

New research reinforces impact men can have as gender equality allies in the workplace

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Men can have a major influence on the extent to which women feel that their identity is safe within a workplace. New research published in *Social Psychological and Personality Science* reports that the presence of a gender equality supportive ally reduces anticipated feelings of isolation while increasing anticipated support and respect.

While many existing allyship studies focuses on responses to events like misogynistic comments or hiring decisions, this research shows that people do not need to wait for something overtly sexist to happen in order to be an effective ally.

"Simply communicating that you care about gender [equality](#) and intend to act as an ally for women can make a difference for women's feelings of inclusion in male-dominated spaces," says lead author Charlotte Moser, a graduate student at the University of Kansas.

Researchers conducted three studies in which women were asked to imagine that they had received a job offer and were randomly assigned to view a slideshow of their future coworkers, displaying either all-male coworkers or a gender-balanced staff. Certain slideshows included a man expressing support for gender equality, whereas no coworker mentioned gender equality in the no-ally group. Participants then completed a questionnaire to indicate the degree to which they would feel isolated or supported by coworkers at the company.

"We found that stating allyship intentions significantly reduced women's anticipation of workplace harassment and hostility," Moser says. "Our work also demonstrates that these male allies set norms of equality for an organization."

The first study involved 241 women and examined the impact of male allyship in reducing effects of underrepresentation among women, such as feelings of isolation and perceived lack of support. The second study included 393 participants, an equal mix of Black and White women, and focused on how the races of the participant and ally affected the ally's impact.

In both studies, the presence of an ally increased feelings of identity-safety such as a sense of belonging in the group and trust that the group would treat the participant fairly. Researchers found no differences in Black or White women's response to allyship from either a Black or White man.

A group of 398 women with male-dominated, STEM backgrounds participated in the final study to address the impact of the gender of an ally among women in male-dominated fields. Researchers found that allyship in a male-dominated workplace is effective for women, especially when the ally is male. While the female ally was perceived as championing [gender](#) equality, this did not reduce expectations of workplace hostility or isolation.

Moser explains that while allyship from men could be interpreted as paternalistic, her research found that women perceived an ally to be an empowering figure. Future research, she notes, would do well to explore men's perceptions of male allies in such workplaces.

In the meantime, this research can serve as a resource for men who want to learn how to be better allies. Their behavior can have a lasting impact, particularly in male-dominated fields like STEM.

"This is important," Moser says, "because it means that men can harness their privileged status to make these contexts more welcoming for [women](#)."

More information: Charlotte E. Moser et al, Male Allies at Work: Gender-Equality Supportive Men Reduce Negative Underrepresentation Effects Among Women, *Social Psychological and Personality Science* (2021). [DOI: 10.1177/19485506211033748](https://doi.org/10.1177/19485506211033748)

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