Past studies have found that youth sport publications such as Sports Illustrated for Kids and Young Athlete lack written and photographic coverage of girls and women and people with disabilities in sport (Cuneen & Sidwell, 1998, Duncan & Sayavong, 1990; Hardin, Hardin, Lynn, & Walsdorf, 2001; Miller, 2003, McNary & Pedersen, 2008, and Walsdorf, 2000). Also, media portrayals of sport fail to cover children of varying races (e.g., Latino/Hispanic, Asian).

Media have a significant impact on everyday lives and individuals learn by seeing, hearing, and reading (Bandura, 2001). Using the social cognitive theory of mass communication (Bandura, 2001) as a framework, a content analytic method was used to examine coverage of social diversity in all 240 issues of a youth sport publication from 1989-2008. Data were extracted from 903 articles, 3,946 photographs, and 228 covers of the magazine.

The purpose of this study was to examine the representation of the written and photographic coverage accompanying articles and covers, specifically examining various components of sport such as the type and category of sport. Furthermore, gender makeup of the athletes, authors, and photographers, as well as the makeup of the athletes’ race and athletes with disabilities were examined.

The results revealed a perpetuation of a lack of diversity of coverage of the various variables categorized for this study. Using frequencies, research question one through five identified major areas of coverage that have been ignored. Of the adult athletes who received coverage, 68.1% were male while 20.9% were female athletes, while the remaining coverage focused on mixed genders (10.5%) and no gender focus (4%). In examining coverage according to race, the most coverage was devoted to white/Caucasian athletes (49.7%) with the second highest percentage of coverage afforded to black/African American athletes (31.6%). Other racial groups (e.g., Latino/Hispanic, Asians, and athletes of mixed races) received the remainder of the coverage. Out of the 903 articles analyzed, only 18 articles focused on athletes with disabilities. In addition, most of the contributing authors were male (75.4%) while female contributors covered 22.7% of the articles. The remaining content was written by either combined genders or an unknown source.

Reporting of photographic content revealed similar findings. A total of 3,946 photographs were coded. General findings reveal that a disparity existed among male photographers (86.7%) and female photographers (5.4%). The remaining photographers were from mixed genders or an unknown source. Interestingly, when photographs of males appeared, 29% of the photographs were coded as large while 20% of female photographs were coded as large. Athletes were captured in most photographs engaging in a sport specific action shot (61.8%) while still shot photos made up 28% of the coverage. In terms of gender, 72% of images reported on male athletes and 20.1% of female athletes. The existing coverage was dedicated to combined genders or athletes whose gender could not be determined. Most of the athletes covered were White/Caucasian (48%). African American athletes (36.1%) made up a significant amount of coverage and Latino/Hispanics (5.2%), Unknown (4.2%), Asians (2.2%), and athletes of two or more races (2.9%) comprised the remainder of content.

Through the use of statistical techniques, significant differences were found between Group 1 (1989-1999) and Group 2 (2000-2008) when analyzing written content. Specifically, chi-square tests showed significant differences between the type of sport as well as category of sport, gender, and race of athletes covered in both time periods. Another difference that appeared was that of gender, type of sport, and the prominence of the article. If females were covered, they appeared closer to the back of the magazine. Additionally, significant differences were found among race of the athlete and the type and category of sport examined.

Many of the Group 1 and Group 2 photographic results mirrored results found within the article content findings since all photographs were associated with a feature article. When viewing photographic content, ANOVA indicated that the gender and type of sport photographed impacted the placement of the article and photograph. Female photographs were bigger in Group 2 than in Group 1 when revenue producing sports and soccer were covered.
Consistent with written content, photographic content results also concluded significant differences between type of sport, category of sport, and the race of the athlete. Overall, few articles or photographs focused on athletes with disabilities.

Areas such as race, gender, and disability have been historically ignored in past studies. This study illustrated that the magazine could be diversified to reflect the varied nature of youth sport participants in the United States. Showing a breadth of coverage that accurately reflects sport participants could further educate children as they continue learning about their world and themselves through media outlets. The study continues building on a line of research and illuminates the importance of ascertaining children's views of the magazine and adds to an area of literature that has been covered on a limited basis.