

Color coded media: Portrayals of race in newspaper coverage of National Hockey League athletes

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I. Introduction

Media representation of athletes may inform broader racial stereotypes. Examining the differences in journalists' when describing both minority and non-minority athletes within the NHL illustrates the ways in which this language contributes to readers' constructions of race.

The difference in the racial composition of the NHL presents a unique opportunity to examine how this difference affects the way in which minority athletes are portrayed in the mass media. Minority players are truly the minority in the NHL, whereas other professional sporting leagues could be considered minority-majority sports.

III. Methods

Data were collected in 2014 from 10 U.S. and 8 Canadian newspapers via stratified sampling of the highest circulation publications in the 2 countries

The unit of analysis was the **comment**, defined as a sentence, phrase, or paragraph describing a single player attribution (physical, cognitive, personal, or combination with n=1,487). Data for this study was coded using a modified Biased Coverage Index (BCI)¹, and analyzed using χ^2 , ANOVA tests and Tukey's HSD tests.

¹ Rada, J. A., & Wulfemeyer, K. (2005). Color coded: Racial descriptors in television coverage of intercollegiate sports. *Journal Of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 49(1)

IV. Results continued

B. Post-Season Physical/Cognitive Comments.

Timing was a statistically significant factor ($\chi^2=11.231, p<0.001$) in how a player was characterized. Post-season games bring in more money & have more prestige. Media coverage shifted away on-ice abilities of minority players during post-season.

Figure 3: Personal/Combination Comments- Minority Players

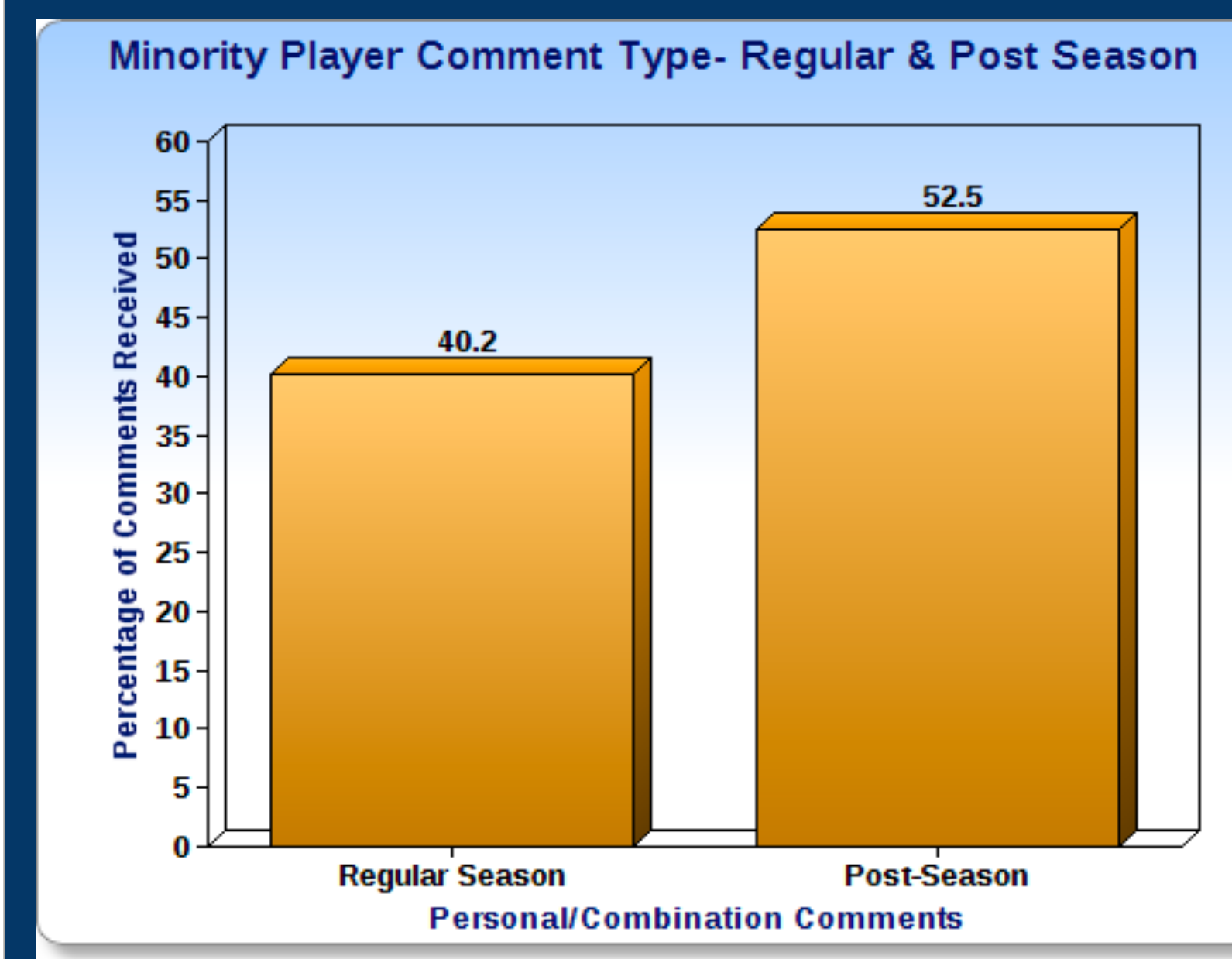
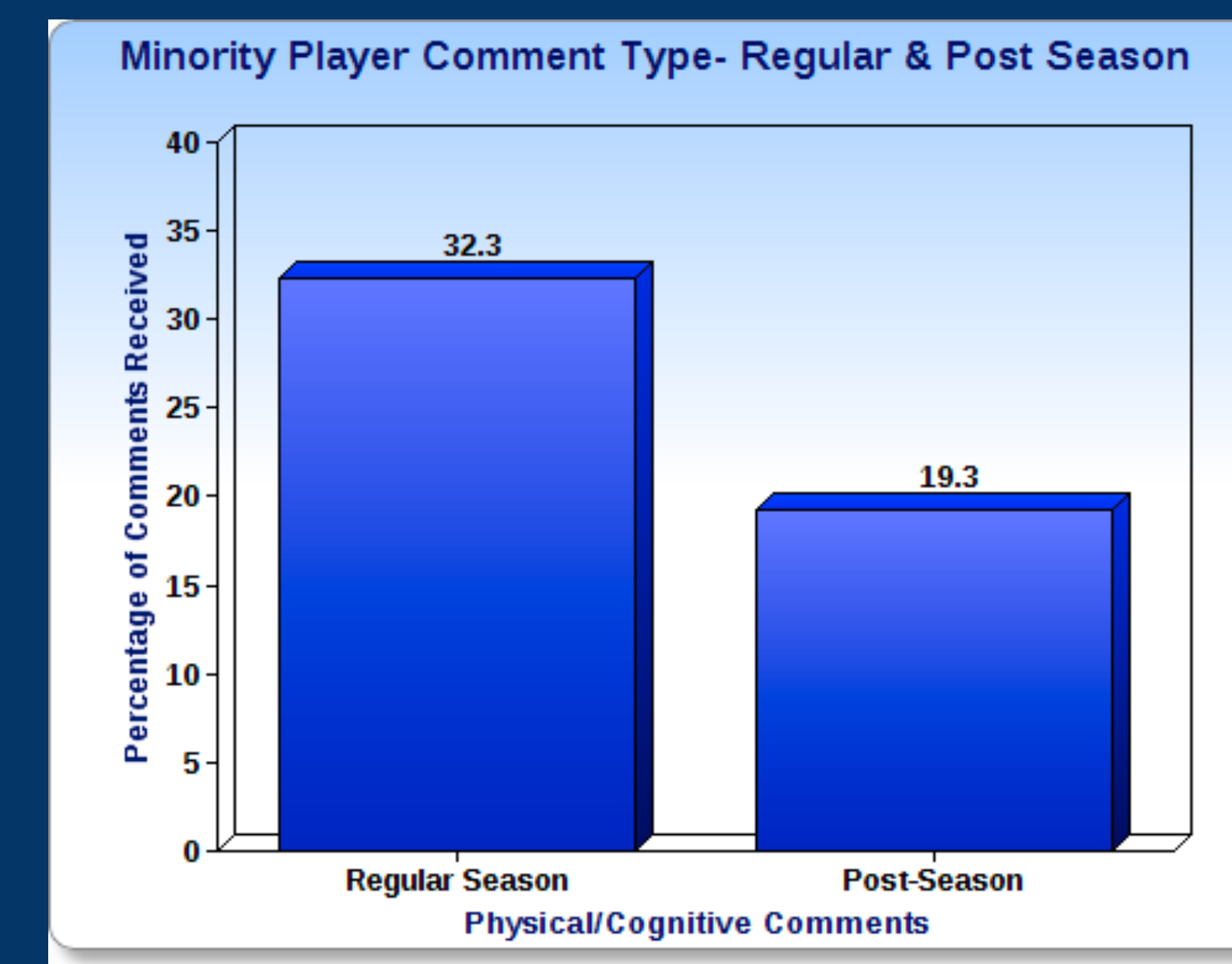


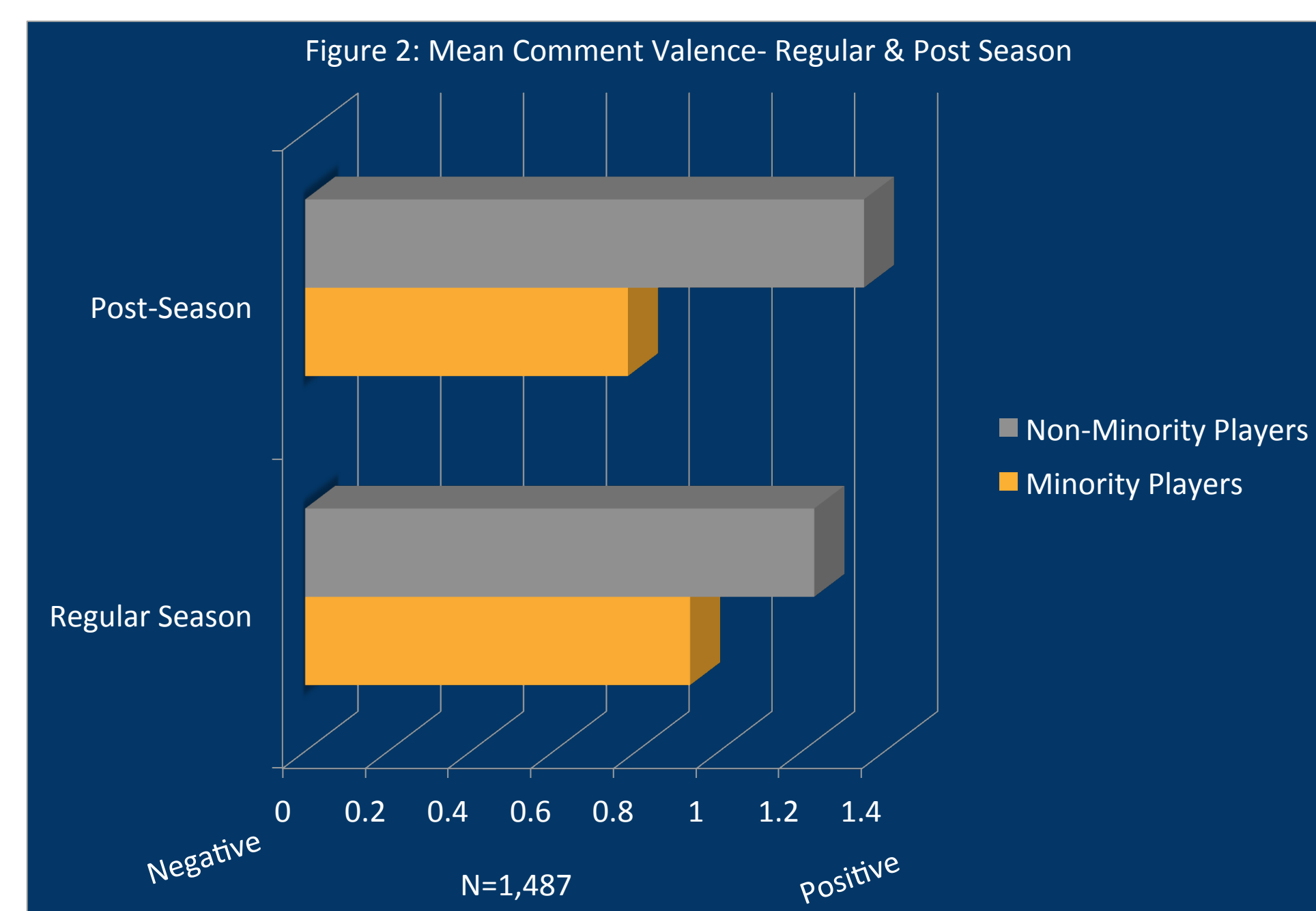
Figure 4: Physical/Cognitive Comments- Minority Players



IV. Results

A. Valence of Comments.

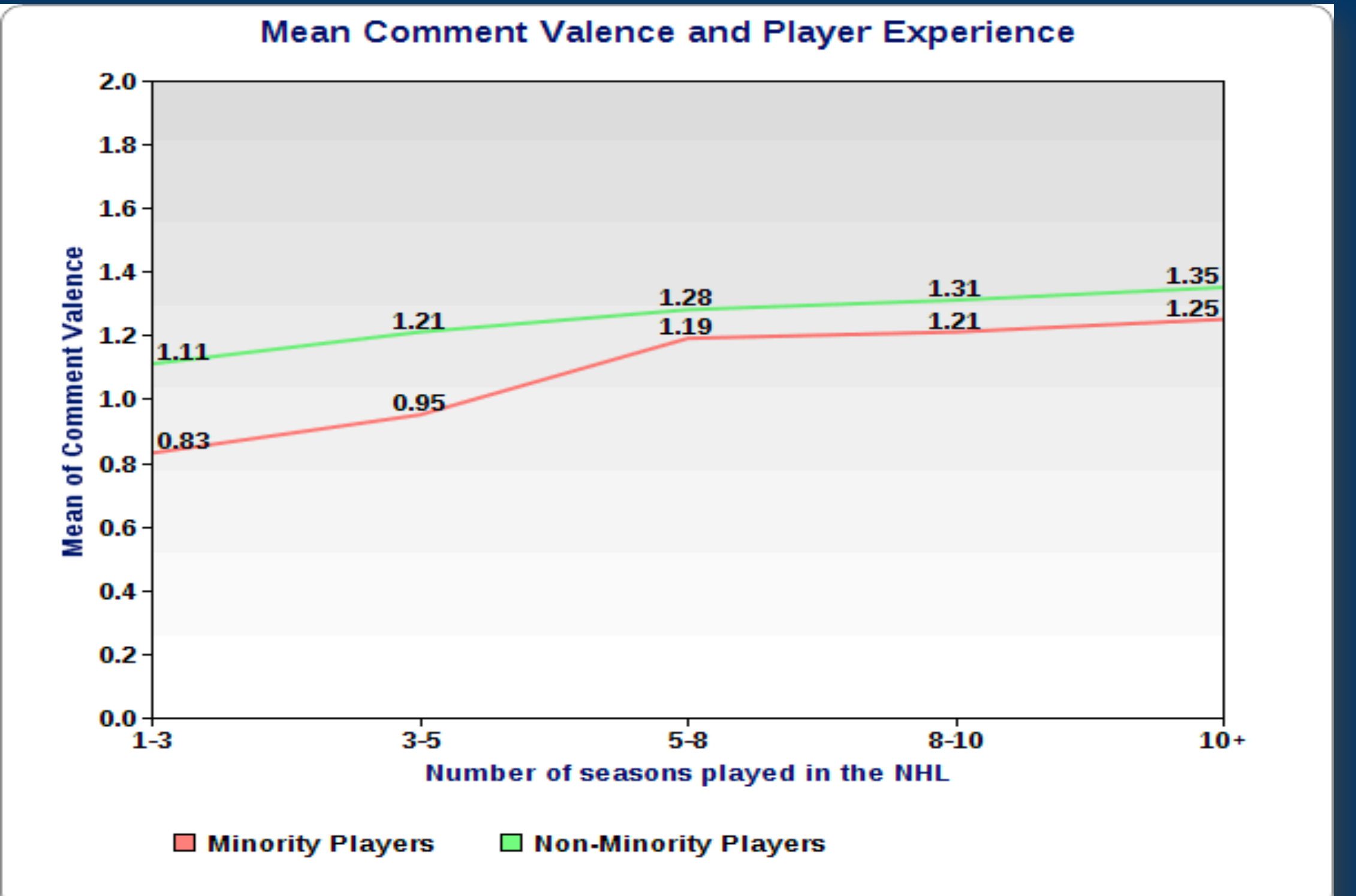
ANOVA testing revealed that the valence of comments received by minority players during post-season coverage was statistically significantly more negative ($\bar{x}=0.78$) than non-minority players ($\bar{x}=1.35$). These findings suggests that as the intensity and importance of a game increase, the tendency toward negative representation of racial minority players in the NHL by sports writers may also increase.



C. Players' Experience.

Post hoc testing using Tukey's HSD (which identifies which groups in a sample differ) indicates that comments for players with 5+ years of NHL experience were more positive than their less experienced counterparts (Mean Difference= 0.366, $p<0.001$) regardless of their racial identity. Since players with 5+ years of experience are characterized more positively regardless of race, this suggests that over time racial biases may diminish.

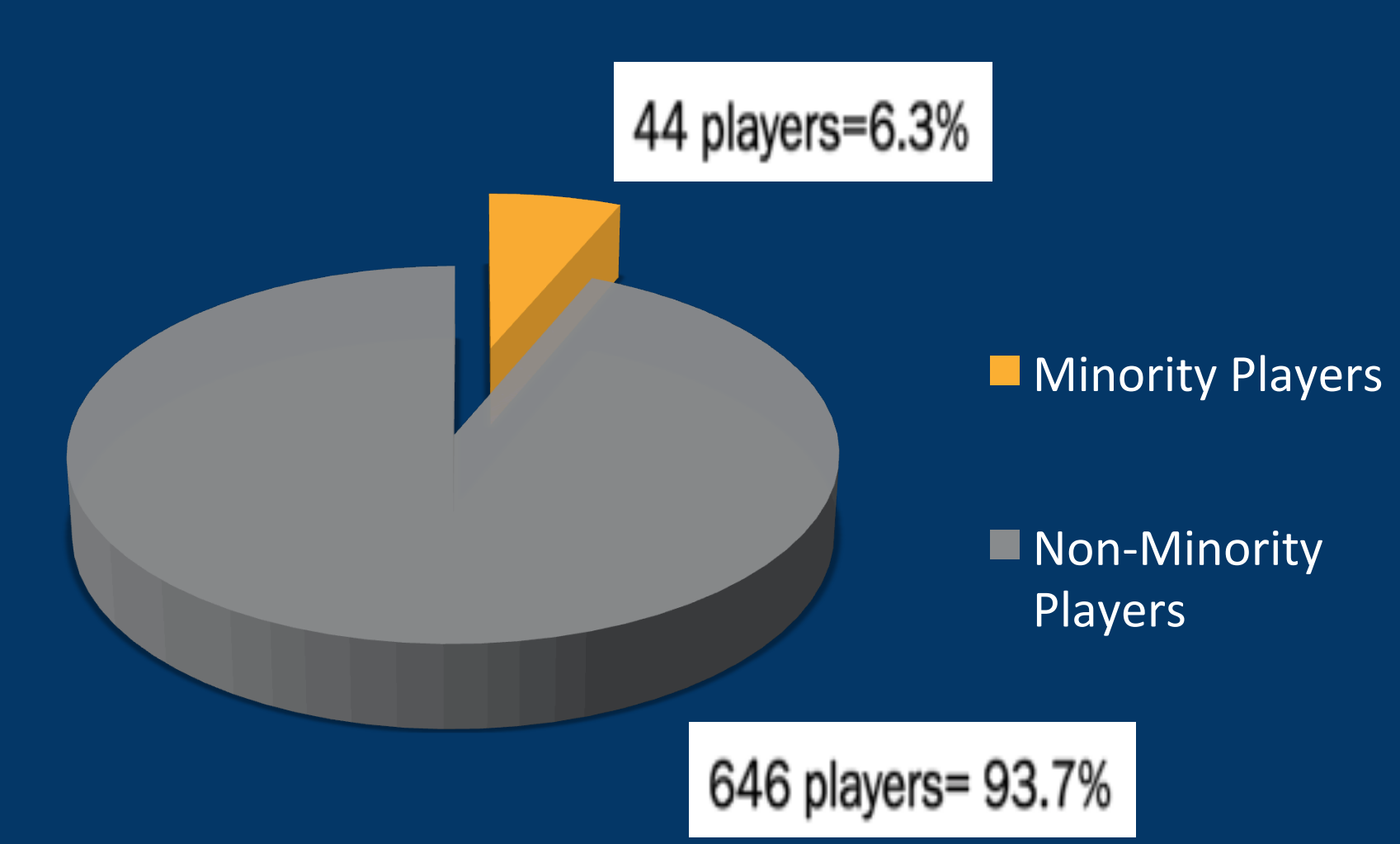
Figure 5: Mean Comment Valence and Players' Experience



IV. Conclusions

Media representation of NHL players differs according to race. These differences suggest that an underlying cultural framework regarding race is being reproduced in the sports pages of newspapers. If a single-season snapshot of newspaper characterizations of minority/majority NHL players shows such clear results, then the cumulative effect of media portrayals of minority athletes must be dramatic. Further study would be worthwhile to determine if these portrayals have changed over time.

Figure 1: Racial Composition of the NHL (2013-2014)



II. Terms

Minority Player- Any Non-white athlete
Non-minority Player- Any white athlete
Valence- Tone of journalists' comments