

## **Nobody's Business? White Male Privilege in Media Coverage of Intimate Partner Violence**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Portrayals of celebrities perpetrating Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) are ideal for understanding the association between gender and racial privilege in representations of social problems. Unlike prior scholarship on framing of IPV, with celebrity perpetrators, race can be analyzed as an important aspect. Using 330 news articles about 66 celebrities, I find patterns of reporting consistent with male privilege that sanctions men's violence against women, whereas the differential treatment of Black men fosters a racialized interpretation that pathologizes Black men. Black men's IPV is more often criminalized, with criminal imagery included 3 times more often in articles about Black celebrities than White celebrities. By presenting violence as an escalation of mutual conflict and excusing it due to mitigating circumstances, such as inebriation, White men's violence is justified 2½ times more often than Black men's IPV. These findings contribute to sociological understandings of racial privilege in the social construction of IPV.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Celebrities in the news for domestic violence offer a unique look at gender and racial privilege in U.S. culture. In 2009, a media frenzy ensued when popular music artist Chris Brown, an African American, assaulted his girlfriend, singer Rihanna. In response to the continued coverage of his violence, Brown and Rihanna recorded a song titled "Nobody's Business," a thinly veiled message to the public that they consider their relationship a private matter. Although Brown continues to be a shared reference point when discussing domestic violence (Edgar 2014; Enck and McDaniel 2012; Rothman et al. 2012), the press has covered many celebrities engaged in domestic violence prior to and after Brown's arrest (Griffin 2013; Maxwell et al. 2000). For comparison, that same year, Charlie Sheen, a White actor, was also arrested for strangling his wife and threatening her with a knife. Despite Sheen's history of violence towards women before and after assaulting his wife, unlike Brown, he is rarely

characterized by his violence toward women in the media (Itzkoff 2012). For instance, when video of professional football player Ray Rice assaulting his then-fiancé dominated national commentary, it was Chris Brown, not Charlie Sheen, who was invoked as a parallel case (CBS News 2014).

As a cultural issue (Katz 2006), the contested viewpoints on intimate partner violence (IPV) are an ideal opportunity to analyze how privilege is mobilized, negotiated, and sustained in the context of social problems. Although gender and racial differences with regard to victim impact and sanctions for perpetrating domestic violence are well documented<sup>1</sup> (Centers for Disease Control 2012; Fawcett 2010; Graffunder et al. 2004; Kanuha 1996; Meyers 1997; Richie 2012), we know less about the association between privileged positions and the construction of IPV as a social problem. Using the case of celebrities is advantageous because of the potentially substantial impact on perceptions of IPV due to the pervasiveness and power of celebrities in

American culture (Marshall 1997). Second, the analysis of celebrities is methodologically beneficial because their detailed public profile allows for a comparative analysis accounting for the perpetrator's race. As such, news of male celebrities' IPV is an ideal case to evaluate how Whiteness is visible in the process of framing social problems. In this study, I build on empirical work on hegemonic masculinity to establish the relationship between gender, power, and privilege in news accounts of U.S. celebrities who have perpetrated IPV. Then, drawing on prior work on racialized news reporting and critical race theory, I examine differences in the construction of Black and White celebrities.

Research on media representation of IPV has focused on newspaper reports of domestic violence, often of fatalities on a state level (Bullock 2010; Bullock and Cubert 2002; Ryan, Anastario, and DaCunha 2006). The majority of reporting normalizes IPV by minimizing men's responsibility and reinforcing myths such as gender symmetry in violent relationships, as seen in national reporting before and after the OJ Simpson trial (Maxwell et al. 2000), national newspaper coverage of IPV (Carlyle, Slater, and Chakroff 2008), newspaper reports restricted to IPV in later life (Beard and Payne 2005; Brossoie, Roberto, and Barrow 2012), and in comparisons between women's, men's, and political magazines (Berns 1999, 2001; Nettleton 2011). Dominant media narratives posit domestic violence as the (female) victim's responsibility, rarely discuss the (male) perpetrator, and when they do, offer explanations that do not hold him accountable, such as suggesting the crime was uncharacteristic of his usual behavior or a natural part of male biology unlikely to be prevented (Berns 1999; Bullock and Cubert 2002; Maxwell et al. 2000; Nettleton 2011). Media coverage regularly uses a passive voice and emphasizes shared responsibility for IPV, influencing readers to incorrectly ascribe shared blame for men's violence against women and altering readers' perceptions of gendered violence as a social problem (Lamb and Keon 1995). Despite the abundance of studies on

gender violence in the media, prior researchers have not conducted a systematic, empirical analysis comparing how Whites and Blacks are depicted.

## **FRAMING SOCIAL PROBLEMS THROUGH CELEBRITY NEWS**

Not all social problems are regarded as public problems, nor are all public problems considered social issues demanding public action (Gusfield 1984). In other words, not all "happenings" turn into cultural artifacts, which in turn come to be considered as a social problem to be collectively acted upon (Griswold 2013). Even when there is little controversy in labeling an issue a public problem, debate over the causes, definition, severity, moral wrongfulness, and consequences of the problem persist (Beckett 1996; Gailey and Falk 2008). Cultural frames – schemata that aid in organizing meaning and action – provide a structure for individuals to select from existing cultural norms to inform their thoughts and beliefs about a social problem (Gamson et al. 1992; Goffman 1974).

Alongside theories of resource mobilization and political processes, the analysis of cultural frames is a central facet of scholarship on social movements (Benford and Snow 2000). Frames are a source of power, limiting what people can see and imagine as possible (Swidler 1995). In some instances, the media act as agenda setters, raising an issue to prominence as a social problem and at other times functioning as a conduit for established policy agendas (Collins et al. 2006). Cultural frames impact policy agendas and social change mobilizing efforts, either as a valuable resource or an obstacle to activists' efforts to address their cause (Andrews and Caren 2010; Collins et al. 2006). Frames of responsibility – how notions of blame and accountability are represented – influence who is seen as a problem, who should be sanctioned, and who is deserving of help and protection (Berns 1999; Gailey and Falk 2008; Goffman 1974).

The framing of news has important effects on promoting the significance of an issue, influencing people's judgment of a topic, creating and reinforcing norms, and shaping public attitudes of policy issues (Garrison 1988). At times, rather than changing individuals' beliefs, media framing reinforces people's previously held opinions and values (Schudson 1989). The news media are not neutral in framing events; they often function as gatekeepers, deciding which events to highlight and whom to interview (Andrews and Caren 2010). Their widespread reliance on advertising for funding necessitates a focus on attracting an audience and reporting news related to their target readership (Gamson et al. 1992). Consequently, the frequency of articles on a given topic may misrepresent the magnitude of awareness and responsiveness to social problems (Best 2010).

Uncontested messages – information that is viewed as a given (e.g., child abuse is immoral) – are not generally presented with alternative perspectives (Beckett 1996; Gamson et al. 1992). When describing potentially disputed accounts, multiple angles are provided regardless of their factual basis as evidence of journalists' unbiased reporting (Gamson et al. 1992; Tuchman 1972). Because the gendered nature of IPV remains contested, news reporting of domestic violence is an ideal context for analyzing the construction of IPV as a social problem. For example, men's entitlement groups regularly claim gender symmetry in an attempt to instill doubt that domestic violence is a gendered social problem primarily committed by men against women (Kimmel 2013; Schwartz, Steffensmeier, and Feldmeyer 2009). In order to seem objective, reporters may try to offer alternative stories to men's violence against women by countering statistics and facts about gender violence with opinions that reinforce men's power, highlight women's active role in the abuse and violence, or offer perspectives that doubt the reality and impact of men's violence against women.

## THE CASE OF CELEBRITIES

Popular culture and the production of *celebrity* specifically is a pervasive mechanism for influencing the framing of issues, activating norms, and providing a national viewpoint on issues (Altheide 2000; Gamson 1994; Lindenberg, Joly, and Stapel 2011). Celebrity culture is a structural system that communicates hegemonic, ideological meanings of the social world and notions of individuality (Marshall 1997). By mirroring social and political realities, discourse on celebrities becomes a shared thread in interpreting American culture (Sternheimer 2011). Altheide (2000) succinctly conveys the role of popular culture, which includes the production of celebrities, in constructing reality by stating, "Popular culture is one of the most pervasive cultural factors that not only defines what we 'know' and 'feel' about certain issues, but also, what 'knowing' and 'feeling' and 'being involved' look like" (p. 288).

I use the case of male celebrities in the media for perpetrating domestic violence for several reasons. First, celebrities have a personal investment – such as maintaining their sponsorships and avoiding legal sanctions – in capitalizing on privileges and diminishing negative classifications, which makes news coverage of their violence a prime site for analyzing privileged behavior. Second, it allows for analysis of IPV in its most common form and is not analytically limited to relying heavily on extreme consequences of domestic violence, such as homicides, as is common in analysis of newspaper coverage. Finally, and most importantly, the race of famous IPV perpetrators is more readily identifiable compared to cases involving ordinary citizens reported in newspapers. Looking specifically at racial dynamics is advantageous in order to attend to multiple stratified classifications (race and gender). Thus, although prior literature largely focused on coverage of IPV in local newspapers, reporting on celebrities has distinct advantages.

## HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

Studies analyzing the discourse on IPV emphasize the disservice to women and victim-blaming characteristics of the reporting. However, our understanding of *how* men evade responsibility for their violent behavior is inadequate. Theoretical analysis that attends to constructions of masculinity may help in answering this question. Hegemonic masculinity is operationalized as culturally constructed patterns of beliefs that sanction men's power over women and influence expectations, behavior, and interpretations of reality (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Male privilege, broadly conceived as the social advantages and benefits that belong to men and are denied to women (Johnson 2006), reinforces hegemonic masculinity through both unearned entitlements and conferred dominance, the latter expressed as power over women (McIntosh 2000). As male privilege increasingly is perceived as under attack, men collectively react with anger, entitlement, and nostalgia for a time when their privilege was unquestioned (Kimmel 2013).

Control and dominance are central to definitions of hegemonic masculinity as means to counter the continuous challenge to male supremacy (Johnson 2005). Force is one mechanism for maintaining dominance (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), but people who benefit from their privileged position resist challenges to their supremacy in other ways, such as: denial and minimization, blaming the victim, relabeling the privilege as something else, obscuring attention to the consequences of privilege and justifying intentions, and excusing oneself from responsibility by proclaiming to be a good person (Johnson 2006). Reliance on force to maintain power is problematic for several reasons (e.g., it's usually only a temporary solution), whereas power through ideology is a more effective instrument to maintain social control (Jackman 1994). Thus, narratives of men's violence against women are important for understanding how the discourse on domestic violence may be shaped by male privilege.

## WHITE PRIVILEGE

Davis (1983) argued that controlling images of Black men as criminals are fused with efforts to demean and discredit Black women, which functions to make Black women susceptible to gender violence (see Richie 2012). Whereas analysis of hegemonic masculinity is central to understanding representations of IPV, critical race theorists draw attention to the importance of understanding normative institutional arrangements that alter the performance of masculinity and marginalize people of color (Delgado and Stefancic 2001; Ray and Rosow 2010). Analogous to male privilege, White privilege consists of the social advantages and benefits accorded to White people and denied to people of color (Johnson 2006). White privilege allows White people to assume their experiences are universal and representative of the population as a whole, while people of color experience their lives as different and deviant from the White reference group (McIntosh 2000). Controlling images – defined as external, stereotypical, negative images – normalize oppression and make marginalization appear inevitable (Collins 2000).

The interconnectedness of oppression based on gender, race, and other characteristics is central to understanding representations of gender-based violence (Meyers 1997). Literature on race and domestic violence has focused primarily on differences in rates of violence, severity of sanctions, and victim support and impact (Kanuha 1994, 1996; Richie 2012; Richie and Kanuha 1993). A notable exception are findings that news reports portrayed Black men as dangerous in coverage of OJ Simpson's murder trial (Maxwell et al. 2000). On the other hand, racial disparities in news coverage of violence and crimes wider in scope than IPV have been well documented. Scholars have focused on the "racial typification of crime" (the portrayal of crime as a Black social problem) and the "criminal typification of race" (the disproportionate portrayal of criminals as black) (Chiricos and Eschholz 2002). Local crime news over-reports Black men as criminals compared to

Whites (Bjornstrom et al. 2010). Blacks are more likely to be depicted as threatening than Whites when shown as criminal suspects, and more likely to be represented as criminals than as victims (Chiricos and Eschholz 2002).

The repetition of stories on certain subjects, such as random violence, stranger danger, and cyber stalking, influences what issues the public believes are important at the expense of other social problems (Best 1999; Sternheimer 2013). The differences in representation of IPV and stranger danger reinforce the notion that there are unidentified, mysterious men to be feared in society, when in reality women are more likely to be harmed by someone they know (Sternheimer 2013; Websdale 1996). Gender violence is racialized, in that perceived danger from strangers reinforces stereotypical categorization of men who are good (White men) and men who are bad (men of color) (Meyers 1997). Media hype of the prevalence of stranger rape and sexual violence – rooted in racist and sexist cultural myths of Black men's violence and rage against helpless, virginal White women – impacts policy decisions (Meyers 1997; Patton and Snyder-Yuly 2007; Websdale 1996). This study seeks to make White privilege visible within the context of cultural portrayals of IPV.

Drawing on prior scholarship outlining the problematic cultural framing of violence against women, I analyzed news coverage of celebrities who have perpetrated domestic violence. I use the theory of hegemonic masculinity to inform my analysis and further analyze whether race alters representations of men's violence against women. This scholarship adds to the prior literature on constructions of social problems by focusing on multiple dimensions of privilege in the framing of IPV as a social issue.

## **METHODS**

### **SAMPLE**

I first identified six popular celebrity and sports news sites to select celebrities for the analysis.<sup>2</sup> Using the search engine provided on each of the chosen websites, I searched the term

“domestic violence” and identified celebrities who had reportedly perpetrated domestic violence between 2009 and 2012 as evidenced by any type of legal involvement (e.g., arrests, charges, protection order issued). This is likely an undercount of celebrities in the news for perpetrating IPV, as the media does not always label IPV as “domestic violence.” However, it is the most common label for IPV, especially when reporting involvement with the criminal legal system. I did not exclude celebrities even if the criminal charges were eventually dropped, a common scenario with domestic violence charges, because they are still news stories about domestic violence and thus relevant to my analysis. This search largely captures men's wrongdoing (behavior considered morally reprehensible), but avoids unnecessarily limiting the sample by excluding behavior that may not meet narrowly defined and inconsistent criminal codes (Gailey and Falk 2008). This sample is restricted to couples in which the celebrity was both reasonably identified as the perpetrator (for example, not identified as a possible victim-defendant) and male, because IPV is a gendered phenomenon in which males predominately perpetrate abuse against their female partners (Dobash et al. 1992) and the consequences of physical violence are more detrimental to women (Richie 2012).

I restricted the sample to White and Black celebrities (as identified by third-party reports such as IMDB.com, Wikipedia.com, and websites that report statistics for professional sports players) because the results yielded a low number of celebrities who were Asian, another race, or identified solely as Latino in ethnicity. Finally, I narrowed the sample to include professional actors, musicians, and professional sports players and excluded college athletes, reality stars, and those making news because of their ties to celebrities (such as the actor Nicolas Cage's son). A total of 66 Black and White male celebrities were included in the sample. Online news sources play an important role in conveying narratives about social issues as Americans are increasingly consuming news via online platforms (Kayany and Yelsma 2000).

Therefore, I used a sample of online articles published within six months of the initial report of domestic violence for each celebrity. In order to achieve a saturation level of the data, five randomly selected articles were analyzed for each identified celebrity, for a total sample size of 330 articles (95 articles about White celebrities, 235 articles about Black celebrities).<sup>3</sup>

I collected demographic information about the celebrities, such as profession, relationship status, age, and race. As shown in Table 1, 29 percent of the sample (N = 19) consisted of White males and 71 percent (N = 47) were Black males. In this sample, the overrepresentation of Black males was associated with the inclusion of a large number of professional sports players (56 percent of the sample). Of the 37 sports figures, 34 (92%) were Black. The majority of the couples (61%) were dating at the time of the initial report of domestic violence and the perpetrators ranged in age from 19 to 67 with an average age of 35.

## ANALYSIS

Using the perspective of hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), I conducted a critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1995) and used Johnson's (2006) characteristics of privilege as a guide.<sup>4</sup> I undertook an emergent coding strategy to code portrayals of responsibility, including instances of explanations of abusers' and victims' behaviors, and illustrations of blame and accountability. Attention to these patterns allowed me to focus on issues of power and control, a central feature of hegemonic masculinity. I coded all instances of criminal imagery, defined as any mention of the criminal legal system, reports or quotes from law enforcement officials or legal documentation, and any prior criminal history. I also identified every label used to describe the celebrity's violence and included a dummy variable identifying if the article was sensational or not. Articles were coded as sensational if the tone was written to highlight the drama of the event or written in a way that was intended to provoke public excitement.

Additionally, I identified all cited sources in each article and inductively grouped them into categories. I initially coded a random sample of 100 articles based on 20 celebrities as an inductive approach to capture additional patterns of interest. To ensure reliability and systematize my procedures, I developed coding rules and definitions to follow for the remainder of the analysis. A random sub-sample of the articles (N = 33) were selected and coded by a peer to ensure reliability of the interpretation of the content. The percent agreement was 97% and the peer coder matched 201 present codes with 81% accuracy. I kept "field notes" throughout the process to capture patterns related to my research questions (Corbin and Strauss 2008). I took a constant comparative approach and organized recurring instances of blame, accountability, and criminal imagery into themes and sub-themes to organize the patterns.

## FINDINGS

The news frame of male celebrities who perpetrated intimate partner violence legitimized men's violence by minimizing men's responsibility for their actions and excusing and justifying their behavior. These narratives effectively sanctioned men's violence against women and rarely presented it as a social problem. The pattern of framing both drew upon and reinforced constructions of hegemonic masculinity, which served to perpetuate problematic stereotypes and beliefs about intimate partner violence. However, Black men were more often presented as criminals and articles about White men were more likely to contain excuses and justifications for their violence. In short, patterns of reporting consistently privileged White males. I delineate my results into two main areas: 1) Patterns of Male Privilege, and 2) Patterns of White Privilege.

### PATTERNS OF MALE PRIVILEGE

Results reveal three primary frames shape the discourse of celebrity domestic violence: (a) *Minimizing the Seriousness of Domestic Violence*, (b) *Under-report of Sanctions*, and (c)

*Misplaced Responsibility.* In the following section, I present the qualitative and quantitative findings regarding male privilege and the construction of hegemonic masculinity. Next, I review the characteristics and frequencies of the primary frames and provide descriptions and examples of the sub-frames (see Table 2).

#### *Minimizing the seriousness of domestic violence*

Culturally constructed patterns of reporting that normalized men's violence over women were present in multiple ways. First, the qualitative findings show male privilege manifested in the article authors' language, which made light of men's violence against women by mislabeling their violent behavior. Second, the media narrative bolstered the celebrity perpetrator's credibility by highlighting their qualifications for celebrity status and including voices and commentary that rationalized their behavior. I present the qualitative findings first and then turn to the quantitative results by outlining the sub-themes' attributes and frequencies.

Primarily, there was a pattern of minimizing the violence and impact to the victim by the reporter's use of language. Male celebrities' domestic violence was routinely labeled as something other than IPV, as writers opted for softer language, such as *argument*, *dispute*, *altercation*, or *incident*. A range of qualifiers were attached to these labels, such as *bad*, *escalated*, *elevated*, and *heated*. When the phrase *domestic violence* was evoked to describe men's actions, it was primarily when reporting the legal charges. Although the tone and verbiage used conjured up images of "bad arguments" that are relatable to most couples, the actions at issue were characteristically different than common couple disagreements. The violence included depictions of punching, strangulation, holding a knife to one woman's throat, beating a woman with the handle of a mop, murder threats, and destruction of property such as bathroom cabinets. One example of this mismatched label and severity of the violence is evident in an Associated Press article published on ESPN.com (2011) about professional boxer Floyd

Mayweather, Jr. The article details the violence as an accusation of "hitting and threatening his ex-girlfriend, Josie Harris, stealing her cell phone and threatening two of their children...." The writer subsequently refers to the violence as an "argument," "altercation," and a "scuffle." This mislabeling serves to minimize men's violence and recasts the analysis of men's problematic behavior as a couple's problem. In other instances, minimizing language was present because the reporter included quotes from the perpetrator, or someone speaking on behalf of the perpetrator, who sought to mischaracterize and minimize the abusive actions and authors routinely failed to point out the minimization or mislabeling.

Beyond mislabeling the crime of IPV as a couple's argument, the quantitative analysis also identified widespread framing that minimized the seriousness of men's violent behavior. Seven sub-categories made up the *Minimizing the Seriousness of Domestic Violence* frame: (a) *Occupational Credentials*, (b) *Minimizing Statements*, (c) *Denial*, (d) *Support for the Perpetrator*, (e) *Good Guy*, (f) *Couple Reconciles*, and (g) *Victim Recants*. Fifty-four percent of all articles (N = 178 articles) contained framing elements of *Minimizing the Seriousness of Domestic Violence* (see Table 2). Further, 25 percent of the sample (N = 83 articles) contained more than 1 sub-type of this framing.

Writers mostly reported the violence in a matter-of-fact tone, with fewer than 3 percent of the articles identified as sensationalizing, and then concluded the report with the credentials of the abuser, such as their yards per game or number of Grammys, and other details beyond simply orienting the reader to why the person is famous. For instance, a 2012 article on *The Inquisitr* website reporting on football wide receiver David Terrell's abusive threats to throw his female partner off the balcony of his high-rise apartment opens with one sentence that a female victim checked into the hospital for bruises to her neck, chest, and arms. The next paragraph includes a quote from Terrell's lawyer

denying the allegations and follows with this statement:

The 33-year-old's best effort came in 2004, when he started 15 games, and hauled in 42 catches for 699 yards. He appeared in only one more regular-season game, with the Broncos in 2005, after being cut earlier that year by the Patriots. Terrell returned to the Broncos in 2007 after sitting out all of 2006 but was released during the preseason. In August 2009, he tried out for the Kansas City Chiefs, but Amani Toomer was signed instead.

The rest of the article describes the teams Terrell has played for over the course of his career. Rather than drawing readers' attention to the seriousness of the crime and impact of the abuse, in nearly 25 percent of the articles in the sample, the author reminded the reader about the respectable qualities of the celebrity. Over one-fifth of the articles included content that served no other purpose but to minimize the abuse and violence. For example, an article about musician Deen Castronovo, arrested on charges of criminal mischief and harassment, recklessly endangering another person, and interfering with making a police report, included this quote from a representative for Castronovo: "It was a misunderstanding that should not have been escalated to such a level in the first place."

More than 20 percent of articles included notions of denial, often direct statements from the perpetrator denying their violent behavior, which is predictable conduct for someone accused of a crime and seeking to capitalize on their privileged status (Sykes and Matza 1957). Rapper Stanley Howse's (aka Flesh-N-Bone) quote to TMZ.com in 2012, arrested for corporal injury, false imprisonment, and threatening behavior, is a typical denial statement found in the articles: "She and I both know that I never hit her. It was just a bad argument. I am very upset that this whole situation turned this messy." Denial exemplified techniques of neutralization, justifications for delinquent behavior by denying responsibility, injury to others, and blaming the

victim by claiming rightful retaliation (Sykes and Matza 1957).

Inclusion of statements that supported the perpetrator outright was present in about 10 percent of the articles. For example, a 2010 *New York Times* article regarding actor Mel Gibson's domestic violence charges, titled "'Bad Boy' Star Loses Support Abroad," detailed how Gibson's actions might hurt his career, but ultimately concluded with this statement from Andrew Herwitz, president of the Film Sales Company: "'This may be an unpopular point of view,' he said. 'But I think he's a great actor, and that matters.'" These men not only benefited from others making excuses for their violence, but also attempted to frame themselves as good guys in nearly 10 percent of the articles. These abusive men sought to align their masculinity not with violence and power, but as decent and genuinely good people. For instance, an S2SMagazine.com article entirely about gospel singer Bebe Winans' response to being charged with domestic assault for smashing his ex-wife's face into the pavement featured his statement: "To be accused of these allegations, which arose out of a child custody right dispute and my desire to spend time with our children as court ordered, is nothing less than heart wrenching . . . . The allegations are inconsistent with my character and the foundation upon which I was raised."

Furthermore, articles minimized the seriousness of men's violent behavior by incorporating descriptions of female victims' actions without providing context about domestic violence dynamics. By failing to provide information about the cycle of abuse and the reasons victims stay in abusive relationships (e.g., danger of increased violence for attempts to leave, economic instability), the articles left unstated the many reasons why victims recant their initial reports and reconcile with their abusers. The lack of context gives the impression that the violence was not as horrific as initially suggested or that the victim is somehow deserving of abuse by not behaving in ways expected of a "model victim." Only 7 percent of

articles minimized men's violence by appealing to the victims' actions. The majority of minimizing was included through the voice of the perpetrator, someone speaking on behalf of the perpetrator, or the journalists themselves (in their summary of the incident). These patterns are consistent with predictions that journalists may seek to demonstrate their objectivity by countering evidence of men's violence towards women by presenting opposing information to the legal accounts of the crime and failing to unequivocally label men's behavior as domestic violence.

#### *Under-report of sanctions*

Whereas more than 50 percent of articles in the sample minimized the seriousness of abusers' violence, fewer than 20 percent reported the consequences of their criminal behavior. An article was identified as including a consequence if there was evidence of accountability for the perpetrator: they faced any sanctions from their employer or sponsors, any statement in the article asserted the celebrity's actions were not okay, any legal sanction was mentioned (ordered to jail, to attend anger management or community service, to pay a fine, will be on probation, etc.), or the perpetrator pleaded guilty to any legal charges stemming from their domestic violence. The frame *Under-report of Sanctions* exemplifies male privilege in that the reporting consisted of little accountability for men's violent acts. This primary frame is comprised of three sub-frames: (a) *Occupational Impact*, (b) *Generalized Accountability*, and (c) *Legal Consequences*.

Merely 8 percent of articles included information about the perpetrator facing a consequence from their employer for their criminal behavior. A meager 6 percent of articles included general accountability statements such as the writer's commentary on the unacceptability of celebrities' use of violence or quotes from others about the seriousness of the behavior. Journalists included a statement that the violence was unacceptable behavior or framed the article in such a way that discounted the celebrity perpetrator's denial in less than 4

percent of the articles. A notable exception was a 2011 article published on Fightlinker.com which included the author's reaction to a report of mixed martial artist Brett Rogers justifying strangling and punching his wife: "Jesus, Brett Rogers. You're a high level mixed martial artist. You don't get to 'return force' on your wife...." When PerezHilton.com (2012) obtained video of musician Paul De Lisle physically abusing his wife, the lead of the article stated: "We hate that we even have to post something this awful and horrific, but we hate even more that crimes like this go unnoticed and ignored every day in this country." However, in 96 percent of the articles, the author never made such an explicit statement of the unacceptability of domestic violence or structured the article in a way that discounted the minimizing effects.

Legal consequences were included in 7 percent of the total articles, with specific sanctions mentioned as follows: community service (5%), probation (5%), guilty plea (3%), domestic violence classes (2%), jail (2%), anger management classes (2%), and fines (1%). Note that the fine one celebrity abuser was ordered to pay was \$400 to a domestic violence shelter. One likely explanation for such under-reporting was simply the lack of follow-up on any charges after the initial violence made headlines. Using the dates of every article in the sample, I calculated the percentage of articles posted within one week and within one month of the date of the initial report of the celebrity committing domestic violence (identified by sorting Google's search results by date). About half of the articles were written within a week of the first report of violence and nearly two-thirds (63%) of the articles were published less than 30 days after the first report, despite my attempt to capture follow-up reports up to six months after the incident.

#### *Misplaced responsibility*

Claims that the victim was responsible for the violence or somehow deserved to be abused, combined with an absence of reporting that included abuser accountability, made up the frame *Misplaced Responsibility*, evident in 24

percent of articles. The articles collectively painted a picture of inevitability and presented the violence as isolated, separate happenings, with little regard to the social context of men's violence against women. Twelve percent of articles included occurrences of blaming the victim, consisting of statements that implied the victim was at least partially at fault for suffering violence and obscured the consequences of the abuser's actions by focusing on her behavior. The articles bolstered attention to women's agency, resulting in shifting attention to couples' dynamics and away from celebrity men's power and violent behavior. The most common frames constructed men's violence as reciprocal, a shared responsibility between partners, rather than the choice of men to act violently. This framing often included name-calling (e.g., "gold digger"), claims the victim was lying or that she was in fact the primary aggressor, and other appeals to deflect from the perpetrator's actions and call into question the victim's actions and reports of violence. For instance, Time.com (2011) published an Associated Press article that highlighted country singer Rodney Atkin's attempt to blame his wife for his violence (assault and attempt to suffocate her with a pillow). The third reference to quotes from Atkin's attorney in the article includes the following statement: "In one filing, his attorney says Tammy Jo Atkins' 'ill conduct' was a justifiable cause for his own conduct in the early morning hours of Nov. 21."

Articles underreported research-based causes of domestic violence, including issues of power and control and a pattern of abusive behavior (Bancroft 2003). Articles infrequently placed responsibility on perpetrators and rarely included explanations such as having a history of abusive or entitled behavior. Less than 10 percent of the sample included accounts of the celebrity's prior history of intimate partner violence, 7 percent of the articles included reports of the abuser's violence towards others, and only one article in the total sample identified power and control as a motive for abuse.

Journalists failed to contextualize men's violence and gave the male celebrity a megaphone to discount the seriousness of their behavior by interviewing the perpetrator, their publicist, their lawyer, and friends and family instead of seeking expert sources such as victim advocates, law enforcement officials, scholars, or even simply reporting local laws or statistics. For example, law enforcement was the most cited source, appearing in 40 percent of the articles, whereas the celebrity perpetrators were the next most cited source (26 percent of the total articles). Comparatively, domestic violence experts were only cited in one Eonline.com (2010) article – a psychologist quoted in an article about Mel Gibson. This practice enabled male celebrities to evade responsibility by paying lip service to a norm of *taking responsibility* while producing filtered statements consisting of established tropes. For instance, on the rare occasion an abuser offered an apology, it was in regard to damaging their image, such as major league baseball pitcher Jeremy Jeffress. Arrested for assault, criminal damage, and disorderly conduct, MLB.com (2012) published his apology, which stated: "I apologize to the people of Kansas City, the Glass family, Dayton Moore, Ned Yost and my peers. There are consequences in what you do or say. I've disappointed my family and the name on the back of my jersey. I just want to make it clear this is not me." An exception to this pattern was present in 3 of the 5 articles about Chris Brown, who directly apologized for his violence. Although journalists' professional ethics may require reporters to permit the accused to respond to allegations of wrongdoing, they also have a responsibility to provide context, hold those with power accountable, and to be sensitive to victims (Society of Professional Journalists 2014).

#### PATTERNS OF WHITE PRIVILEGE

The racializing of gender violence in news reports reinforces negative tropes about Black men, privileges White men, and ultimately disadvantages women. Patterns consistent with White privilege were evident in the articles in

two significant ways: (a) *Criminal Framing*, and (b) *Excuses and Justifications*. White men were less likely to be portrayed as a criminal and more likely to be excused for their violence against women than Black men (see Table 3). Below I detail the frequencies and characteristics of these two master frames and report on the sub-frames.

### *Criminal framing*

These findings build on prior scholarly work on controlling images of Black men as criminals (Bjornstrom et al. 2010). Although all celebrities in the sample have some type of legal involvement, *Criminal Framing* appeared in 67 percent of articles (N = 157 articles) about Black celebrities and only 37 percent of articles (N = 35 articles) about White celebrities. Articles were coded as containing the *Criminal Frame* if they: mentioned the perpetrator was arrested, listed the charges, cited law enforcement or legal documents as sources, provided information on the court proceedings, included the criminal history of the perpetrator, contained generalized criminal references, or reported on the sentencing. Articles about Black celebrity abusers included the *Criminal Frame* three times more often than articles about White celebrities ( $\chi^2 = 25, p < .001$ ). Specifically, articles about Black celebrities were two times more likely to contain arrest information, three times more likely to include the charges, and two and a half times more likely to cite law enforcement officials or legal documents than articles about White celebrities (see Figure 1).

Furthermore, as shown in Table 3, the articles about Blacks and Whites were equally likely to discuss a past criminal history, suggesting that reporters may focus more on arrests of Black celebrities involved in IPV.

### *Excuses and justifications*

White celebrities were further afforded benefits such as a pattern of excuses embedded in reporting on their violence against women. The *Excuses and Justifications* frame builds from Mills' (1940) framework of motives, which are accepted justifications of actions that typically align with social norms. Excuses are

characterized by admissions that actions are wrong or inappropriate but are linked with claims that the actor couldn't help their conduct, and justifications are defined as explanations for the subjectively good reasons the perpetrator had for choosing to break the rule, often with appeals to alternative rules (Scott and Lyman 1968). Articles about White celebrity abusers included the *Excuses and Justifications* frame two and half times more often than articles about Black celebrities ( $\chi^2 = 16, p < .001$ ). This master frame was characterized by the following sub-frames: *It Takes Two!*, *Substance and Drug Abuse*, *Mental Health Issues*, *Anger*, *Boys Will Be Boys*, *Inherently Different Than Others*, *On the Wrong Track*, and *Generalized Excuses*.

The "*It Takes Two!*" sub-frame depicted men's violence against their partners as a mutual argument, usually instigated by the female partner. This was achieved by labeling men's violence as an "argument," implying the victim did something that triggered the abuse, and obscuring the perpetrator's issues with power, control, and exploitation. Most of the time this framing was not explicitly stated but indicated by the journalists' attempts to explain the reason for men's violence, with an inappropriate use of systems theory, suggesting the causality of the violence is reciprocal. The journalists' resistance to fully placing the responsibility for men's violence against women on the male perpetrator reinforces male privilege by ignoring both power dynamics and impact (Meyers 1997). Importantly, 55 percent of articles about White celebrities and 34 percent of articles about Black celebrities included this mutual argument perspective. For instance, Eddie Fisher (One Republic drummer) was charged with pushing his girlfriend's head so hard into a sink that the underside cabinet broke off the wall. Yet, a 2012 ABC15.com article on the incident read:

The 38-year-old Fisher told police that, "His girlfriend was acting hysterical and had trapped him in the bathroom," striking him several times on the head during the early Tuesday clash at the girlfriend's Denver home,

according to a police statement supporting Fisher's arrest. Police said Fisher had a small, bloody cut on his forehead, which was visible in his arrest photo.

The article continued by describing the violence as a mutual, drunken quarrel and never mentioned the possibility that Fisher received the cut to his forehead as a result of his girlfriend struggling to defend herself from his actions, nor did the article highlight the differences in the severity of their injuries. The report mentioned in the lead sentence that Fisher was the one arrested for the violence, but portrayed the violence as a consequence of reciprocal actions with comparable intentions and impact.

Overall, articles about Whites were two times more likely to include the frame "It Takes Two!" than articles about Black celebrities. Although rare, evidence of authors resisting this framing appeared more often in articles about Black celebrities than in articles about White celebrities. For example, two articles included this "It Takes Two!" frame regarding football player Chris Cook, who was arrested for a felony domestic assault by strangulation: "Chris Cook immediately logged on to Twitter to plead for understanding from the fans. His first Tweet explained, 'There's always two sides to a story!'" A 2011 Yahoo Sports contributor noted, "This may be true, but I'm more inclined to believe Cook's girlfriend, especially since this isn't the cornerback's first scrape with the law. In March, he was arrested for brandishing a gun while arguing with a friend." In the SportsGrid.com article, also published in 2011, before ending with a picture of Chris Cook's tweet, the author described Cook's violence this way, "After fleeing to the living room, Cook allegedly grabbed her by the neck again, cutting off her oxygen. It's not clear how or why he stopped – hopefully, it was because he took a break from being a psycho and realized he was choking a woman." In other words, White celebrities benefited more from the inclusion of the "It Takes 2!" frame because it was included

more frequently and almost never challenged in other ways in the article content or structure.

Additionally, there were noticeable differences in the number of articles that contained information about celebrity perpetrators' mental health issues and substance abuse. While small, 2 percent of articles referenced White celebrities' mental health to explain the abusive behavior, whereas no article did so for Black celebrities. More strikingly, 28 percent of articles about White celebrities contained references to their drug and alcohol use, while only 5 percent of the articles about Black celebrities included this excuse. Often the celebrity was reported to be under the influence at the time of their violence, which served to imply the celebrity was violent because they were intoxicated. An article on Time.com (2011) about musician Rodney Atkins stated, "Atkins was arrested Nov. 21 and charged with domestic assault. His wife, Tammy Jo Atkins, told police that after a night of heavy drinking he assaulted her and tried to suffocate her with a pillow." Including drug and alcohol use as contextual information also provided an indirect explanation for the celebrities' behavior by implying substance use caused White men's violent actions. For instance, this statement in a 2011 Telegraph.com article regarding actor Nicolas Cage links his violence with intoxication: "Cage has been charged with one count of domestic violence and one count of public drunkenness." In another example, the writer states that actor Jeremy London's lawyer denies domestic violence allegations and then immediately states, "The Party of Five actor has a history of addiction and substance abuse. He was cast in the fourth season of Celebrity Rehab with Dr. Drew, where VH1 viewers could follow his recovery from Dec. 2010 to Jan. 2011" (International Business Times 2011), providing an indirect connection between domestic violence and his substance use.

Although it is possible the inclusion of over-use of drug and alcohol could serve to further demonize the celebrity, substance use was typically described in medicalized terms, as

something the celebrity can't help but is trying to overcome. For example, an article about actor Tom Sizemore included this statement: "The actor, who has long battled drug addiction, has had a string of other run-ins with the law – he was last arrested in May on an outstanding warrant for drug charges" (StarPlus.com 2009). In this way, the issue becomes that the celebrity in question has an addiction problem that needs treatment rather than a problem of violence against women. Substance and drug abuse was seven times more likely to be present in White celebrity articles than Black celebrity articles.

White celebrities were also excused for their violence with justifications that they were angry or just couldn't help their violent conduct on account of their masculinity. Articles covering White celebrities cited anger as an excuse 4 percent of the time, whereas Black celebrities were depicted as angry in less than 1 percent of articles. White men were constructed as angry in a given moment, whereas Black men were more often deemed criminals. For example, in a 2010 Eonline.com article disputing mental illness as the explanation for actor Mel Gibson's abusive rants against an ex-girlfriend, the author appealed to evidence of his anger, "Still, he has always had a temper problem.... The director of *Maverick* and *Lethal Weapon*, Richard Donner, has said that you have a lot of anger and hostility...." In a few instances, anger excuses were substantiated by informing the reader that the celebrity perpetrator was mandated to attend anger management classes. Notably, unlike prior research which has found that the media typically constructs Black men as angry (Brown 2005), connotations of innate predispositions to anger appeared in articles about White men more than Black men. Additionally, a total of 6 percent of articles on White celebrities included versions of the adage *boys will be boys* but only 1 percent of articles regarding Black celebrities included this reaction.

## CONCLUSION

By constructing this sample from media coverage of celebrities in the headlines for perpetrating domestic violence, I attend to the

power of popular culture and empirically investigate how Whiteness alters the framing of men's violence against women. Prior scholarly literature on media representations of IPV has shown that reporting minimizes men's responsibility, relies on gender essentialist conceptions of male aggression, bolsters myths of gender symmetry and shared responsibility, and blames victims (Berns 1999, 2001; Bullock and Cubert 2002; Maxwell et al. 2000; Nettleton 2011). Similarly, this study found that articles about male celebrities who perpetrated domestic violence exhibited little regard to the seriousness of men's violence against women and failed to draw attention to the consequences of IPV, findings which evidence entrenched patterns of male privilege. This study built on previous findings by empirically investigating race differences in the social construction of IPV. Results show the race of the perpetrator modified the framing of men's IPV by the writers' inclusion of controlling images of Black celebrities, depicting Black men more often as criminals. Compared to Black men, White men benefited by routinely being excused for their violence against women. These patterned narratives function to maintain the privileged status of White men.

Specifically, the online news coverage of men's violence against women reinforced normative constructions of masculinity and Whiteness at the expense of victims of IPV. The regularly recycled framing was both dependent on, and reinforced conceptions of, hegemonic masculinity for White and Black men. The reporting of celebrity men's violence against women was consistent with patterns of male privilege in that the portrayals of masculinity normalized men's power over women. The victim blaming, failure to contextualize men's violence as a pattern of power and control, and repackaging intimate partner violence as a couples' problem were pervasive and recreated the larger context of hegemonic masculinity. More generally, the framing of celebrity IPV drew on stereotypes and normative beliefs about masculinity.

The race of the celebrities altered the framing of IPV by more frequently presenting Black men as criminals and excusing and justifying White men's domestic violence more so than Black men's violence. The variation in the construction of hegemonic masculinity reflects multiple, hierarchical masculinities (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). Thus, the racializing of gender violence is vulnerable to frames of pitting gender against race (Chancer 1998) when Black men become social embodiments of the gendered issue. This article contributes to scholarly research on the construction of social problems by empirically revealing how White men remain unmarked as a source of social problems, which has important implications for strategies to mitigate IPV.

This study is not without limitations. The 66 celebrities included in the sample do not represent all racial groups or the full range of relationships that include violence. Racial differences may manifest differently for Latino, Asian, and other racial and ethnic groups in the news. Another limitation is the limited information available in the media about the nature of these relationships. It is challenging to identify how power and control operates in relationships by looking at media reports of a snapshot of a particular event rather than patterns of intent and effects of behaviors throughout the course of a relationship. While it is possible that some of the couples' relationships included in the sample are characterized by mutual violence, the evidence available suggested the male celebrities were the primary aggressor. Regardless, journalists could more accurately report on violent relationships by: (1) seeking out and including details about the context of the relationship over time (e.g., evidence of prior allegations or arrests for domestic violence), (2) investigating and reporting probable intent, such as whether violence was used by the perpetrator as a tool to control their partner or evidence of fear by the victim, and (3) including details about the impact of the violence, such as who was harmed and in what ways. Despite these limitations, the results

reveal how White men are privileged in news coverage of their use of violence against women.

Although it's not possible to completely disentangle whether the racial differences in reporting reflect the discrepancy in disproportionate arrest rates between Black men and White men (Alexander 2010; Richie 2012), the evidence is suggestive of racialized reporting. This sample was generated on the prerequisite that the celebrity domestic violence case was connected with the legal system, which connotes as least equal opportunity for criminal imagery to be central to discourse on any given celebrity. The results revealed that although each celebrity could potentially be presented as a criminal, White men more often were not.

Similarly, the preponderance of articles collected represent reporting from the first week of the initial news of the celebrity perpetrator's violent action. Even if the White and Black celebrities did face unequal criminal sanctions for their violence, it was not captured in my sample and cannot explain the disproportionate criminal imagery. For instance, musician Chris Brown and actor Charlie Sheen were both charged with felony domestic violence in 2009. Follow-up analysis revealed that Sheen was sentenced to 30 days of jail (which he served in a rehab center), three months of unsupervised probation and domestic violence treatment. Brown was sentenced to 1,400 hours of labor-oriented community service, five years of probation, and domestic violence treatment. Brown's history of domestic violence remains a fixture in articles about him, particularly as he continued to break the stipulations of his probation. In contrast, Sheen was subsequently accused of putting his hands around another woman's throat and threatening to kill her (a threat she considered real enough to seek shelter in a hotel bathroom) a year after his 2009 arrest and was subjected to another restraining order from his ex-wife two years after that, and yet his violence against women is rarely mentioned in celebrity news articles.

Racialized reporting may also be due to differential occupational narratives (professional

sports players versus actors and musicians), racial differences in the severity of violence, or the frequency in which inebriation is a factor. While there are documented racial differences in the prevalence and impact of domestic violence (Richie 2012), this study did not use frequency of identified male celebrities as an indicator of biased reporting. Variation in the severity of abuse was restricted to some extent by only including men whose violence was severe enough to warrant intervention by the legal system. A further systematic analysis of representations of differences in reporting based on severity of violence is needed. Substance abuse is associated with men's IPV (Zavala and Spohn 2010), but more so for Black men than for White men (Caetano et al. 2000). Therefore, we would expect use of alcohol to be offered as an excuse in a greater proportion of articles about Black male celebrities than articles about White male celebrities, which is contradictory to the findings of this analysis.

Past scholars have argued that controlling images of Black criminal rage and disproportionate imagery of substance use (Brown 2005; Tiger 2013) have perpetuated racism and gender-based violence (Enck and McDaniel 2012; Enck-Wanzer 2009). In contrast, I found these excuses and justifications for men's violence most prevalent in media coverage of White celebrities. This pattern casts doubt on conventional wisdom that inclusion of particular controlling images of Black men span diverse social problems. In this study, White privilege affords White men the benefits of highlighting substance abuse and anger as an excuse for violence while escaping the stigmatization of being deemed an addict or criminal. It is possible that Black celebrities deliberately minimized these excuses in their media relations in anticipation of this racialized marking. Black men's gender violence was not presented as a social problem but articles invoked patterned imagery of Black men as characteristically aggressive and predisposed to criminal behavior generally.

This article provides a systematic analysis of the relationship between privileged positions and the construction of IPV. The distorted framing of IPV matters because it modifies public understanding of the causes and severity of IPV as a social issue, and consequently our collective action. The results are especially important due to the power of celebrity culture, particularly for young people. IPV experts know that a high proportion of fatal relationships start when the victim is an adolescent (Fawcett 2010), and youth are likely consuming messages about IPV primarily through their interest in celebrity news, as opposed to reporting of domestic violence in their local newspapers (Manganello 2008).

Unequal portrayals of Black and White celebrities potentially evoke a defense of Black men at the expense of (Black) female victims of domestic violence and allow for all men's violence to remain uncontested. The spectacle of celebrity is a key structural system that reinforces these privileged narratives. The results expose a need for further scholarship that attends to multiple privileges in construction of social problems, as controlling images may be situational.

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## Nobody's Business

### Tables

Table 1. Demographics of Celebrities in Sample

	Black	White	Total
Total Sample	47	19	66
Occupation by Race			
Actors	7	9	16
Musicians	6	7	13
Pro Sports	34	3	37
Relationship Status			
Dating	29	11	40
Married	9	5	14
Engaged	5	0	5
Divorced	2	1	3
Separated	1	1	2
Unknown	1	1	2
Average age			
	32.04	42.47	35.05
	(9.59)	(8.70)	(8.19)

S.D. in parentheses

Table 2. Patterns of Male Privilege: Prevalence of Primary Frame and Sub-category

Theme	Frequency in Articles (%)
Minimizing the Seriousness of Domestic Violence	54
<i>Occupational Credentials</i>	25
<i>Minimizing Statements</i>	23
<i>Denial</i>	21
<i>Support for the Perpetrator</i>	12
<i>Good Guy</i>	9
<i>Couple Reconciles</i>	4
<i>Victim Recants</i>	3
Under-report of Sanctions	19
<i>Occupational Impact</i>	8
<i>Legal Consequences</i>	7
<i>Community Service</i>	5
<i>Probation</i>	5
<i>Guilty Plea</i>	3
<i>DV Class</i>	2
<i>Jail</i>	2
<i>Anger Management</i>	2
<i>Fines</i>	1
<i>Generalized Accountability</i>	7
Misplaced Responsibility	24
<i>Framing the Victim</i>	13
<i>History of Intimate Partner Violence</i>	9
<i>Pattern of Violent Behavior</i>	7
<i>Apology</i>	1

Table 3. Patterns of White Privilege: Prevalence of Primary Frame and Sub-category by Race of Celebrity Perpetrator (%)

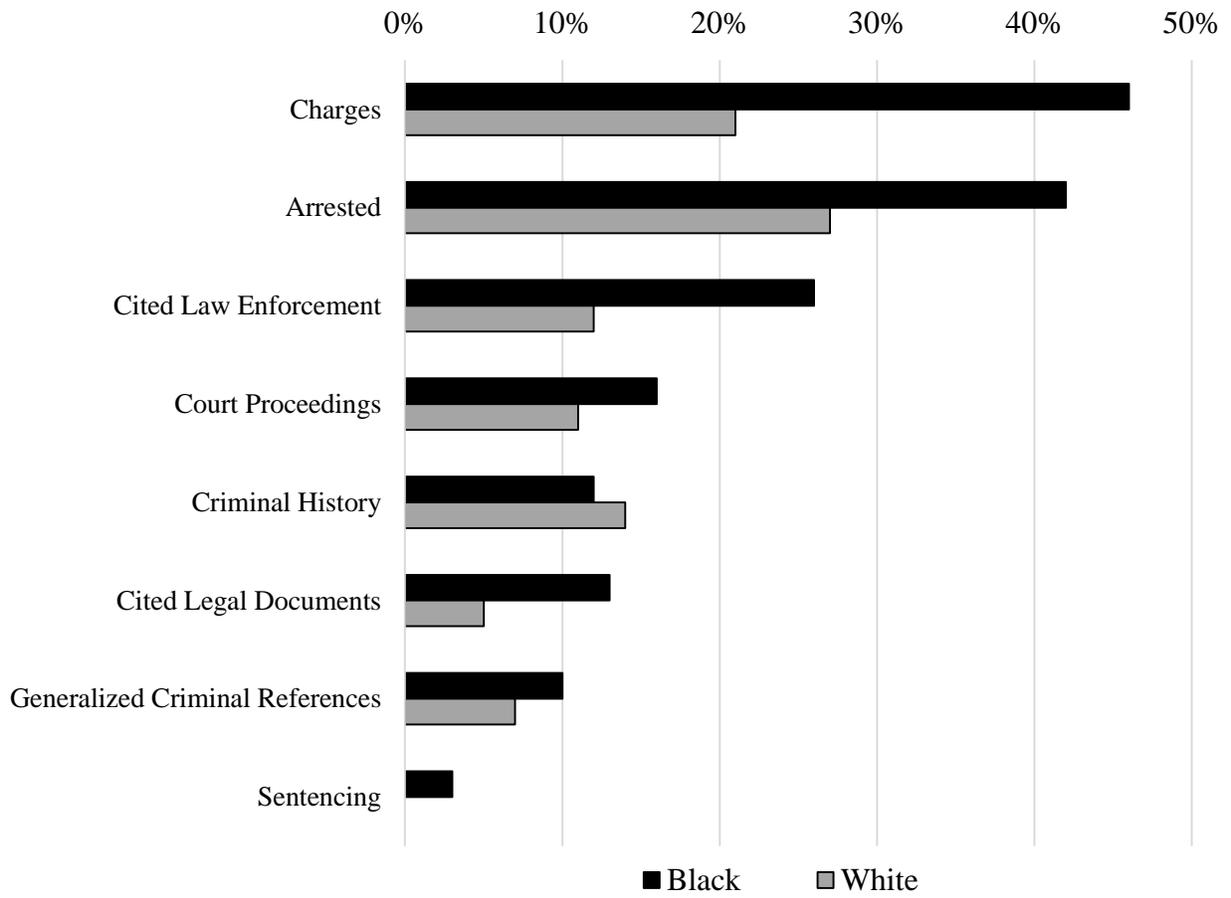
Theme	Black Articles (N = 235)	White Articles (N = 95)	Total Articles (N = 330)	
Criminal Framing	67	37	58	***
<i>Charges</i>	46	21	38	
<i>Arrested</i>	42	27	38	
<i>Cited Law Enforcement</i>	26	12	22	
<i>Court Proceedings</i>	16	11	14	
<i>Criminal History</i>	12	14	13	
<i>Cited Legal Documents</i>	13	5	11	
<i>Generalized Criminal References</i>	10	7	9	
<i>Sentencing</i>	3	0	2	
Excuses and Justifications	41	65	48	***
<i>It Takes Two!</i>	34	55	40	
<i>Substance &amp; Drug Abuse</i>	5	28	12	
<i>Different than Others</i>	3	2	3	
<i>On the Wrong Track</i>	3	3	3	
<i>Anger</i>	0	4	2	
<i>Boys Will Be Boys</i>	1	6	2	
<i>Mental Health Issues</i>	0	2	1	
<i>Other Excuses</i>	2	0	2	

$\chi^2$  statistical tests of difference between frequency in articles about black and white celebrities for the two Master Frames

\*\*\* p<0.001

**FIGURE 1**

Articles with Criminal Imagery (%)



## NOTES

1. Although the scope of the sample is restricted to IPV specifically, cultural references from mainstream society refer to IPV as “domestic violence,” a legal term used to describe violence between any members of a family. Therefore, in the paper I use the terms interchangeably. Even though domestic violence is usually brought to public awareness because of physical acts of harm, IPV can take many forms of violence and abuse, which may include: physical violence; verbal, emotional, and economic abuse; and threats of harm (Centers for Disease Control 2012). Recognizing the importance of context for violent acts and the continuum of abusive behaviors, I adopt this broader definition of IPV throughout the analysis.
2. Using Alexa, a website providing an analysis of Internet traffic, I identified the most frequently visited sites for celebrity news (excluding websites primarily geared to providing movie reviews): TMZ.com (US Rank 86), People.com (US Rank 204), and Eonline.com (US Rank 228). I repeated this process to identify top sports websites (excluding websites targeted to audiences outside of the United States and those limited to individualized sports, such as MLB.com), which resulted in the following sites: ESPN.go.com (US Rank 25), sports.yahoo.com (yahoo.com US Rank 4), and bleacherreport.com (US Rank 80). However, Yahoo Sports does not have a search bar that provides results restricted to their sports section. Therefore it was excluded and the next site listed was selected instead, msn.foxsports.com (US Rank 111).
3. I used Google.com for the search engine and the celebrity name in quotes to generate the population of articles. Google uses PageRank, an algorithm based mostly on the number of links pointing to a page, to deliver the most relevant search results. Using a random number generator, I selected 5 articles from the first 100 articles populated by Google. Articles were excluded from the sample that were blog posts, social media results, captions accompanying a photo with no text, sites exclusively listing statistics for pro sports players, and informational websites such as Wikipedia, IMDB.com, and personal websites of the celebrities. Articles represent selections from diverse websites such as Eonline.com, NYTimes.com, TMZ.com, blacksportsonline.com, huffingtonpost.com and fighters.com, to name a few. Twenty-five percent of the articles quoted another news site as the primary source of information (often TMZ.com).
4. I cannot assess differences in the overall quantity of articles written about each celebrity, as the analytic sample consists of five articles per celebrity. Thus, this analysis is limited to investigation of differences in the content of sampled articles only.