



Taraji P. Henson as Katherine G. Johnson represents the importance of black women in STEM fields in the 2016 film *Hidden Figures*.

## Black women still fight to be part of STEM fields

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For too long, black women were hidden amongst the usually white faces within different STEM fields, but modern representation shown on screen and the growing number of scientists both from the past and present could help inspire future generations to pursue careers and break boundaries.

Women are often discouraged from majoring in and following careers in STEM fields, with the myth being established that women do not possess the minds for such fields. This stereotypical and mindless belief shuns those willing to learn from an early age and harms our entire society in the process. Not allowing someone who wants

to learn because they are a certain age, gender or race remains one of the most idiotic practices I've ever witnessed.

Characters such as Shuri in the recently released *Black Panther* and the group of female mathematicians based on real women in *Hidden Figures*, show the importance of breaking away from such stereotypical myths. While black female scientists are just as important, fictional versions prove more accessible for girls and young women who can easily make their way to the nearest theater or watch from the comfort of their homes. Their real life counterparts are often glossed over or skipped completely in science and history classes.

In *Black Panther*, Shuri is the 16-year-old half-sister of T'Challa,

king of Wakanda, but this role does not define her in the film. Shuri engineers and designs all of the technology used in the film and was described as the smartest person in the Marvel universe by producer Nate More, beating out even *Iron Man's* Tony Stark. As a young black woman, her image and talents already make a lasting impression on black communities, with such tweets as "The Wakanda princess is the epitome of cool. Shuri is the Rihanna of girls in science" from Twitter user diandujour and "Princess Shuri is an icon. She roasts, she invents, and she's hilarious. We have decided to stan forever," from user blackmon. With roles like these, black girls can visually see that nothing can stop their dreams if they work hard enough.

The importance of seeing older black women in STEM fields holds a different importance, showing how these women can turn their knowledge and degrees into careers. *Hidden Figures* centers on NASA mathematicians Dorothy Vaughan, Mary Jackson and Katherine Goble Johnson, the last of which directly helped launch John Glenn into space as the first American to orbit the Earth.

In the film, Glenn asked specifically for Johnson to double check the computer's mathematical calculations, only trusting his flight path until she checked the numbers. This trust in a single person, especially a black woman, instead of a computer shows her brilliance and drive at

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