

# Negative stereotypes affect female soccer performance

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Subjecting female soccer players to a negative stereotype about their abilities reduced their dribbling speed significantly, according to a new study published in *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*. The results demonstrate the impact negative stereotypes can have on athletic performance.

There continues to be a stereotype that women are inferior as soccer players. This view continues regardless of women's success on the field. For example, the German woman's team has won the World Cup twice, and the team is currently ranked 2nd in the FIFA world rankings (the men's team is ranked 4th). Furthermore, there is less coverage of female soccer games and their salaries are far below their male counterparts.

Scientists from the Goethe University in Frankfurt, Germany, researched one stereotype in particular, namely: "females cannot play soccer." This idea is still prevalent in Germany despite the success of the nation's women's national team. Germany is the only country whose men's and women's national teams have both won at World Cups.

Thirty-six teenage female [soccer players](#) who play at a competitive level from three soccer clubs in Frankfurt participated in the study. The participants were asked to read a fictitious article either about female inferiority in soccer or about the worldwide growing popularity of soccer. Then, they had to answer on a seven-point scale whether they agree with the statement "I think boys and girls play [soccer](#) equally well."

The researchers then compared the time the women needed to complete the dribble exercise before and after reading the article was to see if negative stereotypes did in fact affect the girls' performances. The results showed that women who had read an article with negative stereotypes needed significantly more time to complete the exercise than those in the control condition.

Two motivational factors were also investigated: flow and worry. Flow is a term used in sports studies to describe a pleasant psychological state that makes it easier to be focused on the activity at hand. As a result, action and awareness are merged. Contrary to expectations, the results showed that there was no significant relationship between reading [negative stereotypes](#) and either flow or worry. Interestingly, girls who felt more worried, spent less time on the dribbling task.

Negative stereotypes can limit [women](#) from achieving their potential and effect participation in sport. This study confirms the results of previous research by demonstrating that female players are influenced by [stereotype threat](#) as early as their teen years, pointing to the importance of early intervention. Therefore, encouragement and positive messages are important for increasing female participation. As Johanna Hermann, co-author of the study, recommends: "Don't stop when you're stereotyped, stop when you're done, girls!"

**More information:** Johanna M. Hermann et al, "Girls should cook, rather than kick!" – Female soccer players under stereotype threat, *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* (2016). [DOI: 10.1016/j.psychsport.2016.06.010](#)

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