

**Run Like a Girl: Gender Differences in the Psychosocial Attitudes of Recreational Runners**

*Christine Wegner, Temple University*

*Daniel Funk (Advisor), Temple University*

*Jeremy Jordan (Advisor), Temple University*

**Socio-cultural**

**Friday, May 31, 2013**

**20-minute oral presentation  
(including questions)**

**Abstract 2013-153**

**2:05 PM**

**(Room 412)**

The past 15 years have seen an increase in U.S. road race participation of approximately 170%, increasing from 5.2 million in 1991 to 13.9 million in 2011 (Running USA, 2012). One reason for this increase is the growing number of female participants, who now outnumber men overall. According to Running USA (2012), in 1980, 90% of marathon registrants were men, however, as of 2011, 41% of marathon and 59% of half marathon participants were women. This shift has practical implications for the mass participation sport industry, as well as broader implications for those who study gender differences in leisure participation. The current study explores the demographic and psychographic characteristics of individuals who participate in distance running. Specifically, this study will examine the running involvement and negotiation efficacy of marathon and half marathon participants and examine any differences based on gender.

Despite the known physiological and psychological benefits of physical activity, less than 48% of adults meet the minimum requirements for regular physical activity (Center for Disease Control, 2012) with women engaging in lower levels of active leisure compared with men (World Health Organization, 2010). This difference has led to a body of research dedicated to understanding the additional barriers to physically active leisure that women might face (Henderson, 1991; Shaw, 1994). While many intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constraints that exist for women are also true for men, such as time, money, and access to facilities (Crawford & Godbey, 1987), it has been argued that women face different antecedent constraints, barriers that negatively influence interest or preference for an activity (Jackson, 1990). Gender roles have formulated expected behaviors for men and women, and as women are expected to perform feminine leisure activities, they therefore have limited opportunities to participate in certain forms of active leisure that have typically been reserved for men, such as contact sports (Jackson & Henderson, 1995). Research has also highlighted intervening constraints derived from gender socialization that prevent women from participating, particularly family commitments that typically cause more women than men to sacrifice their leisure time. As a primary caregiver, they do not feel "entitled" to leisure time (Kay, 1998; Kay & Jackson, 1991).

Given the work dedicated to understanding barriers to women's participation in leisure activities, the recent increase of women taking part in distance road races suggests that these barriers are not insurmountable. Extant research has found that constraints to participation do not inevitably prevent individuals from engaging in active leisure, and it is possible to "negotiate" through those barriers (Loucks-Atkinson & Mannell, 2007). Negotiation efficacy, the belief in one's ability to overcome barriers to participation, has been applied and tested empirically in a variety of leisure contexts, including distance running (Loucks-Atkinson & Mannell, 2007; White, 2008; Ridinger, Funk, Jordan, & Kaplanidou, 2012). Higher negotiation efficacy scores have been found to diminish the perception of constraints and produce greater levels of negotiation efforts, and therefore can have an indirect, positive effect on participation (White, 2008). It was also suggested that involvement, one's psychological attachment or connection to an activity, can assist with constraint negotiation (Iwasaki & Havitz, 2004). Despite literature dedicated to constraint and gender, this study is the first to examine negotiation efficacy, involvement, gender, and participation in active leisure. Ridinger et al (2012) were the first to find significant differences in negotiation efficacy scores between male and female marathon runners, and suggested that this difference might be related to a difference in constraint level for men and women. The current study extends the work of Ridinger and colleagues, and examines the interactions among constraints within demographic characteristics, levels of negotiation efficacy, and levels of involvement with the activity, to create a profile of recreational distance runners that highlights potential differences across gender.

Data was gathered from a sample of individuals who participated in a marathon and half marathon event that took place in the Southeastern United States in early 2012. A total of 3,476 participants completed the survey with a

## 2013 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2013)

response rate of 14.6%. In addition to basic demographic data, information on family structure and employment status was also collected. Involvement was measured with three items representing the constructs of centrality, pleasure and sign, adapted for running from the general leisure involvement literature (Beaton et al., 2009). Negotiation-efficacy measures were also adapted for running, converting White's (2008) original wording for outdoor recreation (Ridinger, et al, 2012). Three items from the uni-dimensional scale were selected.

Within the overall sample 50% were male and 50% were female. The majority of respondents (63%) were ages 25-44, 61% were married or living with a partner, 44% had at least one child, and within this group, 70% had at least one child under the age of five. Additionally, 82% had a degree from a four-year college or higher, 69% had incomes over \$75,000, 65% owned their own homes, and 77% were employed full time. In terms of differences by gender and race type, marathon runners were made up of 61% male and 39% female, while half marathon runners were 46% male and 54% female. A General Linear Model was used in the analysis. Controlling for income, education, home ownership, employment, race event type, marital status, children, and children under the age of five, there was a significant effect of gender on running involvement ( $F=30.16, p<.001$ ) as well as negotiation efficacy ( $F=8.96, p<.01$ ). Women's mean scores were significantly higher for both involvement and negotiation efficacy. There was also a significant effect of having children on negotiation efficacy ( $F=7.00, p<.01$ ): those with children had significantly higher levels of negotiation efficacy than those who did not. However, no significant interaction was found between gender and having children. No other main effects were found, including having children under the age of five.

Higher negotiation efficacy scores for those with children supports previous literature that the time associated with family life can be a constraint on leisure (Kay, 1998; Kay & Jackson, 1991). The finding that women had higher scores on both running involvement and negotiation efficacy while controlling for other demographic and behavioral factors contributes to the conversation surrounding women's leisure constraints from a new perspective. While negotiation efficacy has not been empirically shown to directly predict participation (Loucks-Atkinson & Mannell, 2007), the current finding supports prior research that identified women are more constrained in their leisure than men (Jackson & Henderson, 1995). This means that in order to participate in the same race events as men, women must have a greater belief in their ability to overcome constraints and a stronger sense of involvement with running. The finding that there was a main effect of gender when controlling for all other demographic variables (structural and interpersonal constraints) also suggests the possible presence of antecedent constraints that are unique to women, and therefore alter their path to participation. As an extension of previous work that explored the psychosocial attitudes of long distance runners (Ridinger, et al, 2012), this study is the first to link differences in constraint level with attitudinal differences towards an activity between men and women.