

2012

Beyond Limits: Exploring Motivation and the Lack of Women in Ultramarathonning

Amy Harris

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Follow this and additional works at: <http://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/jur>

 Part of the [Sports Studies Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Harris, Amy (2012) "Beyond Limits: Exploring Motivation and the Lack of Women in Ultramarathonning," *Journal of Undergraduate Research at Minnesota State University, Mankato*: Vol. 12, Article 3.

Available at: <http://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/jur/vol12/iss1/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate Research Center at Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Undergraduate Research at Minnesota State University, Mankato by an authorized administrator of Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato.

Student Agreement:

I am submitting my research article to be published in the JUR (The Journal of Undergraduate Research at Minnesota State University, Mankato), an electronic journal of the Minnesota State University Undergraduate Research Center.

I/We certify have followed the accepted standards of scientific, creative, and academic honesty and ethics.

I understand that my article submission will be blind-reviewed by faculty reviewers who will recommend acceptance for publication; acceptance with revisions; or reject for publication.

I understand that as author, I retain the right to present any part of the research in any form in other publications.

The JUR has the right to reproduce and reprint published submissions for instructional or promotional purposes.

For complete details, see [*Journal of Undergraduate Research at Minnesota State University, Mankato policies page*](#).

Mentor Agreement:

I have reviewed the submission, and I support its inclusion in the JUR (The Journal of Undergraduate Research at Minnesota State University, Mankato). I understand that I will be acknowledged as the faculty mentor for the student author(s). To the best of my knowledge, the student has followed the accepted standards of scientific, creative, and academic honesty and ethics.

Beyond Limits: Exploring Motivation and the Lack of Women in Ultramarathoning

Amy L. Harris, Cindra S. Kamphoff, Ph.D., & Suzannah M. Armentrout

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Student and Mentor Biographies

Amy Harris, B.S., is from St. Paul, MN. She recently earned a Bachelor's of Science Degree in Psychology. She will begin pursuing a Master's in Sport and Exercise Psychology from Minnesota State University, Mankato in Fall 2012. She plans to obtain her certification from the Association of Applied Sport Psychology to become a Certified Consultant in order to consult with athletes of various sports.

Cindra Kamphoff, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor and the coordinator of the Sport and Exercise Psychology Graduate Program at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Her research focuses on the psychology of running and marathoning and she has published 18 research manuscripts, 7 book chapters, and has received over \$74,900 in grants. She is a Certified Consultant in applied sport psychology (AASP-CC) through the Association for Applied Sport Psychology and a member of the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) Sport Psychology Registry. She is also a past chair of the Undergraduate Research Symposium at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

Suzannah Armentrout, Ph.D., is an affiliate faculty member in the Sport Management Program at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Some examples of her recent research topics include: Motives for Participation in Ironman Triathlons, Reasons for Youth Hockey Attrition, and Barriers for Women Coaches. Dr. Armentrout has worked with organization and management of Minnesota Hockey's Hockey Education Program for the past 5 years.

Abstract

An ultramarathon extends beyond the traditional 26.2-mile marathon (Tharion, Strowman, & Rauch, 1988) and includes 50 kilometers (31 miles), 100 kilometers (62.1 miles) and 135 miles. Participants must train for substantial periods of time and oftentimes in rough off-road terrain while dealing with dramatic changes in elevation and weather. Despite these challenges, participation rates are increasing; yet, most of these participants are men. For instance, for every woman participant, five men participated in the Western States 100 (Soderland, 2011). Very few researchers have examined the motives to participate in this unique sport or investigated the gender barriers of ultramarathons. This qualitative study was conducted to further explore and understand what motivates women to run ultramarathons and the gender barriers that may prevent or make it difficult for them to participate in ultramarathons. Telephone interviews were conducted with fifteen women who completed at least one ultramarathon. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were read in-depth and organized into common themes across all interviews using Creswell's (2000) framework. Gender barriers in ultramarathons were identified as: 1) child-care and household responsibilities, 2) job-related obstacles, 3) lack of support, and 4) safety concerns. To overcome gender barriers, these women commonly stated they used the following as motivation to continue ultramarathoning: 1) the ultra-running community, 2) the challenge of the ultra, 3) the scenic nature of the ultramarathon, and 4) personal growth. Specific results and implications of our findings will be discussed in this paper.

Beyond Limits: Exploring Motivation and the Lack of Women in Ultramarathoning

Introduction

An ultramarathon is a foot-race that consists of distances beyond the traditional marathon distance of 26.2 miles. Ultramarathons include but are not limited to: 9-hour races, 24-hour races, 50K races, 50-mile races, and 100-mile races (Tharion, Strowman, & Rauch, 1988). Ultramarathons are typically run on trails with varying and difficult terrain, whereas most traditional marathons are held on the road. Because ultramarathon runners are required to run such great distances for extended periods of time, they must be prepared for running at night and enduring weather changes. Training in such conditions for hours and months at a time is vital. Not only do runners' race days depend on that preparation but their bodies do as well.

Recreational exercise requires minimal time commitment in comparison to training for an ultramarathon. Several researchers have confirmed that women tend to prioritize housework responsibilities and other family duties like taking care of children over spending time exercising (Bell & Lee, 2005; Netz, Zeev, Arnon, & Tenenbaum, 2008; Sorensen & Gill, 2008). Sorensen and Gill (2008) supported previous findings that, "around half of those who try to start exercising drop out during the first six months." Training for an ultramarathon can take anywhere from four months to a year depending on the distance goal of the runner. Four months of training on trails may be sufficient to prepare the runner for a 50K, while a year of trail running and running shorter distance races may prepare them for the 100-mile race, for example. Training for an ultramarathon, therefore, requires many hours of free time that most people are not willing to commit to. This may partly explain why few women participate in ultramarathons.

Unlike most sports such as basketball, football, track and field, or baseball, ultramarathons allow men and women to compete against each other from the same starting point, running through the same course, and ending at the same finish line. Women have been

successful ultramarathon runners, some outrunning their male counterparts. For example, Pam Reed won the 146-mile Badwater Ultramarathon by beating all of the other men and women in the race in both 2002 and 2003 (Jhung, 2010). Yet, women are outnumbered by the men of this sport. In 2008, only 27% of ultramarathon runners were women (Krouse, Ransdell, Lucas, & Pritchard, 2011; Hanold, 2010). The reason for lack of women participating has not been investigated at this time.

In the year 2012, for every five men that participated in the Western States 100 (one of the most popular ultramarathons), only one woman participated (UltraLive, 2012). The continued participation of those few women demonstrates, however, that the benefits that are gained from ultramarathoning outweigh the costs. Therefore, the purpose of this research study was to explore the following two questions: 1) why do more women not participate in ultramarathons? And 2) what motivates women to run and to continue running ultramarathons? Answers to these questions may aid in filling the gap in Sport and Exercise Psychology literature. Few studies have explored the perspectives of ultramarathon runners as well as the experiences had by women who participate in extreme endurance sports. Exposure to the unique experiences and perspectives of these motivated individuals may result in increased participation from both women and men, and it might induce further admiration and support for those that participate in such a challenging sport. Also, investigating how women ultramarathoners overcome the many challenges presented by the sport may assist athletes of all types in overcoming the adversities they experience in their sports.

Method

Participants

Fifteen women who completed at least one ultramarathon were interviewed. Most of the participants were from various states in the United States ($n = 13$) and two women were from Canada. The mean age of these women was 41.27 ($SD = 8.73$; ranging from 23 to 57). Some completed as few as one ultramarathon and some as many as 30 ultramarathons. The average number of ultramarathons completed across the sample was 6.6 ultramarathons. The most common completed ultramarathon distance was 50Kilometers ($n = 11$). Other completed ultramarathon races included: 24-hour races ($n = 1$), 50-miles ($n = 5$), 100Kilometers ($n = 4$), and 100-miles ($n = 2$). Depending on the length of the races being trained for, participants' training durations and weekly distances varied. The mileage per week ranged from 20 to 80 miles. The participants training for a shorter ultramarathon distance such as the 50K or 50-mile race stated that they needed at least 4 months of training. The participants training for greater distances such as the 100K and 100-mile races indicated that they needed as much training as a year.

Contrary to previous research indicating that women prioritize family care and housework duties over exercise, a majority of the women in the current study indicated they were in a committed relationship ($n = 10$); some of the women have children in their household ($n = 4$); and almost every participant indicated that they are employed ($n = 14$). All but 3 women ($n = 12$) indicated that they have a full-time job. Three of the participants maintain a job and raise children. These women manage to juggle several different roles at once with one of them being an ultramarathon runner. .

Procedures

After Institutional Review Board approval, recruitment of women ultramarathon participants began. Facebook.com© posts provided a description of the project, the participant requirements, and contact information for the researcher, and were posted on ultramarathon and

running group walls. The women interested in participating were asked to e-mail the primary researcher to set up a telephone interview time that was convenient for the participant. Each potential participant was emailed a copy of the consent form, and implied consent was noted if the participant then agreed to set-up an interview time.

Each participant was individually interviewed via telephone. Interviews were conducted by A.H. and the interview duration ranged between 30 minutes to over one hour. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted using demographic questions along with open-ended and probing questions relevant to the research questions. (See appendix for interview guide). Each interview was voice recorded and then transcribed verbatim by the first author. After 15 interviews were conducted, no new information emerged. A saturation point had been reached (Creswell, 2000), so no further investigation was necessary.

Analytical Strategy

A descriptive analytic strategy presented by Creswell (2000) was used for this study. The first author reviewed each individual transcript and highlighted passages that directly answered the primary research questions (why do more women not participate in ultramarathons, and what motivates women to run and to continue running ultramarathons?). A one or two word description of each highlighted passage was noted in the margins of the corresponding transcript. Those brief descriptions were entered into an Excel® spreadsheet in the far left column. Each participant number was entered across the top row of the spreadsheet, and quotes from each participant that fell under the brief description were entered within the spreadsheet. As the organization of this spreadsheet continued and common themes surfaced, the brief descriptions in the far left column were edited, by all authors, to signify the major themes and subthemes of the data.

Establishing Trustworthiness

According to Creswell (2000), there are eight primary strategies that can be used to establish trustworthiness, which is comparable to validity in quantitative research, within a qualitative study. Of those strategies, peer debriefing was utilized in this study to validate the data and decrease researcher bias. In this study, one person (the peer debriefer) was briefed about the objectives of the study and given several transcripts that contained the majority of the themes that were established by A.H., C.K., and S.A. The peer debriefer, Anna Gillen, organized the transcripts into the Excel® spreadsheet as she saw fit. The conclusions of the researcher and the peer debriefer were then compared and edited to include the peer debriefer's changes and additions.

Results

After a thorough analysis of each individual transcript, four major themes emerged: 1) motivation to train and run ultramarathons, 2) balancing ultrarunning and everyday life, 3) the uniqueness of ultramarathoning, and 4) overcoming challenges.

Theme 1: Motivation to Train and Run Ultramarathons

Each participant expressed positive feelings about ultramarathoning and discussed why they choose to train and participate in ultramarathons. Although each woman was motivated in many different ways, the following motivating factors were most commonly shared: 1) the challenge ($n = 13$), 2) group and community running ($n = 13$), 3) fun and enjoyment ($n = 12$), 4) nature, scenery, and trails ($n = 11$), and 5) personal growth and health benefits ($n = 10$).

The Challenge. Each participant had experience in endurance sports such as triathlons, marathons, or shorter road races before they began ultramarathoning. All but two participants explicitly stated that they began running ultramarathons in search of a new challenge ($n = 13$).

One woman in particular explained the sense of accomplishment that she gained from completing this challenging event. She said, “There’s a real sense of satisfaction in doing something so difficult, something that you know most of the population thinks is just crazy but it feels fantastic.”

Group and Community Running. Several participants mentioned that they are motivated to train for ultramarathons because their running partners hold them accountable for their runs and also lend them support and serve as a social distraction from running ($n = 12$). During ultramarathons, most of the women were motivated by the ultra-running community’s support and enthusiasm ($n=13$). One woman provided an example of how her running group assists her:

Sometimes when you don’t feel like doing it, if you get out with a group they can...add to the fun factor, or somebody’s waiting for you to arrive at the start you’re gonna get out of bed and get your butt there.

Enjoyment. Most of these women attributed their continued motivation to sign up for ultramarathons to the enjoyment that they experienced as a result of participating. They enjoyed running with people in the ultramarathoning community and overcoming the challenges of trail running. One woman said, “It wasn’t until I started running trails that I just [fell] crazy in love with it. That was when I stopped running to control my weight and I started running because it was just joyful.”

Nature, Scenery, and Trails. The beauty of running most ultramarathons is that they take place in areas with natural scenery. Often times the great distance, secluded trails, and people’s individual paces force the women to run in nature alone. Several participants mentioned the benefits of having time to be one with nature ($n = 5$). Eleven of the fifteen women stated that being in nature, running on trails, or seeing the scenery surrounding the ultramarathons

motivated them to continue running ultramarathons. One participant spoke very enthusiastically about this source of motivation.

I just love the scenery. The scenery is always gorgeous. Usually where I run in Canada there's a lot of forest. So the forest may not be the most exciting scenery but...I like running in Utah and the scenery is really, really, really gorgeous...I have the benefit or the advantage of being able to see so much more than the average person because I can run those long distances. So that makes me happy when I run.

Personal Growth and Health Benefits. Several of these women expressed that ultramarathon training allows them to take time for themselves outside of their lives at home and at work. Some also explained that ultramarathon running has contributed to their improved mental and physical health. These personal growth and health benefits made ultramarathoning very meaningful and attractive for these women ($n = 10$). For example, this woman described how ultramarathon running can improve a woman's sense of self and wellbeing.

I think that a lot of women don't allow the time for themselves, and I feel like running is a way that you can allow time for yourself and allow time with your thoughts. The one thing that I do in the day where I really feel like [I] not only gain physical benefit but mental benefit, emotional benefit. If I'm angry or sad, usually when I'm done with a run I feel better. And I think it's always a matter of staying fit and staying healthy that motivates me to stay running as well.

Theme 2: Balancing Ultrarunning and Everyday Life

Although the participants of this study are motivated to participate and complete ultramarathons, they experienced some obstacles that make spending time training for their ultramarathons difficult. The following were most commonly identified as reasons for being resistant to ultramarathon training: 1) raising children ($n = 12$), 2) fear and intimidation ($n = 10$), and time and scheduling ($n = 9$).

Raising Children. All of the women with children under the age of 18 in their household mentioned that their duties as a mother interfered with their time spent training for ultramarathons ($n = 4$). Those without children also expressed that being a mother can make

finding time to train for an ultramarathon a challenge ($n = 8$). One woman explained the time commitment that Ultramarathoning requires after being asked what obstacles get in the way of her training.

Yeah, there [are] two things I can think of. The biggest one is the time. To train for an ultra you have to put in many long hours. Especially near the end when you're doing back-to-back long runs like on a Friday and a Saturday. You'll run for 3 to 5 hours both days, and I'm a wife and a mother with two kids at home. So sometimes it gets hard to take that time. I feel like I've taken away from my family but before I committed to the ultra I talked to my family and said, "This is what it's going to require of me. Will that be okay with you?" But and even though I got the okay and they're very supportive, I still feel guilty sometimes for the amount of time I take away from my family, and yet it makes me a healthier, happier person.

Fear and Intimidation. A majority of the participants said that the distance and solitary nature of the ultramarathon can be intimidating ($n = 10$). One participant stated, "...a lot of women don't believe they can do extraordinary things," which demonstrates the lack of self-confidence that some people may experience. One woman observed the fear of distance as being the main deterrent of Ultramarathoning.

I've heard a lot of fear just on the distance. People are afraid of the distance. In their mind they've got a set number that's safe and...it's very scary to get past that number be it 5 or 10 miles. If they hear someone say "Oh I'm gonna do 30 miles," that's really scary...So I'd say that's probably the biggest reason is just it scares them.

Time and Scheduling. Having job and household responsibilities require major time commitments and for some women the addition of training time seems impossible. The women of this study experience time and scheduling conflicts ($n = 9$), and stated that it is a problem that pushes other women away from Ultramarathoning ($n = 8$). One participant said,

It takes a lot of time out of your life, obviously...I mean on a Saturday to say, "I need to go out and do a 6 hour run." And then Sunday saying again you do a 2-hour run, it definitely cuts into your life socially.

Theme 3: The Uniqueness of Ultramarathoning

Each of the women in this study had endurance sport experience prior to Ultramarathoning. Every participant expressed that Ultramarathoning is a sport unique from other sports that they have participated in; hence, the following subthemes under “the uniqueness of Ultramarathoning” surfaced: 1) mindset and/or pace ($n = 15$), 2) the ultramarathon community ($n = 13$), and 3) trail running versus road running ($n = 13$).

Mindset and/or Pace. Since ultramarathons require runners to run great distances with varying elevation, they run at a slower pace than they run on the road in order to conserve their energy. Some women described the ultramarathon mindset as being laid back yet more strategic than the mindset needed in a shorter distance event on the road. This woman explained the unique nature of the ultramarathon mindset.

Part of what I love about ultramarathons is how... important where you are is as opposed to where you're going. In road racing, it's all about your splits and your time and everything is so focused on speed that you don't really think about where you are anymore. And you know on a trail, that's the whole secret, you know, where you are.

The Ultramarathon Community. There tend to be fewer than 100 participants in an ultramarathon, which is small in comparison to traditional marathons that contain thousands of runners (Soderland, 2011). Because of this reason, many of the women in this study described the ultramarathon community as being closely knit, supportive, and fun. This woman represents what many of the women said about the ultramarathon community.

The atmosphere is so much better than the road running because it's a smaller community and people are just so much nicer in the races. And given that you're going on for really long distances you can't go too fast so you talk a lot with everyone, and people are just really, really friendly and nice.

Trail Running Versus Road Running. The majority of participants stated that trail running is more stimulating to the mind and better for the joints than road running ($n = 13$). This woman gives an excellent overview of how trail running can be different than road running.

I think most ultramarathons are trail runs and I think once you get into trail running that it is a whole different mindset and I think that it takes a while to change from road running to trail running. I think that's something that might be a delineator because trail running has its own obstacles and some people hate it because of the rocks or I have some friends that won't run certain places because it's sand or hard rocks or the tree roots or whatever. And it's interesting. I think that was kind of my transition point was coming from road running to trail running.

Theme 4: Overcoming Challenges

The following challenges that these women experienced during ultramarathons were: 1) pain and injury ($n = 11$), 2) negative thoughts ($n = 11$), 3) weather ($n = 10$), and 4) fatigue, falling, or hallucinating ($n = 9$). The mental strategies that they used to overcome these challenges are important to note because they may help other athletes to overcome the challenges that they experience in their sports. This theme is comprised of these subthemes, which are various mental strategies: 1) positive thinking/mantras ($n = 14$), 2) running with others ($n = 13$), 3) dissociative thinking ($n = 13$), and 4) breaking the race into smaller parts ($n = 11$). Passages from the interviews describe each strategy used.

Positive Thinking/Mantras. A mantra is a phrase or word that is repeated in order to sustain focus and motivation. Almost every participant stated that they consciously think positively and repeat positive words and phrases to help them through ultramarathons ($n = 14$).

Here is an example of this mental strategy:

I got myself mentally prepared before the race. I researched just funny sayings about running or inspirational quotes about running and I memorized a bunch of them. So when I felt discouraged I would just say one of these quotes to myself and also I prepared for a year so I'm like, "I prepared for a year. I'm not gonna quit 'cause this is what I came for. And yeah it's painful but this is what I came for. I wanted to experience all of it, the good, the bad and just kind of the full experience. Not just do it if it was good."

Running with Others. Thirteen of these women strategically run with a partner in order to make the ultramarathon experience more enjoyable. Having the company of another runner

gives them a distraction from the task at hand, and they receive many words of encouragement from their fellow ultramarathoners. One woman explained,

It's more fun to run with someone else because when you do your long distance it's really long. It takes a lot of time. So when you're with someone else like time goes faster 'cause you just talk...So for the long distance definitely it's better to run with someone else, 'cause when you're on your own it looks like it takes forever.

Dissociative Thinking. Dissociative thinking is used to help someone distract themselves from the activity that they are involved in (Masters and Ogles, 1998). Participants talked to people around them, viewed the scenery, listened to music, and did various other things to distract themselves from exhaustion and negative thoughts. Here is advice from one woman about how to use dissociation to overcome ultramarathon challenges:

Try and take in the scenery. That's one of the advantages of having those races or events on trails, and if that doesn't distract me enough then I start thinking about things that are unrelated until I can get past that point of acknowledging the fatigue.

Breaking the Race into Smaller Parts. Like with many large tasks, sometimes it is less overwhelming to set checkpoints along the ultramarathon instead of thinking of all of the miles at once. The participants described the act of chunking where the race was broken into smaller pieces to lower stress and increase motivation. This woman provided an example of how she chunked the ultramarathon into smaller parts:

I treat an ultra in smaller distances. Meaning, I look at the big picture but look at it in increments of 10 miles. In life if I'm faced with a bigger challenge, I can break it up into smaller challenges and accomplish it and tackle it the same way I would doing an ultra.

Discussion

The research questions guiding this study were: 1) why do more women not participate in ultramarathons, and 2) what motivates women to run and to continue running ultramarathons? Understanding how and why women are pushing beyond their limits in ultramarathons can

inspire other women to do the same; it can also bring more awareness and support to this unique and empowering sport. The findings of this study are consistent with previous literature about women prioritizing family over exercise in that the women of this study experience household and family responsibilities which interfere with training time (Sorensen & Gill, 2008). However, it is also apparent that the great benefits that these women gain from participating in ultramarathons motivate them to overcome any scheduling conflicts. Training for an ultramarathon comes with a significant time commitment that most likely will interfere with job and household responsibilities. Ultramarathons consist of many challenges including pain, negative thoughts, and the challenges brought by the outdoors such as unexpected weather conditions and changes in terrain. However, each woman of this study demonstrated that women have the mental and physical strength to withstand any challenges that they experience in 24-hour races, 50K's, 50-mile races, and even 100-mile races. All fifteen women also explained that ultramarathon running is empowering and the positive feelings that they experience as a result of participating have motivated them to continue registering for the challenge. How and why these women have been able to overcome gender barriers and maintain strong motivation to continue ultramarathon running will be discussed in this section. Thus, this discussion will include two sections: 1) the meaningfulness of Ultramarathoning for women and 2) how Ultramarathoning empowers women. The limitations of this study and ideas for future research will also be discussed.

The Meaningfulness of Ultramarathoning for Women

The women of this study have expressed why they decide to participate in ultramarathons, and all of the motivating factors relate to the meaningfulness of Ultramarathoning. "Motivation to Train and Run Ultramarathons" indicates that women run

ultramarathons because they are fun, beautiful, and challenging. The fun that they experience stems from the community that surrounds them. Their running groups keep them safe, distracted, and motivated during long training runs through woods, mountains, and desert areas. Fellow ultramarathoners lend constant support and encouragement to everyone involved. The camaraderie is significant among the ultramarathon community, and strong bonds with new friends are often created as a result of participating in this unique sport. Running among friends makes the experience more meaningful for these women.

As previously described, almost all of the women see beauty in ultramarathons: the trails, nature, and scenery make ultras unique and deeply meaningful. Many said that ultramarathoning has given them time to get in touch with themselves and nature.

The beauty of ultramarathons is sometimes disguised by the great challenges that accompany it. Crossing creeks, being ill-prepared for weather conditions and tripping over rocks and tree roots are just some of the challenges that occur in these beautiful courses. What truly is inspiring is that almost all of the women said that the challenge is what motivates them the most. The sense of accomplishment that they feel once they have completed the race is unimaginable to anyone who has not faced such a feat. Some compared the feeling to giving birth in that it is an overwhelming and deep feeling of satisfaction. Several mentioned that their self-confidence “sky-rockets” after completing an ultramarathon.

How Ultramarathoning Empowers Women

Most of the women in this study began ultramarathoning in search of a challenge, but some of those same women and others began the journey because someone else convinced them that they could. When asked “Why are there few women in ultramarathons?” many said that women are afraid of the distance and are intimidated by the thought of failing at such a difficult

sport. In addition to that fear, lack of support and misinformation about ultramarathons also instills fear and shame in both men and women. It is hoped for that more research on ultramarathons and ultrarunners' experiences will alleviate the fear that men and women have about ultramarathon running.

Pushing through initial fear, words of discouragement, and making time for ultramarathons is something that the women of this study are willing to struggle with because they are strongly motivated by the many unique characteristics of the ultramarathon and by the overwhelming sense of accomplishment that the sport has provided them. These women prove that although the race is intimidating, through experience and encouragement from the ultramarathon community, it empowers women to go beyond limits.

This study has shown how meaningful and extraordinary ultramarathons are for women. When asked what they would say to other women in order to convince them to register for an ultramarathon, each woman mentioned that ultramarathoning increases a woman's self-confidence in ways that nothing else can. They said that women will never know the feeling, even after all of these positive words, until they decide to try an ultramarathon for themselves.

Limitations of the Current Study

One limitation of this study is that these fifteen women are a subsample of the Ultramarathoning community and may not represent the feelings and thoughts of the entire Ultramarathoning community. Also, using a semi-structured interview guide allowed for participants to explain and elaborate their thoughts thoroughly. However, there were some additions to the interview guide as the interviewing process progressed and as more women mentioned the unique characteristics of the ultramarathon. Some earlier interviewees were not

asked those additional questions, and so it is possible that even more women are motivated by the unique characteristics of the ultramarathon.

Trustworthiness was established for several interviews because the peer debriefer was able to validate the researcher's analysis, however, the peer debriefer did not analyze each transcript. Therefore, it is possible that things could be missing in the analysis due to the fact that only one person was able to review some of the transcripts.

Future Research

There is a lack of research on the psychology of ultramarathons. To gain a thorough understanding of the ultramarathons, the ultramarathon community, and the ultramarathon mindset it is encouraged that more research is done on any mental aspect of ultramarathons. Topics can include: a more thorough investigation on the mental strategies used by ultramarathoners to overcome challenges, an exploration of what men experience in ultramarathons, or a study specifically questioning how the community plays a role in motivating ultramarathoners. Another topic may be comparing the personalities of ultramarathoners to personalities of non-ultramarathoners, for example, which may lead to a clearer understanding of the uniqueness of ultramarathoners.

References

- Bell, S. & Lee, C. (2005). Emerging adulthood and patterns of physical activity among young Australian women. *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 12 (4), 227-235.
- Creswell, J. (2000). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Hanold, M. (2010). Beyond the marathon: (De)construction of female ultrarunning bodies. *Sociology Sport Journal* 27, 160-177.
- Jhung, L. (2010). Why women rule. *Runner's World: Trail Running*. Retrieved from <http://www.runnersworld.com/cda/microsite/article/0,8029,s6-238-511--13593-0,00.html>
- Krouse, R., Ransdell, L., Lucas, S., & Pritchard, M. (2011). Motivation, goal orientation, coaching, and training habits of women ultrarunners. *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research*, 25 (10), 2835-2842.
- Netz, Y., Zeev, A., Arnon, M., & Tenenbaum, G. (2008). Reasons attributed to omitting exercising: A population-based study. *International Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*, 6, 9-23.
- Soderland, G. (2011). WSER official race results for 2011 by place. *The Western Endurance Run*. Retrieved from <http://ws100.com/results11.htm>
- Sorensen, M. & Gill, D. L. (2008). Perceived barriers to physical activity across Norwegian adult age groups, gender and stages of change. *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine & Science in Sports*, 18, 651-663.
- Tharion, W. J., Strowman, S. R. & Rauch, T. M. (1988). Profile and changes in moods of ultramarathoners. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*, 10.
- UltraLive. (2012). *Western states 100 webcast, 2011*. Retrieved from <http://www.ultralive.net/ws100/webcast.php>.

Appendix

Interview Questions

Introduction: The researcher will explain the purpose of the study to the participants and will assure them that all information is confidential. In addition, follow-up questions will be asked based on the participant's responses.

Note that an ultramarathon is a race that extends beyond the traditional 26.2-mile marathon (Tharion, Strowman, & Rauch, 1988).

INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS

- How long have you been running ultramarathons?
- How many total ultramarathons have you competed in?
- Which ultramarathons have you competed in?
- How long do you typically train for an ultramarathon?
- *How many miles per week would you say you trained for your most recent ultramarathon?*
- Demographic Questions:
 - Do you work full-time or part-time?
 - What is your job title?
 - What is your marital status?
Single
Married
In a relationship
Partnered
 - Ages of children
 - How many children do you have?
 - Ages of children _____
 - What is your age? _____

MOTIVATION TO PARTICIPATE

- Tell me what you like best about running ultramarathons?
 - What else do you like best about running ultramarathons?
- What benefits do you receive from ultramarathoning?
- Why did you begin ultramarathoning? What got you interested?
- What motivates you to continue training for ultramarathons?
- How do you feel when you are finished with an ultramarathon?
- How might your life be different if you had not run an ultramarathon?
- Do you have an interest in doing other ultramarathons? Why or why not?

- When you are training, do you run with others? Tell me about your decision about running with others or not.
- When you are training, what helps to keep you going?
- When completing an ultramarathon, what helps to keep you going?
- What factors are most challenging about training and completing an ultramarathon?
- Is there anything else that motivated you either in training or in your most recent ultramarathon?

HOW ULTRAMARATHONING MAY BE UNIQUE FOR WOMEN

- Have any obstacles stood in the way of your training for an ultramarathon? If so, what have been the obstacles?
 - Do any of these obstacles have to do with being a woman?
 - Are there any other challenges that you experience or may be different for women?
- Tell me about support or non-support you have from others to run ultramarathons (significant other, care takers, etc.)
 - Who supports you? Where is there a lack of support?
 - How does this help or hinder you in your ability to run ultramarathons?
 - Do you think this is the same for men? How is it similar or different?
- Why might a woman choose to train for and run an ultramarathon? Do you think this is the same for men? Say more.
- Why might a woman choose not to train for and run in an ultramarathon? Do you think this is the same for men? Say more.
- How has completing an ultramarathon influenced your perspective on women in sport?
- What other thoughts do you have about women participating or not participating in ultramarathons?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS: MENTAL STRATEGIES are mental tools you use to get through your training and the race.

- Tell me about the mental roadblocks that you experienced during your training for the ultramarathon.
 - *What did you do to keep going with your training?*
- How did you mentally deal with pain or injuries during your training or the race? (Note: not physical like massages and taping)
 - *What mental strategies did you use to deal with pain or injuries?*
- Tell me about the thoughts you experienced while running the ultramarathon. What thoughts helped you?
 - *What negative thoughts did you have?*
 - *How did you deal with these negative thoughts?*
 - *What positive thoughts did you have?*

- *What did you do to maintain your positive thoughts?*
- What did you focus on during your training and the ultramarathon?
 - What helped you specifically to focus on?
- Are there any particular mental strategies that you used more during your last marathon?
- Have you ran a marathon before?
 - If so, did you use different mental strategies when you ran a marathon compared to an ultramarathon? If so, how are they different?

FINAL QUESTIONS

- Hypothetically, what would you say to a woman who runs marathons but doubts that she can run an ultramarathon?
- What advice would you give to other females that are thinking about training for and completing an ultramarathon?