

## Girl Powered: Taking Charge

*I am girl powered. My team is girl powered. The world... not so much.*

First things first, there is one important distinction to be made. Being a team that is girl powered does not mean that we females are superior to males. Instead, the term "Girl Powered" (to me) denotes that girls can do anything that guys can, if given completely equal opportunities.

Unfortunately, today's societal niches often do not allow girls to rise up to these same positions.

Simply by looking around at competitions, it is evident that I, as a female, am a minority.

When brought to the attention of others, that fact is just dismissed by them that girls simply have less of an interest to compete in STEM

fields. However, that is painfully untrue.

Society as a whole has planted these prejudiced ideas that women should not be working in

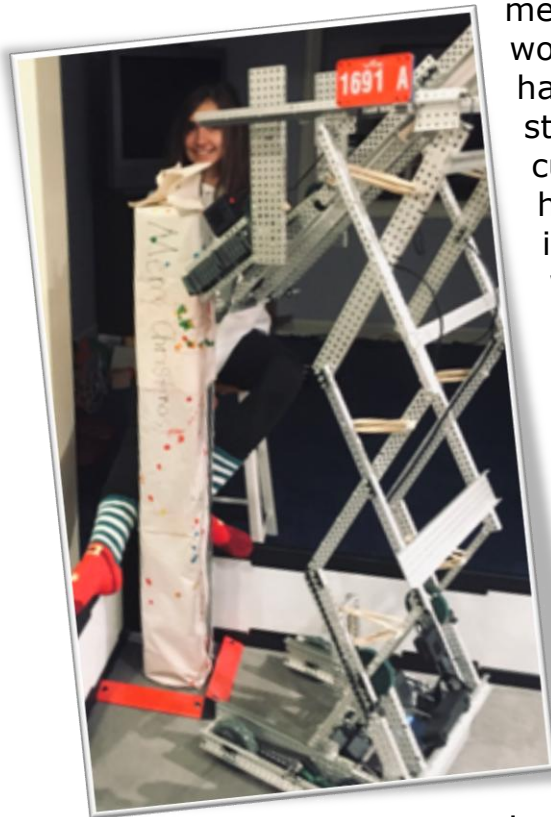
technological fields; that they should not be taking leadership positions. What's worse is that some women themselves come to believe it, as well. Being a girl-powered team in robotics is personally inspiring to me, because it directly contradicts these norms.

I have been doing robotics for the past four years and been on two different teams. In the first team I was on, I was the only girl there. However, I did not let that get me down and constantly fought to be heard and share my opinion. Truth be told, at times it was difficult to get through to the guys since they were all close friends and had formed a tightly-knit clique (from which I was excluded).

After two more years with that team I moved to an independent team, 1691A, which I continue to be a part of today. The majority of people on this team are girls, and I no longer had to fight to be heard. I no longer had to put in thrice as much effort to be respected.



Being a girl-powered team means that we all understand the struggle of being heard. It is constantly reflected in our meetings, especially during brainstorming. We often all sit around in a circle, presenting multiple different solutions to the same problem. Our different backgrounds lead us all to come up with distinct ideas for the robot, which increases the probability that one of those ideas will work excellently. We additionally let each of our



members pick which task they would like to do. In the past I have been a builder, scribe, strategist, driver, and am currently head programmer! In most teams, I have noticed that the head programmer/driver is always the "main guy"; the team member with the loudest voice who asserts his place. This is not the case in *Hurricane Robotics*, as we do not have one teammate who the others consider superior. Despite sounding chaotic, we deem each other equal and respect all of our strengths and weaknesses. I think that captures the true essence of being girl-powered: Everyone has the ability to become whomever they choose on the team. No roles are set in stone, and a vigorous effort is always made to incorporate our members. Whenever differences of opinions arise, they are always resolved purely with logic and by majority of opinion.



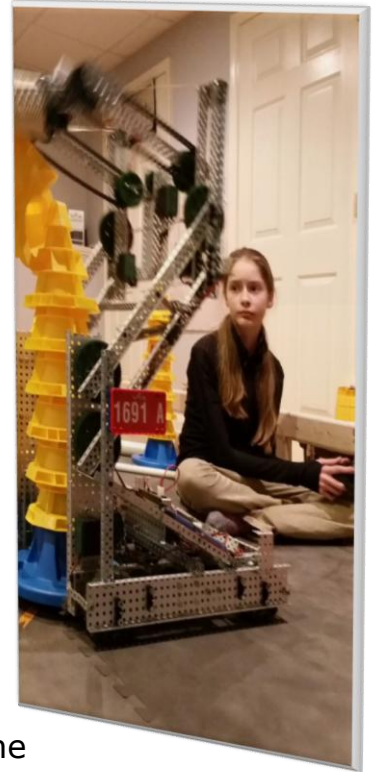
For the past few years, my go-to STEM model has always been Katherine Johnson. She was first brought to my attention through the 2016 movie *Hidden Figures*, which was dedicated to her immense importance in NASA's launches. Katherine was an 18 year old African-American who analyzed the different potential flight paths of rockets in the mid 1900s. She was constantly faced with both racist and sexist work conditions, and had to work without any recognition. However, Katherine did what she knew and loved-math- and it is now believed that the US would not have won the space race without





her efforts. Despite living half a century ago, some of the conditions that Katherine worked in during her STEM years unfortunately still apply today. I personally take inspiration in her headstrong ability to focus on her work and prove herself to everyone who doubted her. Thinking about how she was “just” a teenage girl and helped changed technological world brings me inspiration, because it means that technically, I could too.

However, recently I came to the realization that I do not need to look so far to find a motivating role model. My mother was the one who sparked my interest in STEM. When I was younger she would tell me stories about how she was part of the extremely few women to get her Engineering Degree in Valencia, Spain. I can think of no better example of being girl-powered than her. Being a Hispanic female in the otherwise completely male dominated field of engineering was much more difficult than it should have been. However, that did not stop her. The underlying inspiration that my mother and Katherine Johnson have showed with their life is that: The world was never a fair place, but when you have a passion for something and love what you do, it is always possible to rise to the top. However, the world is slowly becoming fairer. It will indubitably take time, but becoming girl-powered is a positive step in the right direction.



Being girl powered... It means giving everyone around you an equal chance to succeed. It means rising up to be better than the circumstances usually allow. It means that we will not just sit back and let things happen; instead, we are the ones in control of our prosperity. It means that no one is inferior based off of society's preconceived notions. It means that we are influencing others to become the best self they can. We are girl powered, and our team will never be anything but.

