INTRODUCTION
Distance running has experienced a significant increase in popularity in the past 25 years, reflected by a nearly 300% increase in the number of road race finishers since 1990 (Running USA, 2014). Running USA’s annual survey shows that not only are more people finishing, but more people are participating in races more frequently, in greater distances, and with faster times. This change in popularity for the activity is driven, in part, by the percentage of female participants, which has gone from 25% in 1990 to 57% overall in 2013. This influx of women into the once predominantly male activity is most significantly felt in the half marathon distance (13.1 miles), where women make up 61% of all race finishers. These numbers would suggest that women have carved out a space for themselves within distance running, and the activity has in some ways become gender neutral. However, while the percentage of female runners at every distance up to and including the half marathon has increased continually over the past 10 years, the percentage of women participating in full marathons has plateaued since 2006, with women still representing the minority in this distance at 43%. Ultra running races, which are defined as distance running events longer than 26.2 miles, have an even greater gender disparity, comprised of only 27% female runners. This participation difference in events at 26.2 miles and longer compared to all other distances suggests that something may still be fundamentally different in the serious leisure experience for men and women in distance running. The serious leisure literature has suggested that gender itself can be a constraint to participation in serious leisure activities. This filtering effect, however, appears to no longer hold as a barrier in the context of distance running, at least in the initial stages of participation. The environmental filter that once precluded women from distance running has appeared to shift, moving the exclusionary barriers, and now seems to apply only to the longest race distances of 26.2 miles and beyond. Constraints to general leisure associated with gender have been well studied. These include a lowered sense of entitlement to leisure for women as they often are the traditional primary caregivers in the household, and lack of interpersonal support to pursue more time consuming levels of leisure. Structural constraints, while often similar to those faced by men, can have antecedents related specifically to being female, including social norms that both prescribe particular forms of leisure for women and suggest a sacrificing leisure in favor of family commitments. In terms of constraint negotiation, the literature has moved away from strict identification of constraints and strategies for overcoming them to an examination of the psychosocial attitudes that can facilitate constraint negotiation.