left nine people dead. For 3%, this was the story they followed most closely. The media devoted 5% of the newshole to this story.

### Many Know the Fate of Jon and Kate

More than half of the public say they have heard at least a little about the announcement that Jon and Kate Gosselin, the stars of the TLC reality show “Jon & Kate Plus Eight,” had filed

What the Public’s Hearing About...			
	A lot	A little	Nothing at all
	%	%	%
<i>How much have you heard about...</i>			
News that TV’s Jon and Kate Gosselin will divorce	27	36	36
Chris Brown pleading guilty to assault charges	14	41	45
News that Apple’s Steve Jobs had a liver transplant	9	33	58
Questions about how often Obama smokes cigarettes	8	41	50

for divorce. About a quarter (27%) say they had heard a lot about this, while 36% say that had heard a little. Another 36% say they had heard nothing at all about the plans for the parents of young twins and sextuplets to separate.

More than a third of women (35%) have heard a lot about the marriage troubles, compared with 18% of men. Close to half of women under 50 (46%) say they have heard a lot about this.

Just 14% say they have heard a lot about singer Chris Brown’s plea of guilty last week to an assault charge involving an attack on pop star Rihanna. Four-in-ten (41%) heard a little about this, while 45% say they have heard nothing at all. In mid-March, a third (33%) said they had heard a lot about Brown’s troubled relationship with Rihanna after allegations surfaced that he had assaulted her.

About one-in-ten (9%) say they have heard a lot about Steve Jobs’ liver transplant. A third (33%) have heard a little about the Apple chairman’s operation, while close to six-in-ten (58%) have heard nothing at all.

And 8% say they have heard a lot about reporters’ questions to President Obama about whether he still occasionally smokes cigarettes. Four-in-ten (41%) say they heard a little about this, but half say they have heard nothing at all.

These findings are based on the most recent installment of the weekly News Interest Index, an ongoing project of the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. The index, building on the Center's longstanding research into public attentiveness to major news stories, examines news interest as it relates to the news media's coverage. The weekly survey is conducted in conjunction with The Project for Excellence in Journalism's News Coverage Index, which monitors the news reported by major newspaper, television, radio and online news outlets on an ongoing basis. In the most recent week, data relating to news coverage were collected from June 22-28, 2009 and survey data measuring public interest in the top news stories of the week were collected June 25-28, 2009 (N=1,007) and June 26-29, 2009 (N=1,022) from a nationally representative sample of adults.

## About the News Interest Index

The *News Interest Index* is a weekly survey conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press aimed at gauging the public's interest in and reaction to major news events.

This project has been undertaken in conjunction with the Project for Excellence in Journalism's *News Coverage Index*, an ongoing content analysis of the news. The News Coverage Index catalogues the news from top news organizations across five major sectors of the media: newspapers, network television, cable television, radio and the internet. Each week (from Monday through Sunday) PEJ compiles this data to identify the top stories for the week. The News Interest Index survey collects data from Friday through Monday to gauge public interest in the most covered stories of the week.

Results for the weekly surveys are based on telephone interviews among a nationwide sample of approximately 1,000 adults, 18 years of age or older, conducted under the direction of ORC (Opinion Research Corporation). For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling is plus or minus 3.5 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, and that results based on subgroups will have larger margins of error.

For more information about the Project for Excellence in Journalism's News Coverage Index, go to [www.journalism.org](http://www.journalism.org).

## About the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press

The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press is an independent opinion research group that studies attitudes toward the press, politics and public policy issues. We are sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts and are one of seven projects that make up the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan "fact tank" that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world.

The Center's purpose is to serve as a forum for ideas on the media and public policy through public opinion research. In this role it serves as an important information resource for political leaders, journalists, scholars, and public interest organizations. All of our current survey results are made available free of charge.

All of the Center's research and reports are collaborative products based on the input and analysis of the entire Center staff consisting of:

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**PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS**  
**NEWS INTEREST INDEX OMNIBUS SURVEY**  
**SURVEY A: JUNE 25-28, 2009 N=1,007**  
**SURVEY B: JUNE 26-29, 2009 N=1,022**

**ASK SURVEY A ONLY [N=1,007]:**

Q.1 In the past few weeks, have you come to have a MORE favorable opinion of Barack Obama, a LESS favorable opinion of Barack Obama, or hasn't your opinion of him changed lately?

	<u>More favorable</u>	<u>Less favorable</u>	<u>Opinion has not changed</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
<b>Barack Obama</b>				
June 25-28, 2009	13	20	63	4
May 21-24, 2009	18	21	60	1
April 9-13, 2009	20	18	60	2
March 20-23, 2009	22	19	56	3
February 27-March 2, 2009	23	20	56	1
February 6-9, 2009	23	16	60	1
<b>2008 CAMPAIGN</b>				
<b>TREND FOR COMPARISON:<sup>1</sup></b>				
October 31-November 3, 2008	25	25	49	1
October 24-27, 2008	24	21	52	3
October 17-20, 2008	33	23	43	1
October 10-13, 2008	29	21	48	2
October 3-6, 2008	28	23	47	2
September 26-29, 2008	31	23	45	1
September 19-22, 2008	25	20	53	2
September 12-15, 2008	20	20	58	2
September 5-8, 2008	20	20	59	1
August 29-31, 2008	29	19	50	2
August 22-25, 2008	22	21	54	3
August 15-18, 2008	16	21	60	3
August 8-11, 2008	15	18	64	3
August 1-4, 2008	16	22	60	2
July 25-28, 2008	17	21	59	3
July 18-21, 2008	16	22	60	2
July 11-14, 2008	15	17	64	4
July 3-7, 2008	17	17	62	4
June 27-30, 2008	21	19	56	4
June 20-23, 2008	16	16	66	2
June 13-16, 2008	17	15	64	4
June 6-9, 2008	19	17	61	3
May 30-June 2, 2008	17	21	58	4
May 22-25, 2008	18	20	60	2
May 16-19, 2008	19	19	59	3
May 9-12, 2008	20	23	55	2
May 2-5, 2008	11	25	59	5
April 25-28, 2008	16	24	58	2
April 18-21, 2008	18	24	54	4

<sup>1</sup> For March 20-24, 2008, through October 31-November 3, 2008, the introduction read, "In the past few days." For September 12-15 through October 31-November 3, 2008, the question asked respondents to "Please think about each of the following candidates," Barack Obama, John McCain, Joe Biden and Sarah Palin in the 2008 presidential and vice presidential elections. For June 13-16, 2008, through September 5-8, 2008, the question was worded, "Please think about each of the following *presidential* candidates..." and asked about Barack Obama and John McCain. For March 20-24, 2008, through June 6-9, 2008, the list of presidential candidates included Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama and John McCain.

Q.1 CONTINUED...	More <u>favorable</u>	Less <u>favorable</u>	Opinion has <u>not changed</u>	DK/ <u>Refused</u>
March 28-31, 2008	18	27	52	3
March 20-24, 2008	22	30	46	2

## NO QUESTION 2

### ASK SURVEY B ONLY [N=1,022]:

Q.3 As I read a list of some stories covered by news organizations this past week, please tell me if you happened to follow each news story very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely. First, **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE] [IF NECESSARY “Did you follow [ITEM] very closely, fairly closely, not too closely or not at all closely?”]**

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
a. The Iranian government’s crackdown on election protestors	31	27	18	23	1
June 19-22, 2009: Protests in Iran over disputed Elections	28	28	21	22	1
June 12-15, 2009: The presidential election in Iran	18	26	23	34	*
<b>TREND FOR COMPARISON:<sup>2</sup></b>					
May 21-24, 2009: <i>Iran testing a missile that could reach Israel</i>	20	29	25	26	*
July 11-14, 2008: <i>The Iranian government firing test missiles capable of striking Israel</i>	25	29	22	23	1
January 11-14, 2008: <i>Encounter between U.S. and Iranian ships</i>	25	26	21	27	1
December 7-10, 2007: <i>Intelligence report on Iran’s nuclear weapons program</i>	25	31	20	23	1
October 26-29, 2007: <i>Mounting tensions</i>	26	34	21	18	1
September 28 – October 1, 2007: <i>Ahmadinejad visit to U.S.</i>	23	31	20	25	1
June 1-4, 2007: <i>U.S.-Iranian talks</i>	19	27	27	26	1
February 23-26, 2007: <i>Mounting tensions</i>	29	37	18	15	1
February 16-19, 2007: <i>Iran supplying weapons to Iraqi insurgents</i>	28	32	20	19	1
February 2-5, 2007: <i>Mounting tensions</i>	33	38	18	10	1
Sept., 2006: <i>Iran’s nuclear research program</i>	23	34	19	23	1
August, 2006	24	34	20	20	3
June, 2006	21	32	22	22	3
April, 2006	26	30	23	20	1
March, 2006	24	31	22	22	1
b. The debate in Washington over health care reform	29	26	20	25	1
June 19-22, 2009	28	28	20	23	*

<sup>2</sup> May 21-24, 2009 asked about: “Iran testing a missile that could reach Israel.” July 11-14, 2008 asked about: “The Iranian government firing test missiles capable of striking Israel.” January 11-14, 2008 asked about: “News about a naval encounter between U.S. and Iranian ships.” December 7-10, 2007 asked about: “A new intelligence report stating that Iran stopped its nuclear weapons program in 2003.” October 26-29, 2007, February 23-26, 2007 and February 2-5, 2007 asked about: “Mounting tensions between the United States and Iran.” September 28-October 1, 2007 asked about: “Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s recent trip to New York City where he spoke at Columbia University and the United Nations.” June 1-4, 2007 asked about: “Recent talks between the United States and Iran.” February 16-19, 2007 asked about: “Reports that Iran may be supplying weapons to insurgents in Iraq.” March, 2006 through June, 2006 asked about: “Iran’s nuclear research program.”



**Q.3 CONTINUED...**

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
June 12-15, 2009	29	26	18	26	*
<b>TREND FOR COMPARISON:<sup>3</sup></b>					
May 15-18, 2009: <i>Debate over Obama's health care plans</i>	25	30	20	24	*
March 6-9, 2009: <i>Obama proposing a \$630 billion fund for overhauling health care</i>	41	32	13	14	*
September, 1994: <i>The Clinton administration's health care reform proposals</i>	32	41	18	9	*
June, 1994	34	40	19	7	*
May, 1994	37	37	16	9	1
January, 1994	38	38	15	9	*
Early January, 1994	40	40	14	6	*
December, 1993	45	35	12	7	1
October, 1993	44	32	17	6	1
September, 1993	49	34	11	6	*
August, 1993: <i>Reports about the White House task force on health care reform headed by Hillary Clinton</i>	27	32	25	15	1
June, 1993	28	38	19	15	*
May, 1993	30	30	25	14	1
c. The death of singer Michael Jackson	30	28	23	19	*
<b>TREND FOR COMPARISON—celebrity deaths:</b>					
March 20-23, 2009: <i>Death of actress Natasha Richardson in a skiing accident</i>	18	28	24	30	*
October 3-6, 2008: <i>Death of Paul Newman</i>	19	29	28	23	1
June 13-16, 2008: <i>Death of Meet the Press host Tim Russert</i>	28	23	19	30	*
January 25-28, 2008: <i>Death of actor Heath Ledger</i>	13	29	27	30	1
November 30-December 3, 2007: <i>Death of NFL player Sean Taylor</i>	14	25	22	38	1
March 2-5, 2007: <i>Death of Anna Nicole Smith</i>	14	19	30	36	1
February 23-26, 2007	13	22	33	31	1
February 16-19, 2007	14	25	29	31	1
February 9-12, 2007	11	27	31	30	1
September, 2006: <i>Death of the Crocodile Hunter, Steve Irwin, from a stingray strike</i>	30	36	21	12	1
December, 2001: <i>Death of former Beatle George Harrison</i>	10	23	30	35	2
July, 1999: <i>Death of John F. Kennedy Jr., his wife and sister-in-law in a plane crash near Martha's Vineyard</i>	54	29	13	4	0
March, 1999: <i>Death of former baseball player Joe DiMaggio</i>	18	33	27	21	1
June, 1998: <i>The death of Frank Sinatra</i>	17	31	31	20	1
September, 1997: <i>The death of Princess Diana</i>	54	31	11	4	*

<sup>3</sup> May 15-18, 2009 asked about: "Debate over Barack Obama's health care plans." March 6-9, 2009 asked about: "Barack Obama proposing a \$630 billion fund for overhauling the U.S. health care system." September, 1993 through September, 1994 asked about: "The Clinton Administration's health care reform proposals." May, 1993 through August, 1993 asked about: "Reports about the White House task force on health care reform headed by Hillary Clinton."

**Q.3 CONTINUED...**

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
August, 1995: <i>The death of Jerry Garcia</i>	9	19	23	45	4
August, 1995: <i>The death of Mickey Mantle</i>	24	36	21	18	1
May, 1994: <i>The suicide of rock star Kurt Cobain</i>	7	14	25	52	2
<b>TREND FOR COMPARISON—Michael Jackson:</b>					
June, 2005: <i>Michael Jackson trial</i>	13	31	29	26	1
Mid-March, 2005	12	23	32	32	1
February, 2005	8	17	30	44	1
November, 2003: <i>Recent charges of child molestation against Michael Jackson</i>	29	27	22	20	2
January, 1994: <i>Michael Jackson's personal problems</i>	19	30	30	20	1
December, 1993	15	25	27	32	1
d. A train crash in Washington, D.C., that killed nine people	18	31	25	26	1
<b>TREND FOR COMPARISON</b>					
March, 1999: <i>The derailment of an Amtrak train in Illinois</i>	29	39	19	12	1
February, 1996: <i>Recent train crashes in Maryland, Colorado and New Jersey</i>	24	40	24	11	1
September, 1993: <i>Amtrak train wreck in Alabama</i>	40	37	15	7	1
e. The U.S. House considering a measure to limit greenhouse gases	16	20	21	41	2
<b>TREND FOR COMPARISON</b>					
July 18-21, 2008: <i>The debate in Washington over U.S. energy policy</i>	23	22	22	33	*
June 6-9, 2008: <i>The debate in Congress over legislation to combat global warming</i>	13	22	27	37	1
May, 2001: <i>George W. Bush's new energy policy</i>	22	33	21	22	2
November, 1997: <i>The debate over U.S. policy concerning global warming</i>	9	24	33	33	1
f. South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford admitting he had an affair	16	25	28	30	1
<b>TREND FOR COMPARISON</b>					
August 15-18, 2008: <i>John Edwards' admission that he had an affair</i>	13	26	30	30	1
March 14-17, 2008: <i>The governor of New York, Eliot Spitzer, resigning because of his involvement with a prostitution ring</i>	26	35	24	15	*
November 9-12, 2006: <i>The Colorado minister who stepped down amid allegations of a homosexual affair</i>	15	27	25	32	1
June, 1998: <i>Allegations of sexual misconduct against Bill Clinton</i>	28	32	24	15	1
April, 1998	27	39	20	14	*
March, 1998	30	35	25	9	1

**Q.3 CONTINUED...**

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
Mid-February, 1998: <i>Allegations that President Clinton had an affair with former White House intern Monica Lewinsky</i> <sup>4</sup>	21	44	25	10	*
Early February, 1998	34	42	17	7	0

**ASK SURVEY B ONLY [N=1,022]:**

Q.4 Which ONE of the stories I just mentioned have you followed most closely, or is there another story you've been following MORE closely? [**DO NOT READ LIST. ACCEPT ONLY ONE RESPONSE.**]

- 31 The death of singer Michael Jackson
- 19 The debate in Washington over health care reform
- 18 The Iranian government's crackdown on election protestors
- 6 The U.S. House considering a measure to limit greenhouse gasses
- 4 South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford admitting he had an affair
- 3 A train crash in Washington, D.C., that killed nine people
- 10 Some other story (VOL.)
- 9 Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

**ASK SURVEY B ONLY [N=1,022]:**

Q.5 How much if anything, have you heard about each of the following? Have you heard a lot, a little or nothing at all? [**READ AND RANDOMIZE**]

	<u>A lot</u>	<u>A little</u>	<u>Nothing at all</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
a. Apple CEO Steve Jobs disclosing that he had a liver transplant	9	33	58	1

**NO ITEM B**

c. The announcement that Jon and Kate Gosselin of "Jon & Kate Plus 8" are getting divorced	27	36	36	1
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**NO ITEM D**

e. Singer Chris Brown pleading guilty to felony assault of pop star Rihanna	14	41	45	1
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**TREND FOR COMPARISON:**

March 13-16, 2009: <i>Troubled relationship between pop singers Chris Brown and Rihanna</i>	33	36	31	*
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f. Questions about how often President Obama smokes cigarettes	8	41	50	1
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**ASK SURVEY B ONLY [N=1,022]:**

Q.6 Thinking again about the death of Michael Jackson... Do you think news organizations are giving too much, too little, or the right amount of coverage to this story?

- 64 Too much
- 3 Too little
- 29 The right amount
- 3 Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

<sup>4</sup> This question was not asked as part of a list in mid-February 1998.

**TREND FOR COMPARISON:**

Do you think news organizations are giving too much coverage, too little coverage or the right amount of coverage to each of the following **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE]**

	<u>Too much</u>	<u>Too little</u>	<u>Right amount</u>	<u>DK/Refused</u>
<i>March 20-23 2009:</i> The death of actress Natasha Richardson after a skiing accident	34	5	53	8
<i>January 25-28, 2008:</i> The death of actor Heath Ledger	52	5	37	6

**ASK SURVEY B ONLY [N=1,022]:**

Q.7 Has what you've seen about Michael Jackson in the news over the past few days **[ROTATE FIRST TWO OPTIONS WITH THIRD LAST]**

- 26 Focused too much on the scandals and personal problems in his life
- 11 Focused too much on his successful musical career
- 50 Struck the right balance
- 12 Don't know/Refused (**VOL.**)