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Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport

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Why, 40 years after the passage of Title IX, are female athletes routinely asked to pose in ways that sexualize them and minimize their athletic competence?

Does Sex Sell Women's Sport?—The "Second Wave" of Sport Media Research

The Tucker Center is internationally known for producing gender and sport media research. As we approach the 20th anniversary of the TC, our commitment to producing sport media research that matters is stronger than ever. TC researchers are part of a large group of scholars across the globe who over the last 30 years have contributed to a significant body of knowledge on traditional sport media, establishing that females continue to receive significantly less coverage than their male counterparts in both print and broadcast journalism and are routinely portrayed in ways that emphasize femininity and heterosexuality far more than athletic competence. This "first wave" of sport media scholarship has systematically and comprehensively documented the marginalization of female athletes and women's sport, primarily through content analysis of visual and written texts.

Until recently, scholars have largely ignored how such coverage is interpreted and understood by individuals who are exposed to and consume images of female athletes. Within the last decade a "second wave" of sport media audience reception research has emerged to fill the gap. Informing and complementing TC research, a small number of scholars have produced systematic lines of audience reception research, including Elizabeth Daniels (Oregon State U) and the team of Vikki

Krane (Bowling Green State U) and Sally Ross (Grand Valley State U) and colleagues. Daniels's key contribution is consistent data demonstrating that performance images of female athletes elicit positive comments and feelings about female athleticism from diverse audiences—including boys. Krane and colleagues contribute data that indicate when sportswomen are given a choice regarding self-representation, they emphasize their physical power, strength and athleticism but also identify other (or dual) identities that they have beyond their athletic one. TC Director Mary Jo Kane and former graduate student Heather Maxwell found that showing diverse focus groups sexualized images of female athletes did little to increase respect for or interest in women's sports, and many participants (i.e., females, older males/dads with daughters) found such images offensive. This small but powerful set of studies challenges, as Kane argues, a deeply seated cultural assumption and widely held marketing practice that sexualizing female athletes is one of the most effective ways to generate fan interest as well as boost attendance, TV ratings, and corporate sponsorships.

At the Tucker Center, we are building on the emerging body of second wave sport media research. Last summer Kane, TC Associate Director Nicole M. LaVoi, and Affiliated Scholar Janet Fink (UMass-

Letter from the Director



Dr. Mary Jo Kane

As I write this column in late March it's sunny outside, (relatively) warm and the snow is finally beginning to melt. Welcome to spring in Minnesota! The first bit of news I want to share is that 2013 marks the 20th anniversary of the Tucker Center. Because we want to honor and celebrate this remarkable milestone we decided not to have a spring Distinguished Lecture so that we could focus our efforts on planning a number of special events for next Fall.

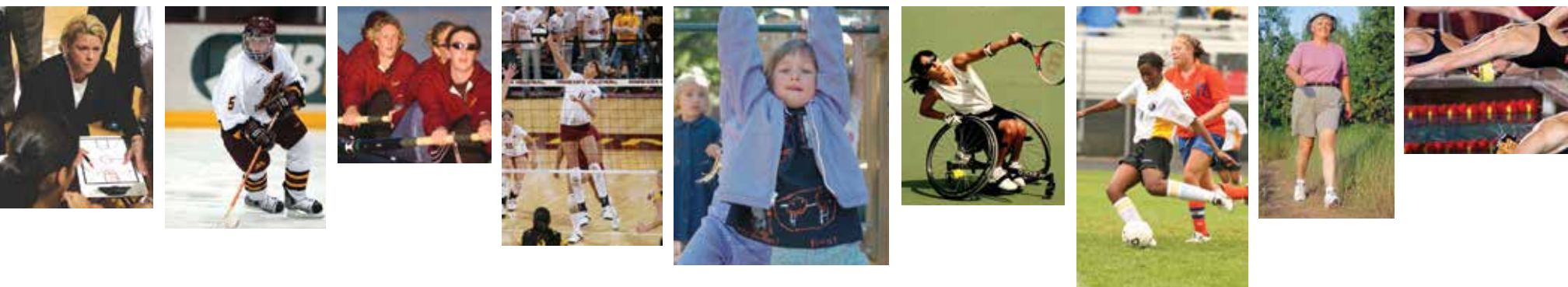
The theme of this newsletter is "research." When we opened our doors two decades ago as a first-of-its-kind research center, our scholarly endeavors were—and remain—at the heart of our mission. Over the last 20 years we have worked with an amazing group of individuals from a variety of academic disciplines who have collaborated with us on numerous research projects. I speak of faculty from the U of M ranging from the School of Public Health to the School of Journalism, visiting scholars from around the globe, the best and the brightest graduate students, and finally, our community partners. We highlight the groundbreaking research these individuals have done, along with the scholarly contributions of Tucker Center faculty and graduate students.

Our **Feature Story** examines "second wave" sport media research. What this story makes crystal clear is that we are at the cutting edge of producing new knowledge that directly challenges stereotypes regarding the most effective ways to cover and promote female athletes. As you will see, there is a growing body of evidence that indicates that "sex sells sex," not women's sports. In **Research Updates** you'll learn about the diverse and exciting research our doctoral students are conducting, from how sportswomen are portrayed on the Internet, to an examination of the various ways parents behave within a youth sport context. In our **Guest Column** we feature an interdisciplinary research project undertaken by Professors Lisa Kihl and Sally Shaw, along with doctoral candidate Vicki Schull. Their project, which explores sport and organizational change, should be of particular interest because they focus on the merger that took place between the women's and men's athletic departments at Minnesota in 2002. Finally, on the back page we highlight our summer **Internship Program** where students work closely with faculty members who train them to become future scholars and educators.

Be sure to look for details about our 20th anniversary celebration and stay current with all the TC news on our website at www.tuckercenter.org. And happy—if belated—spring!

—Mary Jo Kane

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Research Update

The Shining Stars of the Tucker Center: Doctoral Students!

The Tucker Center attracts the best and brightest graduate students who are interested in pursuing diverse research interests related to gender and sport. To showcase the cutting-edge work they are producing, we invited eight recent graduates and current doctoral students in Kinesiology at the University of Minnesota to summarize their existing lines of inquiry.

Austin Stair Calhoun: The purpose of my dissertation is to explore how and why—from the perspective of the Sport Information Director (assigned athletic department gatekeepers)—same-sex family narratives get masked and erased in online coaching biographies. In my earlier work with colleagues, I applied a “counting” methodology to examine family narratives in online coaching biographies—coaches’ accomplishments, extracurricular activities, and family life narratives. Heterosexual family narratives were common—only 2 of 1,855 online coach bios listed a same-sex partner, marking a near absence of same-sex family narratives. Scholars assert that gay and lesbian coaches are erased, silenced and policed, and have many fears such as losing their jobs, losing recruits, and receiving homophobic backlash from the department, institution, and community. With my results, I hope to influence athletic departments to develop and adopt inclusive sports information policies, thus creating opportunities for GLBT coaches, administrators, and athletes to be open about their non-traditional identities and family narratives.

Julia Dutove: For my dissertation I will utilize a social theory and a sociological approach to study parent sideline behavior in youth sports. A majority of researchers have focused mainly on documenting the amount of poor sideline behavior and the impact parental behavior has on athletes, but little attention has been paid to what influences parents to act in unsportsmanlike or egregious ways. Specifically, I will examine how parents come to know what is normative and appropriate/not appropriate on youth sport sidelines. The results of this research will be used to further inform evidence-based sport parent education workshops the Tucker Center often delivers to private, community-, and school-based sport programs and to help create a more enjoyable and positive climate for youth sport participants.

Maya Hamilton: The purpose of my dissertation is to gain a better understanding of college coaches who have made sustained commitments to moral values in their personal and professional lives. As central agents in athlete moral development, coaches have a duty to operate at the very minimum within the organizational and institutional rules and expectations. The pressures and demands on many coaches cause them to subvert moral and educational values and betray the virtues often attributed to sport (e.g., integrity, honesty, teamwork) in part in order to obtain another “W.” To improve the moral state of college sport, I believe we must understand the coaches who have been successful in placing moral values and character development ahead of winning, despite an environment in which their job can often depend on wins/losses. With this knowledge, I hope to educate coaches on how to better form the next generation of moral citizens.

Emily Houghton: In my dissertation I add to sport media audience reception research by assessing the “goodness of fit” between how audiences interpret images of Black male athletes and the ways in which those interpretations “fit” with scholarly assertions pertaining to racially marked media depictions. Researchers have indicated that Black male athletes are portrayed in ways that reinforce stereotypes, yet few researchers have examined if or how those depictions might impact audiences. I view this project as a way to provide empirical evidence to illustrate how stereotypical portrayals are internalized or challenged by consumers of sport media. My goal is to utilize the results of this study to educate by prompting individuals to think critically about dominant media narratives and portrayals.

John Lisec: Currently, my research interests focus on how female athletes are represented on the Internet. As sport fans increasingly utilize a variety of online resources such as Web sites, blogs, social networking, and discussion boards, it has become increasingly important to understand the implications for the current and future landscape of women’s sports. My dissertation and other research projects expand theoretical frameworks within sport media research to reflect the uniqueness, complexities, and negotiations that occur in an online context. Most importantly, I will use my research to advocate for online spaces that promote and highlight the strength, skill, and accomplishments of female athletes.

Vicki Schull: In my dissertation I seek to understand how individual female college athletes socially construct leadership in the context of intercollegiate athletics and to understand how female college athletes’ experiences in sport shape their interpretations of leadership within intercollegiate athletics. [Read more about Vicki’s gender and leadership research in the Guest Column on the next page.]

Chelsey Thul, Ph.D. (’12): I am currently working as a Postdoctoral Fellow in Interdisciplinary Research Training in Child & Adolescent Primary Care, Department of Pediatrics, University of Minnesota. My research interests center on using Community-Based Participatory research methods to promote culturally relevant physical activity (PA) for underserved girls. In my doctoral research I examined East African (EA) adolescent girls’ perceptions of individual, social, structural, and societal barriers and supports for PA. I am currently working to co-develop a garment for PA that is functional, culturally sensitive, and aesthetically appealing to EA adolescent girls and to assess the impact of such a garment on the girls’ PA attitudes and behaviors. I am also exploring Somali adolescent males’ and parents’ beliefs about Somali adolescent females’ physical activity participation. The findings will advance understanding of how to bolster significant others’ social support and help guide future intervention development of culturally relevant PA programming for EA adolescent girls.

Tommy Valentini: My doctoral research focuses on moral education in and through sport. The purpose of my research is to better understand how to develop team norms that promote moral functioning for individuals by transforming teams into moral communities. The belief that sport ought to be a character-building mechanism pervades contemporary sport culture. Yet a growing body of research shows that sport participation can actually impede rather than facilitate moral functioning. I aim to contribute to sport moral research that will advance sport as a positive, moral educational endeavor and limit the problematic incongruence of sport as character building in theory, but character depleting in practice.



Austin Stair Calhoun



Julia Dutove



Maya Hamilton



Emily Houghton



John Lisec



Vicki Schull



Chelsey Thul, Ph.D.



Tommy Valentini

Guest Column

Collaborative Research: Living the Mission of the Tucker Center

The Tucker Center attracts exceptional visiting scholars from around the globe who desire to conduct collaborative research with TC faculty and grow their intellectual pursuits. During Fall 2012, visiting scholar Sally Shaw, a professor in the School of Physical Education at the University of Otago in New Zealand, worked on a research project with TC Affiliated Scholar and UMN Associate Professor of Kinesiology Lisa Kihl and UMN Kinesiology doctoral candidate Vicki Schull. We invited them to share their findings in the column below.

Gender and Organizational Change

The aim of our research was to examine the gendered political nature of merging gender-affiliated sport organizations through the case of the University of Minnesota's merger of the men's and women's athletic departments. We examined how various stakeholders perceived the merger, how both men and women were impacted, and the processes by which various stakeholders engaged in political maneuvering along gender-affiliated lines during this major organizational change process.



Dr. Sally Shaw

Contemporary discussions about organizational change tend to approach change processes with a linear, gender-blind focus. However, gender scholars assert that all organizational processes are chaotic and gendered. The merging of gender-affiliated sport organizations offers a unique opportunity to examine organizational change in sport. These mergers are driven by pressures on organizations to compete for funding and resources and are influenced by neoliberal ideologies of efficiency (i.e., eliminate redundancies in operations and services to reduce costs). The merger process is highly political as stakeholders from the previously separate departments jockey for position and power thereby creating an "us versus them" mentality, which plays out as "men versus women." Gender is a central feature of the merger process and women generally have the most to lose in organizational change and restructuring (e.g., jobs, gender equity, identity, status) and thus often experience the merger differently. For example, women may have different emotional reactions and interpretations of the merger and may engage in varying political activities based in part on their perceived weaker positions in the sport domain and gendered assumptions and ideologies. Thus, mergers between gender-affiliated sport organizations offer a context-specific and highly political opportunity to examine how gender relations are shaped within certain organizational change processes.



Vicki Schull

What We Found

Based on the data, we found the merger was inundated with gendered political processes. First, the merger provoked both positive and negative gendered reactions by stakeholders. The potential for organizational change created uncertainty about the future of women's sports, which elicited a variety of emotions including anger, anxiety, fears of loss related to autonomy and gender equity, and threats to identity from stakeholders of women's sport. In general, women's stakeholders felt their

program would be taken over by the men's program. Conversely, men's department stakeholders reported positive reactions to organizational change because they believed nothing would change. Coaches of men's and women's Olympic/non-revenue sports feared a loss of allocation of resources and loss of status and value within the new organization. For example, instead of being 1 of 12 sports in a men's department, in a merged department the men's gymnastics program became 1 of 25.



Dr. Lisa Kihl

Second, we found that gendered political processes were evident in the search process to name a leader for the newly merged departments. Stakeholders from both gender-affiliated departments engaged in political strategies to control and manipulate the search process by exerting power over the candidate criteria and by influencing the candidate pool and perceptions of certain candidates. Collectively, the political strategies contributed to gendered processes favoring masculinity-based leadership qualities and male candidates in the search for a leader. While gender equity was an important consideration in the search process, it was widely accepted by many stakeholder groups that hiring a man was essential to the merger's success. This belief was due to the controversial nature of the merger.

Last, a dramatic organizational change such as a merger requires considerable departmental restructuring and creation of a new culture with gendered political implications. We found that during attempts to create a new culture, many stakeholders from both men's and women's departments "kept score" of the new leaders' decisions that favored the men's or women's department. Furthermore, men's department stakeholders resisted change more than the women in terms of adapting to new policies and procedures, changes in reporting lines (i.e., certain male coaches resisted reporting to a female administrator), and relinquishing responsibilities to a female administrator.

Practical Implications

The practical implications for managers considering organizational change in terms of merging gender-affiliated organizations are many. Critical to facilitating a merger and managing the gender politics is the hiring of experienced outside leaders (i.e., AD and senior managers) who are not affiliated with the previous regime and who are committed to gender equity. Unfortunately, these criteria lend themselves to hiring a male because a limited pool of female candidates exist who meet the eligibility criteria, as women represent only 9% of all NCAA Division I Athletic Directors (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012).

To read more about our collaborative work and additional practical implications, please refer to the following publications:

- Schull, V., Shaw, S., & Kihl, L. A. (2012). If a woman came in ... She would have been eaten up alive: Analyzing gendered political processes in the search for an athletic director. *Gender & Society*. Published on November 19, 2012, <http://gas.sagepub.com/content/27/1/56>
- Kihl, L. A., Shaw, S., & Schull, V. (2012). Fear, anxiety, and loss of control: Analyzing an athletic department merger as a gendered political process. *Journal of Sport Management*, 27, 146-157.

"Does sex sell" continued from page 1

Amherst) conducted 36 one-on-one interviews with elite female college athletes across six sports. The purpose of the study was twofold: first, we wanted to know which of four images female athletes would choose to represent themselves, to represent their sport, and to increase interest in and respect for their sport. The images included female athletes depicting: 1) Athletic Competence (on-court, in-action); 2) Mixed-Message (off-court posed image with both an athletic marker and focus on femininity); 3) Sexy/Classy Lady (off-court, posed image, non-athletic marker, in fashionable attire); and 4) Soft Porn (off-court image emphasizing sexual objectification). The study's second purpose was to determine if the female athletes would affirm a commonly held belief that "sex sells" women's sports. Would identity tensions and the need to

balance them reflect not only a dual identity but also one which female athletes believe to be contradictory? Would they prefer to be portrayed as in-action, highly gifted athletes or as off-the-court "sexy babes," or with images that represent both identities depending on the circumstances? And would the athletes rely on the commonly held belief that "sex sells" women's sports, and if so, would they choose those images that highlight off-the-court sexualization versus on-the-court athletic competence?

Following are highlights of two key findings. (The full framework and results of this study can be found in the newly launched *Communication & Sport* journal; citation follows story.) The first major finding was that competence matters—athletic competence was the primary image choice for the vast majority of sportswomen. Female athletes did

choose other images (such as sexy/classy lady) to represent themselves and their sport and to increase interest and respect, but those choices were almost always in combination with the image that represented athleticism. The second primary finding was a pattern of responses that indicated female athletes possess a sharp awareness of being and being seen as a female and an athlete (i.e., a dual identity). Some athletes embraced and celebrated their dual identity, while others resisted it—which we felt was an interesting, complex, and nuanced finding. In terms of "selling sex," most agreed that this did indeed generate interest for their sport, particularly when trying to attract a male audience. However, they also noted athletic images would be most effective to promote sport to parents, young girls, and women.

In our article we posed an important question: Why, 40 years after the passage of Title IX, are female athletes routinely asked to pose in ways that sexualize them and minimize their athletic competence? We believe, as did many of our participants, that the answer lies in the following: As long as sportswomen are portrayed in ways that sexually objectify them, they will not be given the respect they deserve, nor will they gain an equal foothold in an institution of immense status, wealth, and power—sports.

Excerpts taken from: Kane, M. J., LaVoi, N. M., & Fink, J. S. (2013). Exploring elite female athletes' interpretations of sport media images: A window into the construction of social identity and "selling sex" in women's sports. *Communication & Sport*, 1-30. doi: 10.1177/2167479512473585.

Tucker Center Internship Program Prepares Future Scholars

The Tucker Center Internship Program for undergraduate students began in the summer of 2008. It has been one of our most important—and impactful—initiatives in that it highlights the various ways we fulfill our three-fold mission of interdisciplinary research, education, and community outreach. Since its inception, our Internship Program has attracted a competitive pool of students who are passionate about and committed to making a difference. Our interns receive a first-rate—and first hand—experience by participating in a full spectrum of TC research opportunities.

Many of our interns credit their time in the Tucker Center as inspiring them to pursue and successfully complete graduate degrees. **Sarah Hammon** (2008 intern), currently a doctoral candidate and teaching fellow in Counseling Psychology at the University of North Texas, states, “I strongly believe that my research internship at the Tucker Center was one of the main experiences that set me apart from other candidates applying to graduate school. As a graduate student, I continue to use so much of what I learned at the Tucker Center on a daily basis.” Nine students from a variety of educational and personal backgrounds have completed our Internship Program while gaining valuable professional and life experiences. As evidence of our interns’ “record of excellence,” we note that five have completed their M.A. degrees, and four are currently in doctoral programs.

We take great pride in knowing we are training a generation of future scholars who will make a difference in the world in their own unique ways. **Alicia Johnson** (2009 intern), currently a doctoral student in Cultural Studies at the University of Tennessee, claims, “The academic and personal growth I accomplished through my experiences at the Tucker Center will forever remain part of me and will push me to continue fighting and advocating for girls and women in sport around the world.” This amazing group of young scholars is a part of the Tucker Center legacy.

To learn more about the Tucker Center Internship Program and all of our former interns or to apply to the program, please visit our Web site at www.tuckercenter.org/about-internship.html.

Honors & Awards

- In September 2012, TC Affiliated Scholar **Beth Lewis**, as principal investigator, was awarded a 4-year, \$1 million National Institute of Mental Health R01 grant, “Effect of Exercise and Wellness Interventions on Preventing Postpartum Depression.”
- In January, TC Affiliated Scholar **Chelsey Thul** received the Joanna Simer Award for \$2,000 for her community-based research project titled, “Listening to Somali Adolescent Females’ Significant Others’ Voices: A Social Key to Physical Activity Promotion.”
- **Mary Jo Kane**, TC Director, has been named to the Editorial Review Board of *Communication & Sport*.
- **Nicole M. LaVoi**, TC Associate Director, was named to the Editorial Review Board of the *Women’s Sport and Physical Activity Journal*.
- TC research assistant and doctoral candidate **Maya Hamilton** won the 2013-14 Jean Freeman Scholarship from the College Swimming Coaches Association of America (CSCAA) in recognition of her exceptional contributions in bringing recognition to the school where she coaches, St. Olaf College in Northfield, MN.

Publications

- **Kane’s** commentary, “The Better Sportswomen Get, the More the Media Ignore Them,” will appear in *Communication & Sport* this summer.
- **LaVoi** and doctoral candidate **Austin Stair Calhoun’s** chapter “Digital Media and Female Athletes” will soon appear in the *Handbook of Sport and New Media*.
- TC Affiliated Scholar **Elizabeth Daniels** and **LaVoi’s** chapter “Athletics

as Solution and Problem: Sports Participation for Girls and the Sexualization of Women Athletes” is published in *The Sexualization of Girls and Girlhood: Causes, Consequences, and Resistance* by Oxford University Press.

- **JoAnn Buysse**, TC Affiliated Scholar and graduate student **Sarah Wolter** published the 20th anniversary of Buysse’s media guide research titled, “Gender Representation in 2010 NCAA Division I Media Guides: The Battle for Equity Was Only Temporarily Won” in the January issue of the *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*.

Presentations

- This spring, **Kane** gave two research keynotes, “Exploring female athletes’ interpretations of media images: A window into the construction of social identity and ‘selling sex’ in women’s sports” at the Sports, Media and Gender Conference, Annenberg Institute of Sports, Media & Society, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA, in March, and delivered the Raymond A. Weiss Distinguished Lecture at the AAHPERD Research Consortium in Charlotte, VA, in April.
- In January, **LaVoi** was invited to speak to University of Minnesota alumni for the Alumni Minne-College in Naples, FL. Her talk was titled “Physical Activity of Aging Women.”
- In April **Buysse** traveled to Havana, Cuba, for the International Association of Physical Education and Sport for Girls and Women (IAPESGW) conference.
- In November 2012, **LaVoi** spoke at the symposium for Female Water Polo Coaches at Stanford University about “Thriving and Surviving for Female Coaches.”

KEEP IN TOUCH WITH THE TUCKER CENTER!

There are several ways you can keep up to date with the most recent events and news from the Tucker Center. For starters, the Tucker Center’s Web site is our online hub. Everything from current research to staff contacts can be found at:

www.tuckercenter.org

The Tucker Center also maintains a presence on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube:

- **Facebook:** facebook.com/tuckercenter
- **Twitter:** [@tuckercenter](https://twitter.com/tuckercenter)
- **YouTube:** youtube.com/tuckercenter

We hope you’ll take advantage of all the ways we are sharing information!



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- Tucker Center Summer Internship Program
- Borghild Strand Endowment for Young Women [3743]
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- Eloise M. Jaeger Scholarship at the Tucker Center [4449]
- Tucker Center Doctoral Fellowship for Gender Equity in Sport [8644]
- Tucker Center Research Fund for Gender Equity in Sport [8673]

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Thank you for your continued support of the **Tucker Center!**