Speaker 1: The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Nicki Donnelson: American society has come a long way since the inception of the feminist movement. Even as recently as the 1990s. Gender studies could be seen as quite radical. Now, those same notions are largely internalized for kids, thanks to pop culture references, social media, and positive role modeling.

Nicki Donnelson: I'm Nicki Donnelson. Today, on the Missouri State Journal, I have Dr. Shannon Wooden. She's a professor of English at Missouri State University and the coordinator of the Gender Studies Program.

Nicki Donnelson: It's March, which is known to be celebrated as Women's History Month or Women's HERstory Month. She is here to talk about the evolving role of femininity and masculinity.

Shannon Wooden: If what women's studies in the future is open up new ground for women, then you also have to understand what's going on with men. You have to understand how we're going to share this space, and if we talk about feminine identity without also talking about masculine identity, we are not shaking the actual foundations as much as we're trying to build something new on top of old foundations. The conversations really have to go together. For a long time, they couldn't. For a long time, the work needed to be done on women's lives, period, but we've gotten to a place now where so much of that work is done, and now we can do something that enriches that foundational work of feminism.

Nicki Donnelson: As a literature professor, Wooden studies the great books to look at gender representation, but she also is interested in narratives in movies, television, and advertising in the like, she explains.

Shannon Wooden: Anytime there are human bodies in the story, gender is a factor in the story, and, increasingly, gender is something that you can historicize, so 1950s gender looks quite a bit different from 1980s gender looks quite a bit different from 21st century gender, and it's super interesting to historicize gender in all of these cultural texts to see how it's changed over time.

Nicki Donnelson: As a member in the Women's HERstory Month Planning Committee at Missouri State, Wooden served as a guiding force to ensure that historical female figures continue to be celebrated.

Shannon Wooden: ... because as much as I'm excited about and enthusiastic about where we're going in the future, it's really important that we recognize that powerful and successful and brave women have always been doing the things and that history has been written in a way that those stories haven't been told and circulated and shared. Something like the month of March, Women's HERstory Month, is a great opportunity to share in an enthusiastic and progressive kind of orientation to the future, but also a really great opportunity to share some of those stories from actual history so we can see what our great-grandmothers were doing and what our great-great grandmothers were doing to realize how many examples we have and have always had.

Nicki Donnelson: "The expectations and roles of men and women have been changing drastically and for the better in recent years," noted Wooden. The most notable example is in the conversation surrounding sexual harassment.

Shannon Wooden: There are narratives of interpersonal communication that have always been a particular way regardless of what made women feel safe and happy and comfortable. They always were that way, even when that way was bad, and in the last few years, women have publicly and collectively decided that they're not going to silently put up with stuff anymore, which has been culturally very disruptive in what is uncomfortable, but I think, ultimately, an incredibly valuable way, so you get conversations with people going, "Well, we used to be able to say anything literally 10 years ago. We could talk this way at work. What are we supposed to say now?" You could be real flip and sarcastic. What you say now is not the sexist thing. We've dramatically changed a discourse that was normalized for decades.

Nicki Donnelson: Watching films from the 1980s and 1990s can make you laugh or sigh with nostalgia. Recently, though, more and more people are watching these films and cringing. Molly Ringwald, an actress who starred in films, like Sixteen Candle and Pretty in Pink, recently opened up in an interview about this topic. Wooden shares what stuck out to her.

Shannon Wooden: It was about her experience with John Hughes, and she says, "As an adult woman," she's about my age, she looks back at these films and is horrified that she participated in them, and while knowing John Hughes was really important to her professionally, while it was a wonderful experience for her as an actress, and while she didn't have any problem with it at the time, she looks back and goes, "Oh, look at the narratives I perpetuated."

Shannon Wooden: Dramatic changes fairly quickly for men and women alike as we all wake up to something and go, "Hey, wait a minute. We could actually create a new normal," and that process is never smooth.

Nicki Donnelson: The full schedule of events for Women's HERstory Month is available online. That was Dr. Shannon Wooden. I'm Nicki Donnelson for the Missouri State Journal.

Speaker 1: For more information, contact the office of University Communications at (417)836-6397.