

**Male allyship contributing to women's empowerment in *Hidden Figures*****I Gusti Ayu Mahatma Agung\*, Ni Luh Sutjiati Beratha**

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\*Corresponding Author: [ayu.mahatma@unud.ac.id](mailto:ayu.mahatma@unud.ac.id)**ABSTRACT**

This study examined male allyship in the movie *Hidden Figures*. It focused on how male characters support women's empowerment in a workplace marked by racial and gender discrimination. The study aimed to identify different forms of male allyship and to analyze their impact on women's career development by using the theoretical framework proposed by Burrell and Morin (2025). The research used qualitative content analysis of selected scenes that show men supporting women who face structural discrimination. The findings showed that male allyship appeared in several forms. These included fostering social capital through mentorship and sponsorship, speaking up against resistance to diversity, equity and inclusion (D.E.I.), using power and resources to support advancement opportunities, clarifying that D.E.I. does not promote unqualified candidates, presenting D.E.I. as a strategic strength for the organisation, acting as visible advocates for inclusion, and sharing stories that make the benefits of D.E.I. concrete. These forms of male allyship empowered women by creating opportunities, removing systemic barriers, and positioning diversity, equity, and inclusion as essential to organizational success. The study concluded that male allyship based on fairness, respect and integrity showed that supporting women's empowerment does not weaken masculinity or leadership credibility. Instead, it strengthened collective achievement and encouraged gender inclusive work environments.

**Keywords:** Gender equality, male allyship, positive masculinity, women's empowerment**Article history**

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**INTRODUCTION**

Gender equality has been a central issue in the society for a long time (Siboro et al., 2023; Zulfie & Kusumayanti, 2023). The struggle for gender equality is still very clear in professional settings. This is especially true in male dominated fields such as Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). Women often face discrimination, harassment, and systemic barriers in these environments (Calvo-Iglesias & Epifanio, 2024). Many studies have shown how women are marginalized in professional settings (Boivin et al., 2024; Corbett et al., 2024; O'Connell & McKinnon, 2021; Parmaxi et al., 2024; Sebastián-Tirado et al., 2023). These narratives are important because they reveal gender inequality and show the need for structural change. However, gender equality cannot be effectively achieved by focusing only on injustice and exclusion (Kossek et al., 2024). There is also the need to demonstrate how equality can be reached through positive examples and supportive behaviors (De Souza & Schmader, 2025). One way to achieve this is by examining male allyship.

The idea of male allyship has gained more attention in recent years. It refers to the active support that men give to women in professional and social settings (Warren et al., 2021). This includes recognizing women's contributions, advocating for their inclusion, and removing barriers (Madsen et al., 2020). Male allyship is not about rescuing women or controlling them. It is also not performative and does not take attention away from women's own efforts. Instead, it reflects a collaborative approach where men use their position and values to support gender equality (Moser et al., 2024). In a society where masculinity is often associated with power and control, male allyship offers a different perspective. It shows that leadership is not about competing for dominance, but about creating space for others to succeed (Ralph & Nicol, 2023).

Male allyship is crucial because gender equality needs the involvement of men (Van Laar et al., 2024). When men choose to support their female colleagues, they contribute not only to individual empowerment but also to stronger institutions (Erskine & Bilimoria, 2019). Male allyship does not mean taking over women's voices or seeking praise. It is about using one's position, privilege, or influence to listen, understand, and open opportunities. This attitude reflects positive masculinity that is secure, thoughtful, and inclusive (McDermott et al., 2019). True male allies do not see women's progress as a threat. They understand that supporting women does not make them less of a man. Instead, it shows maturity, strength, and leadership. These men are not driven by ego or insecurity. They are motivated by a genuine desire to see people succeed (Ralph & Nicol, 2023).

The present study used the movie *Hidden Figures* as its data source. The movie was produced by the 20th Century Studios and based on a nonfiction book written by Margot Lee Shetterly. The movie received strong critical acclaim and widespread public attention when it was released in 2016. It became a cultural milestone because it highlighted the overlooked contributions of black women mathematicians at NASA during the Space Race era. The movie was distinctive because it shows women who experience both racial and gender discrimination. However, they also display resilience and excellence in a male dominated and segregated workplace. The movie was chosen as the data source because it offered an engaging narrative of how male allyship could appear in such challenging environments. In current discussion on gender equality, this study is urgent because it highlights the role of male allyship in supporting women's empowerment.

Despite the importance of male allyship, many gender-related studies still focus on the experiences of women as victims of injustice. This can be seen in previous studies that discuss the movie *Hidden Figures* in terms of gender and racial discrimination faced by Black women. For example, Amanda et al. (2024) focus on how the movie portrays racial injustice and gender inequality through Black feminism. Their analysis also highlights women's struggles against oppressive systems in society and the workplace. Similarly, Sabrina et al. (2023) discuss the double discrimination of race and gender experienced by the female characters. In their study, they show how these women must continuously prove their worth in an environment that does not easily recognize their intelligence and contributions. Another study also highlights the gender-based discrimination in NASA's male-dominated culture, including unequal salaries, limited career advancement, and systemic segregation, as discussed by Yulisnawati & Kurniati (2023). Additionally, Sari et al. (2022) examine *Hidden Figures* by identifying various types of gender and racial discrimination faced by the three main female characters. Their study reveals that these women experience unfair treatment in their workplaces, educational pursuits, and daily interactions. These works consistently highlight the oppression and marginalization that Black women faced, as well as their resilience in fighting for recognition.

Even though the previous studies are important in exposing injustice, they rarely examine *Hidden Figures* from the perspective that highlights the role of men who choose to support women in their careers. This current study addresses the gap by focusing on male allyship as depicted by the male characters in the movie. Unlike previous research, this study does not focus only on women's struggles. It also examines how men play a role in creating opportunities for women to progress. It shows that their support is not driven by ego, pity, or a need to dominate. Instead, it is guided by a commitment to fairness, competence, and organizational success. By highlighting male allyship, this research offers a model of positive masculinity. It shows that men's support does not threaten their masculinity but instead reflects real strength and leadership.

This study aimed to identify different forms of male allyship in the movie *Hidden Figures* and to analyze their impact on women's professional advancement. It focused on how the male characters supported the career development of the Black female characters. The analysis looked at how these men acted, what values they represented, and how their support influenced both the women and the organization. In this context, this research offers a contribution to gender studies by not only criticizing inequality but also offering models that can be applied in real life.

## METHOD

This study used a qualitative method to analyze the forms of male allyship depicted in the movie *Hidden Figures*. The data source was the movie *Hidden Figures*, directed by Theodore Melfi and released in 2016. The movie was chosen as the data source because it depicted male characters who showed different forms of male allyship towards Black women working at NASA. Their actions

provided clear examples of how male allyship could be practiced in professional settings. The data were collected by watching the movie several times and taking detailed notes on the scenes and dialogues that showed male allyship. The notes focused on words, expressions, and actions that demonstrated support, inclusion, and empowerment from male characters to female characters. The data were then analyzed by grouping and examining the forms of male allyship using the theory of male allyship by Burrell & Morin (2025). The theory explains how men could act as effective allies in professional contexts. Through this method, the study aimed to present a clear understanding of how male allyship was portrayed in the movie *Hidden Figures*.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study identified various forms of male allyship portrayed in the movie *Hidden Figures*. Table 1 summarizes the forms of male allyship identified in the movie. It also shows how male characters use their positions to support women's empowerment.

**Table 1. Forms of Male Allyship in *Hidden Figures***

No.	Forms of Male Allyship	Description
1.	Foster Social Capital through Mentorship and Sponsorship	Male characters give recommendations, speak up for women's promotion, and help them build useful connections. In doing so, they expand women's professional opportunities.
2.	Confront Anti-Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (D.E.I.) Pushback with Confidence and Facts	Male allies challenge unfair assumptions with confidence. They point out women's competence and show how inclusion benefits the organization.
3.	Leverage Resources to Support Development Programs	Men use their authority and resources to open access to training and development. This helps women grow and advance in their careers.
4.	Clarify That D.E.I. Does Not Promote Unqualified Candidates	Male leaders emphasize that inclusion is about recognizing real talent, not about lowering standards. They affirm that women are qualified and deserving of their positions.
5.	Position D.E.I. as a Competitive Advantage	Male characters present inclusion as a key part of organizational success. They do not treat it as a mere formality or moral duty.
6.	Be Visible Advocates for Inclusion and Equity Initiatives	Male allies consistently support women in public. They show their allyship through visible actions and clear acknowledgment.
7.	Share Narratives Highlighting the Tangible Benefits of D.E.I.	Men share stories about women's achievements. These stories make the value of diversity and inclusion more visible and connected to shared goals.

These findings show that male allyship in the movie *Hidden Figures* appears in several forms. Some forms of male allyship are direct, such as sponsoring women for new roles. Others are more cultural, including efforts to shape positive attitudes about inclusion. These actions show how male allyship can support women, challenge systemic barriers, and strengthen organizational success. A detailed analysis of each form is provided in the discussion section.

### Male Allyship in *Hidden Figures*

This section analyzes how male characters in the movie demonstrate allyship towards female colleagues. It examines the forms of support they provide, such as sponsorship, advocacy, and removing systemic barriers.

#### Foster Social Capital Through Mentorship and Sponsorship

This role shows how male allies can use their position and influence to support the career growth of people from marginalized groups (Burrell & Morin, 2025). Mentorship involves guiding, advising, and sharing knowledge to help people develop professionally and personally (Nunan et al., 2023). Sponsorship goes further than mentorship. It involves speaking up for someone, recommending them for opportunities, and connecting them to important networks they may not be able to access on their

own (Schwartz et al., 2023). When male leaders practice mentorship and sponsorship, they do more than sharing skills or advice. They help open doors and make sure the talent is noticed and valued. This form of male allyship is important because it directly challenges the barriers caused by exclusion and discrimination. It creates real opportunities for inclusion and career progress. This role is shown in Data 1, where Mr. Zielinski encourages Mary to apply for the Engineer Training Program and supports her advancement by recognizing her abilities.

### Data 1



**Picture 1. Mr. Zielinski encourages Mary to pursue engineering**

Mr. Zielinski	: “ <i>There’s another opening in the Engineer Training Program.</i> ”
Mary	: “ <i>Flat head rivets could reduce wind drag.</i> ”
Mr. Zielinski	: “ <i>Mary...a person with an engineer’s mind should be an engineer. You can’t be a computer the rest of your life. That would be a tragic waste of your ability.</i> ”
Mary	: “ <i>Mr. Zielinski, I’m a Negro woman. I’m not going to entertain the impossible.</i> ”
Mr. Zielinski	: “ <i>And I’m a polish Jew whose parents died in a Nazi prison camp. Now I’m standing beneath a spaceship that’s going to carry an astronaut to the stars. I think we can say, we’re living the impossible. Let me ask...if you were a white male, would you wish to be an engineer?</i> ”
Mary	: “ <i>I wouldn’t have to. I’d already be one.</i> ”

(Melfi, 2016, 15:20-16:05)

In Data 1, Mr. Zielinski acts as a mentor and sponsor for Mary. When he informs her about the opening in the Engineer Training Program, it is not because of duty or small talk. His words show that he has observed her work and recognizes her potential as an engineer. When he says, “*A person with an engineer’s mind should be an engineer,*” he affirms her intelligence and ability. This is something her environment has often denied because of her gender and race. His allyship matters because it is more than kind words. Mr. Zielinski becomes a sponsor by directly connecting Mary to an opportunity for advancement. He uses his position to recommend her for the training program. Through this action, he gives her access to a career path that would likely remain closed due to structural discrimination (Randel et al., 2021). The scene in picture 1 shows this moment, with Mary standing attentively while Mr. Zielinski gestures towards the spacecraft model. This image supports his role as a mentor and suggests the future in space engineering that he believes Mary can achieve.

Additionally, Mr. Zielinski’s allyship is based on empathy. When Mary says that becoming an engineer is impossible for a Black woman, he responds by sharing his own background as a Polish Jew whose parents died in a Nazi camp. He does not share this story to compete in suffering. He does it to create understanding between them. He then says, “*Now I’m standing beneath a spaceship that’s going to carry an astronaut to the stars. I think we can say, we’re living the impossible.*” With this sentence, he invites Mary to see that change is possible, even with a painful history and unfair systems. His next question, “*If you were a white male, would you wish to be an engineer?*” shows that he understands structural inequality. He knows that Mary’s problem is not her ability, but the discriminatory system around her. Mary’s reply, “*I wouldn’t have to. I’d already be one,*” makes this clear. The scene shows how male allyship can uncover injustice in a simple but powerful way. At the same time, it helps Mary recognize her own worth and potential (Kossek et al., 2024).

Mr. Zielinski's allyship reflects positive masculinity and leadership. He does not treat Mary with pity, nor does he position himself as her saviour. Instead, he uses his influence to open opportunities for her. This is the essence of fostering social capital through mentorship and sponsorship. It means using one's privilege, authority, and networks to create opportunities for those who are marginalized.

### Confront Anti-D.E.I. Pushback with Confidence and Facts

This role focuses on how men respond to resistance to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Male allies who take this role do not stay silent when they see discrimination. They respond to it clearly and firmly. They use their position to challenge unfair practices (Burrell & Morin, 2025). They do not fear backlash or criticism because their focus is on creating a fair environment. The example of this role is shown in Data 2.

#### Data 2



Picture 2. Al Harrison destroys the “Colored Ladies Room” sign

Al Harrison : “Where the hell have you been? Everywhere I look you’re not where I need you to be. And it’s not my imagination. Where the hell do you go everyday?”

Katherine : “The bathroom, sir.”

Al Harrison : “The bathroom! The damn bathroom!”

Katherine : “Yes, sir. The bathroom.”

Al Harrison : “For 40 minutes a day!? What do you do in there!? We are T-minus zero here. I put a lot of faith in you.”

Katherine : “There’s no bathroom for me here.”

Al Harrison : “There’s no bathroom? What do you mean there’s no bathroom for you here?”

Katherine : “There’s no bathroom here. There are no COLORED bathrooms in this building or ANY building outside the West Campus. Which is half a mile away! Did you know that? I have to walk to Timbuktu just to relieve myself! And I can’t take one of the handy bikes. Picture that, with my uniform: skirt below the knees and my heels. And don’t get me started about the “simple pearl necklace” I can’t afford. Lord knows you don’t pay “the coloreds enough for that. And I work like a dog day and night, living on coffee from a coffee pot half of you don’t want me to touch! So excuse me if I have to go to the restroom a few times a day!”

In the following scene, Al Harrison angrily uses a crowbar to tear down the “Colored Restroom” sign from the bathroom wall while a crowd of engineers, technicians, and the West Computing Group, including Katherine, Dorothy, and Mary, watch him in shock and amazement.

Al Harrison : “There you have it! No more colored restrooms. No more white restrooms. Just plain old toilets. Go wherever you damn well please. Preferably closer to your desk. At NASA we all...pee the same color!”

(Melfi, 2016, 1:01:17-1:04:43)

The scene in Picture 2 shows Al Harrison, the head of the Space Task Group at NASA, destroying the “Colored Ladies Room” sign with a crowbar. This happens after he finds out that Katherine has been walking a long distance just to use a segregated bathroom. At first, Harrison is angry with Katherine

because she often leaves her desk. Everything changes when Katherine explains the real reason. She tells him that there is no bathroom for Black women in the building and that she has to walk half a mile just to relieve herself. Her words reveal a reality he has never thought about. In that moment, he understands that the problem is not her effort or discipline. The real problem is the systemic racism embedded within NASA's facilities.

Harrison feels frustrated and angry about the injustice and inefficiency created by this system. It causes. He does not call a meeting, write an email, or delegate the problem to someone else. Instead, he acts immediately and decisively. In the following scene, he tears down the "Colored Restroom" sign with a crowbar while the engineers, technicians, and the West Computing Group watch in shock. His actions are not only symbolic. They are also practical and focused on solving the problem. By removing the sign, he ends a rule that has forced Katherine to spend extra time and energy just to use the bathroom. When he says, "*At NASA we all pee the same color*," he challenges segregation with a simple truth. His words show that discrimination has no place in an organisation that is trying to reach space.

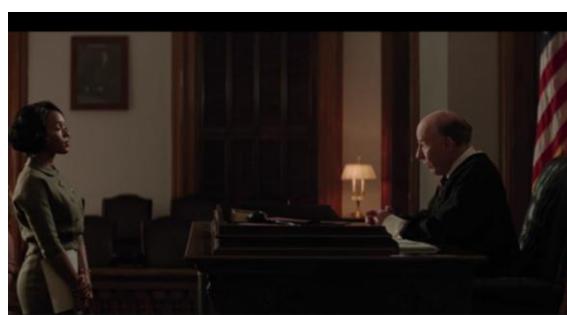
Harrison's action is not only about making work more efficient. It also shows a clear rejection of racial segregation at NASA. By taking down the sign, he removes a barrier that limits Katherine's comfort and dignity. He does not present his decision as pity or charity. His focus is on fairness and justice. He wants everyone on his team to work without unnecessary obstacles. He is not worried about how people who support segregation might react. He cares about what is right for his team and for the mission. His confidence in facing this injustice shows leadership based on integrity, not ego.

This scene shows Al Harrison as a male ally who uses his authority to challenge systemic discrimination. He focuses on what is fair and right, instead of keeping unjust rules in place. His actions reflect positive masculinity. They show that real leadership is not about controlling others, but about removing barriers so everyone can contribute fully and equally (Raj, 2024). Harrison's decision reflects the role of confronting resistance to diversity, equity, and inclusion with clarity and confidence. It gives an example of how male allies can act directly to dismantle injustice.

### Leverage Resources to Support Development Programs

This role means using one's authority, influence, or position to give marginalized individuals access to opportunities. These opportunities support their growth, education, and career advancement. Male allies in this role understand that there are systemic barriers. They use their power to open paths to training, education, or development programs that help marginalized individuals move forward (Burrell & Morin, 2025). The example of this role is shown in data 3.

#### Data 3



**Picture 3. The judge gives Mary permission to attend night classes at an all-white school**

*The Judge* : "Hampton High School is a white school, Mrs. Jackson."

*Mary* : "Yes, your Honor. I'm aware of that."

*The Judge* : "Virginia is still a segregated state. Regardless of what the Federal Government says or the Supreme Court says. Our law is the law."

*Mary* : "Your Honor, if I may, I believe there are special circumstances to be considered."

*The Judge* : "What would warrant a colored woman attendin' a white school?"

*Mary* : "Your Honor, you of all people should understand the importance of being first."

*The Judge* : "How's that, Mrs. Jackson?"

Mary : "You were the first in your family to serve in the Armed Forces. US Navy. The first to attend University. George Mason. And you are the first State Judge to be re-commissioned by three consecutive Governors."

The Judge : "You've done some research."

Mary : "Yes, sir."

The Judge : "What's the point here?"

Mary : "The point is, your Honor... No Negro woman in the State of Virginia has ever attended an all-white school. It's unheard of."

The Judge : "Yes. It's unheard of."

Mary : "And before Alan Shepard sat on top of a rocket, no American had ever touched space. He will forever be remembered as the Navy man from New Hampshire who was the first to touch the stars. And I, sir, plan on being an engineer at NASA. But I can't do that without taking those classes at that all-white high school. And I can't change the color of my skin. So... I have no choice but to be the first. Which I can't do without you. Your Honor, of all the cases you'll hear today, which one will matter in a hundred years? Which one will make you the "first?""

The Judge : "Only the night classes, Mrs. Jackson."

(Melfi, 2016, 1:10:56-1:13:10)

In the scene shown in Picture 3, the judge shows the role of using his position to support development opportunities. Mary Jackson asks permission to attend night classes at an all-white high school so she can qualify for an engineering position at NASA. At first, the judge resists her request. He refers to Virginia's segregation laws and reminds her that, despite federal decisions, state law still enforces racial segregation. However, Mary does not appeal only to pity or general fairness. She builds her argument carefully and reminds the judge of how he was "the first" in many parts of his life. He was the first in his family to serve in the Navy, the first to attend university, and the first state judge to be reappointed by three governors. Her words ask him to think about change and the kind of legacy he wants to leave beyond his courtroom.

What makes the judge's response an example of this allyship role is his final decision. He decides to allow Mary to attend the night classes, despite his earlier resistance and the social norms of the time. He uses his position as a judge to change a rule that would have blocked her education. He only allows her to join the night classes, but this decision is still important. It removes a key barrier between Mary and her goal of becoming an engineer at NASA. Without his ruling, she would have no legal access to the training she needs. His allyship is quiet but meaningful. The judge does not speak publicly in favour of integration. He also does not clearly say that he has changed his views about segregation. However, he uses his authority and the law to create an opportunity for Mary. This shows that allyship can take the form of practical action within existing systems. It is not always about big speeches or dramatic gestures. Often, it is about making decisions that open doors so that others can grow and move forward (Garrick et al., 2024).

This scene shows that when individuals in power use their resources to support the educational and career development of others, it creates long-lasting impact (Geerts, 2024). The judge's decision not only supports Mary's career but also contributes to NASA's mission by allowing a talented individual to reach her full potential. It is a reminder that male allyship can transform institutions when those with authority choose to act beyond personal comfort or societal norms for the sake of fairness, progress, and excellence.

### Clarify That D.E.I. Does Not Promote Unqualified Candidates

This role shows that diversity, equity, and inclusion (D.E.I.) are not about lowering standards or promoting individuals who are not qualified. The focus is on recognizing and advancing the talents of those who are often overlooked due to systemic barriers (Burrell & Morin, 2025). Allies who play this role make it clear that inclusion is based on competence and excellence. They help ensure that decisions are both fair and held to high standards. Data 4 shows this role in action. Katherine is trusted with critical calculations not because of her identity, but because of her proven skill and expertise.

### Data 4



**Picture 4. Al Harrison trusts Katherine with critical calculations**

Katherine : "Well, sir, I'd like to get a jump on John Glenn's trajectory."  
 Al Harrison : "This isn't about plugging in numbers, this is about inventing the math. I think we talked about that. It doesn't exist."  
 Katherine : "I can do it, sir."  
 Paul Stafford : "Do you know how exacting these calculations have to be?"  
 Katherine : "Yes. It's like shooting a sawed-off shotgun from a thousand feet and getting that one BB through a hole so tiny, you can't even see it. I'm an excellent shot, sir."  
 Al Harrison : "How do Grissom's numbers look good. Paul?"  
 Paul Stafford : "They appear spot on."  
 Al Harrison : "Give Glenn's orbit a go. But you run it all through Stafford. You understand?"  
 Katherine : "Yes, Sir. Thank you."

(Melfi, 2016, 1:14:00-1:15:15)

In Data 4, Al Harrison shows the role of clarifying that D.E.I. does not promote unqualified candidates. When Katherine asks to work on John Glenn's trajectory, he reminds her that the task is not just about inserting numbers. It requires creating new mathematics for a very important and risky mission. Katherine still responds with confidence and says, "*I can do it, sir.*" When Paul Stafford questions her ability, Katherine answers with a clear and powerful analogy. She then says, "*I'm an excellent shot, sir.*" Her words are calm and firm. They show that she understands the work deeply and is confident in her own competence.

Al Harrison's response is significant. He does not dismiss her or agree with Stafford's doubt. Instead, he checks Grissom's previous numbers, finds them correct, and then gives Katherine the opportunity to calculate Glenn's orbit. His instruction that she runs her work through Stafford reflects procedural caution, but his decision to assign her the task shows his trust in her skills. This moment is powerful because it shows that Harrison's choice to involve Katherine is not based on charity, pity, or tokenism. He chooses her because she is the best person for the job.

This scene clarifies that D.E.I. is not about lowering standards to include unqualified individuals. On the contrary, it is about recognizing people's ability regardless of their race or gender. Harrison's decision demonstrates positive allyship by showing that inclusion is driven by competence and organizational need, not by fulfilling diversity quotas. Katherine is not given the task because she is a Black woman who needs a chance. She is given the task because she is a brilliant mathematician, and her work is crucial for NASA's success. In this way, Harrison's allyship challenges the hidden biases within the workplace that equate inclusion with lowered standards. His leadership reflects integrity and fairness, showing that strong allies focus on capability, potential, and what is best for the team and the mission (Okatta et al., 2024). This scene gives an example of how leaders can support diversity by making decisions that honor both excellence and equity.

### **Position D.E.I. as a Competitive Advantage**

This role shows diversity, equity, and inclusion as more than moral or social goals. They are strategic assets that can improve team performance, support innovation, and strengthen organizational success (Burrell & Morin, 2025). Male allies in this role see that different perspectives, experiences, and

skills are important for solving complex problems and making better decisions. Data 5 reflects this role, as Al Harrison views Katherine's inclusion essential for NASA's mission and success.

## Data 5



**Picture 5. Al Harrison introduces Katherine Goble and highlights her crucial role**

Katherine : "Mr. Harrison, I'd like to attend today's briefing."  
 Al Harrison : "Why's that?"  
 Katherine : "Well, sir, the data changes so fast. The capsule changes. The weight and the landing zones are all changing daily. I do my work, you attend these briefings and I have to start all over. Colonel Glenn launches in a few weeks. And we don't have the math figured out yet."  
 Al Harrison : "Why can't she attend?"  
 Paul Stafford : "She doesn't have clearance, Al."  
 Katherine : "I cannot do my work effectively without having all of the data and all of the information as soon as it's available. I need to be in that room, hearing what you hear."  
 Paul Stafford : "Pentagon Briefings are not for civilians. It requires the highest clearance."  
 Katherine : "I feel like I'm the best person to present my calculations, Mr. Harrison."  
 Al Harrison : "You're not going to let this go. Are you?"  
 Katherine : "No, sir."  
 Paul Stafford : "And she's a woman. There's no protocol for a woman attending."  
 Al Harrison : "Okay, I get that part, Paul. But within these walls, who makes the rules?"  
 Katherine : "You, sir. You're the boss. You just have to act like one."  
 Al Harrison : "You keep quiet."  
 Katherine : "Thank you, sir."  
 Al Harrison : "This is Katherine Goble with our Trajectory and Launch Window Division. Her work is pertinent to today's proceedings."

(Melfi, 2016, 1:20:50- 1:22:50)

The scene in Data 5 shows how Al Harrison as a leader can position D.E.I. as a competitive advantage. When Katherine asks to attend the Pentagon briefing, she explains that the data changes every day. If she is not in the room, her calculations for John Glenn's launch are delayed and less accurate. Her explanation points to a practical problem. Excluding her slows the team and can put the mission at risk. However, Paul Stafford immediately objects her request. He says that Katherine does not have clearance and that there is no protocol for a woman to join the briefing. His reaction reflects institutional norms that prioritize strict rules over effective work. Despite the objection, Katherine stays calm and firm. She says, "*I feel like I'm the best person to present my calculations.*" Her statement is not arrogance but a clear statement of her expertise and the urgency of the task.

Harrison's leadership in this moment is critical. When he asks, "*But within these walls, who makes the rules?*" and Katherine answers, "*You, sir. You're the boss. You just have to act like one,*" it pushes him to rethink his role. He moves from simply following protocol to making an active decision for the success of the organization. Harrison does not let outdated norms limit NASA's potential. Instead, he understands that including Katherine is not about charity or token presence. It is about making sure that the most competent person has access to the information she needs to do her work well. His decision to

bring Katherine into the briefing and introduce her as, “*This is Katherine Goble with our Trajectory and Launch Window Division. Her work is pertinent to today’s proceedings,*” shows this clearly. He presents her as an asset to the team. In doing so, he positions her expertise as necessary for reaching NASA’s goals at a time when the Space Race demands precision and innovation. This scene illustrates that positioning D.E.I. as a competitive advantage requires leaders to go beyond compliance and see inclusion as integral to success (Leuhery et al., 2024).

### Be Visible Advocates for Inclusion and Equity Initiatives

This role involves using one’s voice, authority, and actions to publicly support marginalized individuals. Male allies who take on this role show their support openly. In doing so, they set an example for others and challenge cultures that exclude marginalized groups (Burrell & Morin, 2025). Their visible support normalizes equity and sends a message that inclusion is not only acceptable but necessary. Data 6 reflects this role, as John Glenn requests Katherine’s expertise and validates her contribution in front of NASA’s leader.

#### Data 6



**Picture 6. Astronaut John Glenn requests Katherine’s expertise**

Al Harrison : “*The IBM has been spot on up to this point, John, but we’ll run it again, see what it comes up with.*”  
 John Glenn : “*To be honest with you, Al... when I fly, I fly the machine and now I feel like the machines are flying me.*”  
 Al Harrison : “*We’re on the same page. We’re staying on the ground until this works out our way. Stay tuned.*”  
 John Glenn : “*Let’s get the girl to check the numbers.*”  
 Al Harrison : “*The girl?*”  
 John Glenn : “*Yes, sir. The smart one. If she says they’re good, I’m ready to go.*”  
 Al Harrison : “*All right. We’ll get into it. Sam... go find Katherine. She needs to verify Glenn’s Go/No Go or we’re staying on the ground.*”

(Melfi, 2016, 1:41:58-1:42:36)

In Data 6, John Glenn shows what it means to be a visible advocate for inclusion and equity. As NASA prepares for his launch, the IBM computer finishes its calculations. However, Glenn says he feels uneasy trusting only the machine. He explains, “*When I fly, I fly the machine, and now I feel like the machines are flying me.*” His words show that he still needs human assurance, especially when his life is at risk. Instead of asking for a senior male engineer, Glenn says, “*Let’s get the girl to check the numbers.*” When Al Harrison asks, “*The girl?*” Glenn answers confidently, “*Yes, sir. The smart one. If she says they’re good, I’m ready to go.*” In this short exchange, Glenn publicly recognizes Katherine’s expertise.

Glenn makes his request in front of NASA’s leader, so his trust in Katherine is visible to everyone. In an environment where Black women’s work was often ignored or credited to their male colleagues, his words give formal recognition to her role. He shows that she is an important part of the team. This supports the idea that inclusion is not an act of charity, but a strategic need based on competence. Moreover, Glenn’s visible advocacy challenges the silent biases within NASA at the time. His request

carries authority because it comes from the astronaut whose life depends on these calculations. By asking for Katherine's involvement, he rejects the idea that women's contributions are secondary. His words send a clear message: the mission's success relies on the best minds, and Katherine is one of them.

This scene shows that being a visible advocate for inclusion does not always require formal speeches or policy changes. Sometimes, it is about a leader using their position to acknowledge the value of someone who has been overlooked (Madsen et al., 2020). Glenn's allyship models a secure and mature masculinity that is not threatened by women's competence. Instead, it celebrates their contributions as vital to collective achievement. Through his simple yet powerful words, Glenn demonstrates that inclusion becomes a cultural norm when those in authority choose to make their support visible. His actions remind us that allyship is not only about believing in equality, but also about taking actions that make others believe in it too.

### Share Narratives Highlighting the Tangible Benefits of D.E.I.

This role involves using real stories to show how diversity, equity, and inclusion lead to better outcomes. Male allies who take this role make inclusion visible by sharing the achievements of people from underrepresented groups. In doing so, they show that D.E.I. is not only about fairness, but also about excellence, innovation, and results (Burrell & Morin, 2025). Data 7 reflects this role, as it shows Al Harrison sharing Katherine's achievement with John Glenn and presenting her contribution as crucial for NASA's mission.

#### Data 7



Picture 7. John Glenn thanks Katherine for her assistance



Picture 8. Al Harrison highlights Katherine's significant contribution

Al Harrison : "We can confirm the Go/No Go point for re-entry is 16.11984, -165.2356. The launch window is a go. The landing coordinates match."

John Glenn : "Good to hear that, Al. Hard to trust something you can't look in the eyes."

Al Harrison : "That's right, Colonel. Katherine did manage to calculate a few decimal points further than that hunk of metal."

John Glenn : "I'll take every digit ya got. Be sure to thank her for me."

(Melfi, 2016, 1:47:00-1:47:32)

In the scenes depicted in Picture 7 and 8, Al Harrison and John Glenn together create a powerful narrative that highlights the benefits of diversity, equity, and inclusion. As Glenn prepares for re-entry, Scott Carpenter informs him that Langley is on the line with the final trajectory calculations. Harrison then confirms the Go/No Go point for re-entry, stating the exact coordinates, and assures Glenn that the launch window and landing coordinates match perfectly. Glenn responds with relief, "Good to hear that, Al. Hard to trust something you can't look in the eyes." His words reveal his need for human

confirmation. It shows that even the most advanced technology is not enough without the reassurance of skilled individuals. At this point, Harrison uses the moment to highlight Katherine's role. He replies, "That's right, Colonel. Katherine did manage to calculate a few decimal points further than that hunk of metal." In saying this, Harrison does more than just acknowledge Katherine's contribution. He publicly tells Glenn, and everyone in the room, that her calculations are not only equal to but even more precise than the IBM computer. This transforms Katherine's work from an invisible background task to a story of excellence and critical impact.

Glenn's response strengthens this narrative. He says, "I'll take every digit ya got. Be sure to thank her for me." His words are simple but meaningful. He affirms Katherine's contribution and shows that her calculations give him confidence in his safety and the mission's success. By asking Harrison to thank her, he makes sure that her efforts are recognized. This scene reflects how sharing narratives about the achievements of underrepresented individuals makes the benefits of D.E.I. visible to others. Harrison does not frame Katherine's contribution as an act of inclusion for its own sake. Instead, he presents it as a strategic advantage for NASA's mission. His words turn her involvement into a story of operational excellence. This shows that D.E.I. is about recognizing the best talents available. Furthermore, this allyship also reflects positive masculinity and leadership. Harrison and Glenn do not act surprised by Katherine's competence. They treat it as normal and necessary. They place her achievement inside NASA's larger success story. Their exchange gives an example of how leaders can build inclusive cultures by sharing stories that link individual contributions to shared goals. It reinforces the idea that true excellence appears when every capable person is trusted and valued.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the forms of male allyship shown in the movie *Hidden Figures*. It highlighted how the male characters use their positions to remove barriers and create opportunities for women in an environment marked by racial and gender bias. They do not act out of pity or a desire to feel superior. Instead, they recognize the women's abilities and focus on what truly matters: the success of the mission and the progress of the organization. The male characters in *Hidden Figures* serve as examples of how male allyship can work in practice. Their allyship appears through concrete decisions and supportive actions. They show that men can support women's empowerment without losing their status or sense of purpose. They also show that women's progress does not weaken men. It does not reduce their masculinity or authority. On the contrary, it suggests that they are confident, reflective, and able to see beyond their own interests. In doing so, they offer a version of masculinity that is grounded in respect, fairness, and integrity. These are the values that can guide men toward becoming part of the solution in the effort to build gender-inclusive environments. This offers important implications for developing workplace cultures where men actively support women's advancement as part of collective progress. Future research could explore how these forms of allyship can be developed more systematically in different professional setting so that everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

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