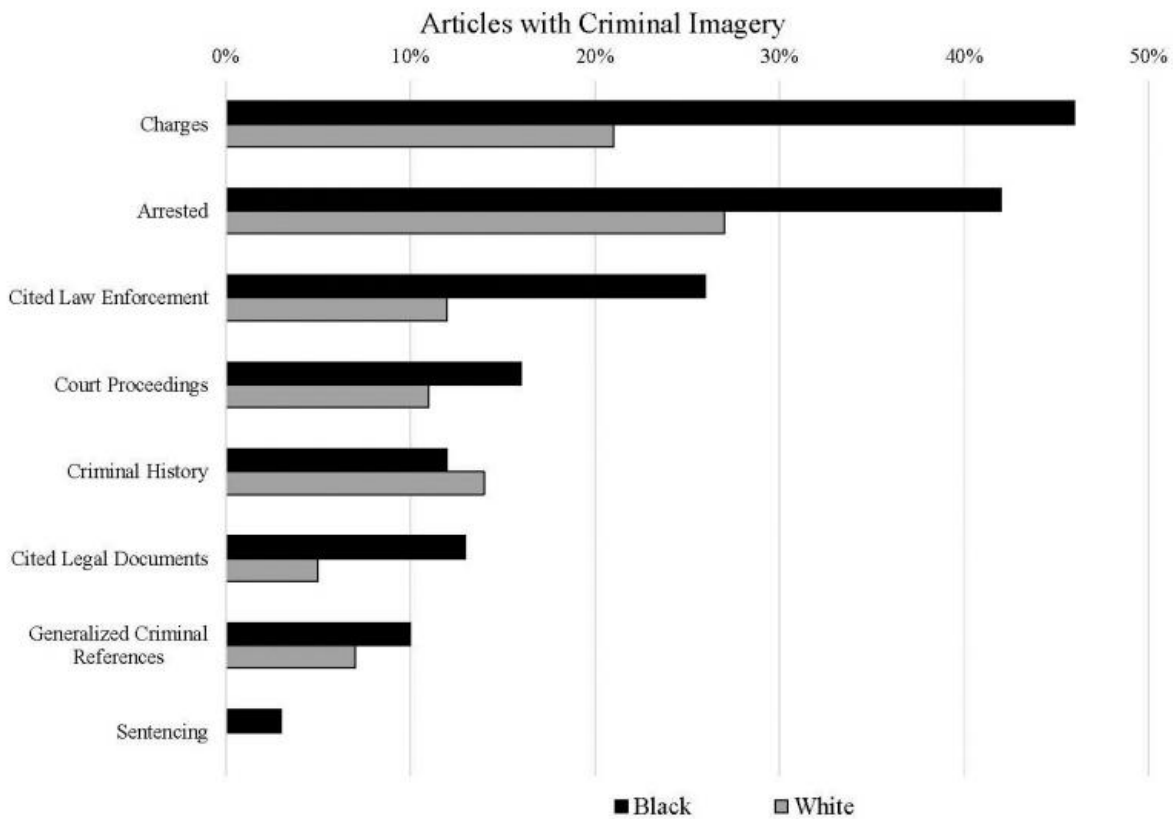


# Study shows racial bias in media coverage of celebrity domestic violence

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Athletes, musicians and actors who commit acts of domestic violence continue to face heightened scrutiny, and new research from the

University of Maryland reveals that the news coverage of such cases is often racially biased.

The study examined 330 news articles, covering approximately 66 celebrities between 2009 and 2011, to extract disparities between the reporting of celebrity offenses.

"The [racial differences](#) are attributed to two mechanisms," said Joanna Pepin, Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Sociology and the author of the study. "First, when the media reports on [domestic violence](#), men's violence is more likely to be portrayed as a criminal act when the celebrity is black than when the celebrity is white."

Earlier research has demonstrated that [black men](#) are overrepresented as criminal suspects in the media compared to whites. Pepin's study found strikingly similar results in articles covering celebrity domestic violence. Black men were presented as criminals (citing arrest information, details of official charges, and mentioning [law enforcement officers'](#) involvement) more often than [white men](#). She discovered these mentions occurred three times more often when authors reported on black male celebrities than when they reported on white male celebrities.

"Secondly, reports are more likely to include excuses for men's violence against women when the coverage is of a white celebrity than when the celebrity is black," explained Pepin.

Her study further revealed that articles were two and a half times more likely to include excuses for men's violence against their female partners when reporting on white celebrities than when covering black celebrities. Authors were also more likely to suggest white men's violent behavior resulted from a mutual conflict and to excuse their violence due to mitigating circumstances, such as inebriation.

"This is a surprising finding," said Pepin. "Some research suggests black men are more likely to be shown as addicts or prone to violent anger but I found these depictions most often in [news articles](#) about white men. White celebrities benefited by highlighting substance abuse and anger as an excuse for violence while escaping the stigmatization of being deemed an addict or criminal."

**More information:** Joanna Rae Pepin. Nobody's business? White male privilege in media coverage of intimate partner violence, *Sociological Spectrum* (2015). [DOI: 10.1080/02732173.2015.1108886](https://doi.org/10.1080/02732173.2015.1108886)

Provided by University of Maryland

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