

October 1, 2007

To: Jonathan Levy
From: Stanley Feldman
Re: Review of *How Journalists See Journalist in 2004* and *Media Professionals and Their Industry: A Survey of Workers*

As you requested, I have read all of the material that was included with two reports: *How Journalists See Journalist in 2004*, by the Pew Research Center and *Media Professionals and Their Industry: A Survey of Workers*, by Lauer Research, Inc. These two studies cover very similar issues although their methodologies vary somewhat. The Lauer Research, Inc study surveyed members of the media industry who are members of one of four unions: AFTRA, NABET, The Newspaper Guild, and the Writers Guild of America. The Pew Research Center Study interviewed people who were systematically sampled from people working in the news industry in television, newspaper, wire services, magazines, and news services. It is difficult to know how similar these two samples are in practice since there is not enough information provided in the Lauer Research report to make comparisons to the composition of the Pew Study.

In addition to detailed information about the composition of the Lauer Research report there are two other critical omissions that make it very difficult to evaluate the conclusions of this study. First, the appendix with the figures and charts was not included with the report. It is therefore not possible to see much of the data presentation that is referred to in the text. And as the questionnaire that was included with the report does not contain any frequencies for the questions there is a great deal of missing information. It is therefore impossible to check the figures that are provided in the text against any data from the survey. Second, the technical details of the study do not give any indication of the response or cooperation rate for the survey. The report simply says that "interviewers made up to three call back attempts per household" to reach the members of the sample. They could have had an 80% cooperation rate or a 20% cooperation rate. Without this information, or other information that compares the characteristics of the sample with known characteristics of the union members, it is impossible to know how good the sample is – whether it is really representative of the population of union members. In general, three call backs is *not* enough to insure a good response rate for a telephone sample and I fear that the response rate for the study is probably too low.

I also feel that the Lauer Research report sometimes tried to draw conclusions from relatively week data. Small differences in percentages were described as being large, conclusions about potential changes in attitudes were drawn from data collected at one time point, and there were far more questions that asked about problems in the media industry than one that asked about

strengths. With all of these limitations it is difficult to know how much faith to put in the conclusions drawn in this study.

The Pew Research Center study (*How Journalists See Journalists in 2004*) is much more detailed than the Lauer Research report and provides all of the elements missing from the Lauer report. The technical report is detailed and describes exactly how the population was stratified and how specific respondents were selected. Repeated efforts, by mail and telephone, were used to maximize the response and interviews were completed with 67% of those in the sampling frame – a very good result. It is possible to be confident that the sample accurately reflects the views of the population of news media professionals that it was designed to study.

The Pew Research study also has two other major strengths. The questionnaire that was used was much better balanced than in the Lauer Research study. It was more detailed and, more importantly, much better balanced. As a result, it is possible to get a much clearer picture of the ways in which news media professionals see the news industry. In order to understand the magnitude of the negative comments it is often necessary to compare them to positive comments as is done in this study. The Pew Research report also benefits from having some earlier data (surveys of news media professionals in 1995 and 1999) to compare the 2004 data with. As a result, at key points it is possible to see actual change over a 10 year period. This is a major improvement over the common practice (used in the Lauer Research study) of asking people whether a situation has gotten better or worse. It is entirely possible that a majority of respondents could say that “things” are getting worse at several points in time without actual views really changing. Having some over time comparison increases confidence in inferences about change.

I found the Pew Research report to be careful and appropriately detailed. Conclusions were clearly backed up with data and were qualified where necessary. The discussion was even handed throughout, balancing positive and negative assessments and, where appropriate, showing the diversity of views across the news media industry. The discussion of ideology – a generally contentious topic – was particularly well done. This is a solid study and the conclusions are well supported by the survey data.