



# Rewriting the Roles

Students and advisors reflect on the impact of sexism on student media

By: Samantha Sullivan

For most young girls, it's never been a question of who they can be.

Instead, it has always been the question of what role society has conditioned them to fulfill.

However, with a generation of "nasty women," rising from the ashes of second wave 90's feminist movements, it seems that now more than ever people are taking an active role in defending their rights. With the determination to smash the patriarchy and dismantle the gender binary, women's whispers have evolved into battle cries. The damsel in distress has begun to save herself.

This change is one that SIPA High School Advisor, **Erin Coggins**, has been able to observe over the past 15 years and one that she ascribes to some of the resistance she has seen socially in regards to female adherence to gender roles.

"I think the swing happened when women were allowed to do sports. When I majored in journalism in college...I wanted to do sports...and I was told 'you can't do that 'cause girls can't do that,' and that was what, 25 years ago? So in that 25 year span you start to see people like Erin Andrews doing it...and now you're seeing a lot of girls in different shapes and sizes doing it and I think that's really what's pushing journalism...Girls now are seeing that and thinking 'we can do that too'...Girls are

beginning to be more outspoken as well, and it used to be you sit pretty and keep your mouth shut but now since times have changed, they're being more outspoken and are living up to that potential," Coggins said.

This spirit of independence and persistence is one that Coggins encourages amongst all of her students regardless of gender, but feels is especially important to convey to her female students due to the male-dominated industry. Despite the mirage of equality in the journalism industry, there is a heavy male bias whether it comes to credibility or opportunity.

Being a female in an industry with such strong patriarchal influences means that talent simply is not enough. Where males can speak, females must scream.

This struggle is one that co-editor in chief, **Aneesa Conine-Nakino**, faces every time she picks up a pen.

"I think it's just the idea that when women talk about things or issues, it's just them complaining and thinking that like they deserve special treatment and...they think everything we do is motivated off our emotions rather than actual facts," Conine-Nakino said.

Conine-Nakino, along with tons of other female

journalists, refuse to see their gender as a source of vulnerability: empowerment stemming from the shattered glass surrounding them each time they break down another boundary.

This fight to end sexism and the unfair representation of women in mainstream media is one being fought by all members of the writing community, including **David Ragsdale**, SIPA advisor and AP literature teacher who has his classes participate in facilitated succession about issues such as consent and the disadvantages of women.

"I think girls have been conditioned to believe they're not safe...I think it absolutely negatively affects them and for girls that are more willing to be outspoken, they're ready to fight while other girls are left considering 'is that really what they think of me? Am I an object? Am I just some conquest for you?' I think it leads to a lot more questions than answers," Ragsdale said.

This sense of vulnerability pried off of by men is one that women all over are refusing to succumb to. The notion that women are not equal to their male-counter parts is one that females are refusing to accept. No longer deemed to silence, women's voices are being heard, all asking one question: who will they be?



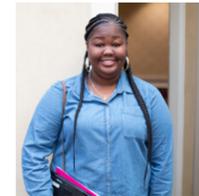
## Gracie Barnett

"I don't really encounter [sexism] that often. I feel like if our advisor was male it would be different."



## Zoe Stuckey

"I feel like sexism for females is a rather hard thing to come by because you are already dealing with trying to reach a certain caliber as someone else."



## Blake Ellis

"Looking at professional media there are in general more white male reporters. I think maybe unconsciously it gives a bias."



## Erin Slowey

"It's been a male world for such a long time but journalism can definitely change that. Women can definitely turn it around and this is the place to do it"



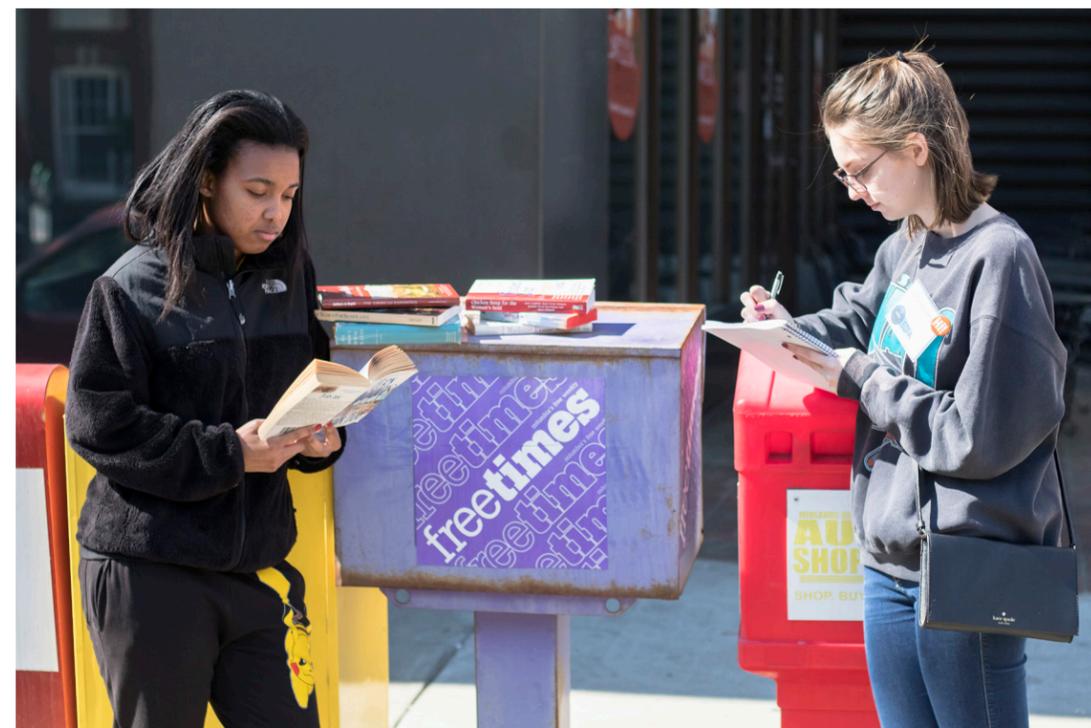
## Joshua Pearson

"Girls or any minority group definitely have less opportunities. It's just unfortunate that people aren't given a chance because they are a certain gender or race"



**SMILE FOR THE CAMERA:** (above) Cassidy Saison, SIPA student, interviews a conference member during a broadcast segment. "I think that women have definitely come a long way media-wise and... I think that in today's society those attitudes have kind of changed a lot. I personally feel like I am seen as equal in comparison to my male counterparts," Saison said.

**STAFF MEETING:** (left) Aneesa Conine-Nakino, SIPA student, meets with other members of her newspaper staff. "We just live in a patriarchal society so I mean men are just generally more respected in every sense... I would say in the majority of professions men are just always going to have the upper hand, especially in a profession like journalism," Conine-Nakino said.



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## ENTERING INTO FREE TIMES:

(left) Kennae Hunter, SIPA student, read books regarding the female role in society in Columbia, South Carolina. "I feel like as a black woman, people think I am not cut out for the job. Like, if I want to do a sports story I don't know what I am talking about because I am a woman," Hunter said.

## BOOK OF LIFE:

(opposite) Katherine Palmer, SIPA student, reads a book defying gender stereotypes. I was definitely raised with an empowering family that built me up that made me feel powerful, accepted and equal as a female. I think that those words are something that every girl needs to hear," Palmer said.