

The struggle to make sense of modern-day feminism

Is it possible to be a debutante, a cheerleader and a feminist all at once?

Usually when I read the editorial columns in the *Old Gold and Black*, I am surprised at how one-sided they are. I do not blame anyone for having an opinion, but am I the only person who doesn't see everything as right or wrong, black or white? While writing this column, I was

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at first ready to present my negative opinions of my experience this summer as a debutante, but then I recalled the more positive aspects of my summer experience as well.

So, if you are interested in a deb-bashing article, you may as well turn the page, because what I have to say is about my experience as a Southern debutante and how it has perhaps changed my perspective on feminism as a whole.

I'm a debutante. So what? Does that make me less of a person? Does the fact that I actually enjoyed a summer full

of tea parties make me a woman who deserves less respect than a woman who spent the summer participating in activities our culture has deemed to be masculine? Am I less of a woman if I decide I don't like wearing skirts all the time?

In the 10th grade, I was a self-proclaimed feminist. Now, granted, I didn't really know the definition of a feminist back then, and I probably don't now. I think I came up with my own concoction of feminism as a retaliation against the boys who continually teased me. I did not, and still do not, believe that women are above men, but I was a strong advocate of equal respect between the sexes, and was easily aggravated by sexist jokes and comments. This would lead boys to further provoke me with comments like, "There are only two rooms in a house where a woman belongs: the bedroom and the kitchen." Occasionally, I would give in and participate in a nice verbal battle, but mostly I just let the comments slide off my back.

However, I was troubled with the fact that I, just like many girls of that age, liked many so-called "girly" things, like gossiping or watching sappy movies. How, I wondered, could I be taken seriously as a young woman when I enjoyed the very things I thought to be male assumptions of the female

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By the end of 10th grade, while contemplating my school's physical education requirements, which mandated that each student to participate in a sport, I debated joining a team whose stereotypical member was, at the time, everything I was attempting not to be. I made my decision by the last day of school that year.

After the summer break, I came back to school as the normal me. I wore the same clothes, got into the same debates with the same boys and hung out with the same friends. However, I had a secret. The first Friday of school came around, as did the first football game of the season, and I showed up to school that day in a forest green, black and white cheerleading uniform. You should have seen the heads turn.

Everyone I saw did a double-take to see if it was actually me, Julia Walthall, the "femi-Nazi" who had joined the varsity cheerleading squad. Many people asked me why I decided to join. I simply said, "It sounded like fun, and I'm good at it." It was then that I adopted my policy of "Who the hell cares?" I decided that I should be respected as a woman no matter what I did.

However, I did not find unconditional respect. When venturing outside of my school community, I would get different reactions from people depending on whether they knew I was a cheerleader or not. If the conversation went on for several minutes before the topic was brought up, everyone was surprised that I was a cheerleader, but they treated me no differently.

If the conversation quickly stumbled upon the fact that I was a cheerleader, I could feel the tone of the conversation change. I could sense people's assumption of my intelligence drop if they knew I was a cheerleader from the beginning.

This dampened my spirits, but had a great impact on my future decision to become a debutante, which finally solidified my perspective on the "feminist" issue.

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high school graduation, I turned over the envelope to make sure they had addressed it to the right person. Were they really inviting the girl who was never considered the "pretty one" or the "popular one"? What were they thinking? Well, I thought that I might as well give it a go, considering it might be a change of pace for both myself and the Debutante Club.

To be totally truthful, I had mocked the whole "deb-bing" process throughout my freshman year, considering it to be foolish, and just something I was doing for a joke. As the summer arrived, I began to be more concerned that I just wouldn't fit in. I do not have a perfect body, or perfect manners. I don't know how to waltz. I thought I would stand out like a vegetarian at a barbecue.

In all honesty, I felt that I didn't fit in. I separated myself from the other girls in thinking that I was not like them. However, as the summer progressed, I realized I was just like them, or, in effect, they were just like me.

Most of us never expected to be a debutante. Yes, there were the few girls who epitomized everything in life that I did not want to be, the majority of the girls were intelligent and independent. I was not the only one making a statement by being a debutante. We were all saying, "We're debutantes! So what?"

Sept. 11 left us with more questions than answers

The only thing Americans can be certain of is that our country will never be the same again.

At this printing, it will have been just over a week since the World Trade Center towers were leveled to the ground and a section of the Pentagon was destroyed. Normally I use the space allotted to me in the *Old Gold and Black* to try and bring some levity to our often stress-filled lives, but this is one instance where such a response would be inappropriate.

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We have heard the president and his advisors and his Cabinet members. We have heard the news analysts, the university experts and the lead investigators. We have heard stories from survivors, from rescue workers and from those who witnessed the incidents. We have heard all of these things, and yet so many of us still cannot find the words to convey what it is that we are feeling.

The morning of the incident I had a 9:30 a.m. broadcast writing class, but was awakened nearly half an hour before my alarm ever went off. I heard running outside in the hallway, and it sounded as if every television in the suite was on. "A plane hit the World Trade Center!" I heard someone outside say.

How horrible, I thought, disregarding it as probably nothing more than a freak accident. But then I turned on the television, and right before my eyes a second plane pummeled the building.

This is no accident, I thought, suddenly tasting bile and feeling the heavy sensation of horror in my gut.

Almost immediately, I began to wonder if I knew anyone directly who could have been injured or killed in the attacks. Unlike so many of my grieving classmates and colleagues, I was able to say a prayer of thanks for the fact that my family and friends all seemed to be safe – or so I hoped.

The night of the 11th, I called someone whose family I had worried about all day – Erin, a close friend from high school, and her family. Originally from Queens, another borough of New York City, I knew that they still had relatives and loved ones in the city. Fortunately everyone was safe and accounted for.

Something that Erin's mother said to me on the phone has stuck in my mind. "I know I don't sound like a good Christian woman right now," she said, her voice still shaking nearly 12 hours after the attacks, "but we need to go over to Afghanistan, find their president and murder him."

According to an informal ABC News poll, something on the order of 80 percent of Americans surveyed seem to share her convictions.

A friend of mine seemed to unknowingly confirm all of this when he said, "They don't realize that if they mess with us again, there's going to be a crater where Iraq and Afghanistan used to be."

Even over a week later, I am now fully and utterly confused. On the one hand, punishment in some form is entirely appropriate, considering that the full death toll (at my deadline) has not

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yet been determined and that hundreds, if not thousands, are still in New York area hospitals. Our country must do something to respond, and I have full confidence that our president and Congress will do everything in their power to make certain that justice is served.

But on the other hand, I wonder if we have reduced ourselves to the same level as the terrorists who did this to our country when we embrace violence and weapons of mass destruction as appropriate forms of retaliation. Thousands of our civilians were killed ... so does that mean that we, who claim to be more civilized, should kill thousands of their civilians? Assume that this does become the case, and that we bomb those countries responsible until nothing even remotely recognizable remains.

Will the rest of the world cringe in horror when media shows Americans dancing in the streets rejoicing, just as we cringed in horror when our media showed us Palestinians rejoicing?

My parents came to the school that night in order to bring me my mail and some other items ... that, and I think they just wanted reassurance that I was safe.

I asked my father, who is a Baptist minister, why this happened. "To the people that did this," he answered after a considerable pause, "we are the enemy."

Most Americans never had any idea that our country was considered to be someone's "enemy." For the most part we are peaceful and we work things out ... we are, after all, the "world's policeman." But it seems that certain other countries want to see us ruined.

Everyone at this university is intelligent in some capacity – this apparently includes myself, but I do not have the knowledge or the brainpower to figure out why someone would do this to us.

On our campus, in our city, in our state and in our country we pride ourselves so often on our ability to work out our differences with words than causing ruin we would later regret with violence. By no means are we perfect, but we try.

I certainly do not hate anyone, although this may sometimes seem otherwise – as a humor writer, it is more or less my "beat" to poke fun at those situations or people that most of us are irritated or annoyed by. These attacks, however, go well beyond "irritating" or "annoying." These acts of cowardice wound every American, whether or not you can feel it yet.

So it is with this column that I apologize for my apparent lack of sensitivity in last week's issue of the *OG&B*. Certainly, when I submitted last week's column on the afternoon of Sept. 10, there was no indication that any event of this magnitude was to happen. It is with deepest sympathy and with utter shock and disbelief that I send the people of the United States my thoughts and my prayers following these hideous attacks.

To echo the president – God bless America.



Backlash against Arabs is patriotism gone awry

Arab Americans should not be made guilty by association.

We are all trying to cope with what occurred on Sept. 11th in our different ways. Some can be found in church seeking refuge in their faith; others find the best way to deal is to remain busy, burying themselves in work.

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Others find comfort in the hours they wait to give blood, the gaps in their closets due to the clothes they have donated. Still others find what they seek amongst the stars and between the red and white stripes of Old Glory herself, a message of retaliation, reason and consequence giving them hope.

In whatever way you are finding that which you need, I make this one request: be wary and aware of where your anger is placed.

After World War II and the containment of thousands of Japanese Americans being written into our history books, our movie scripts, our novels and our collective consciousness, I never would have dreamed I would hear, read and see what has been happening today. Arab Americans, threatened, attacked, harassed, *blamed* for

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something they had nothing to do with based on their ethnicity and religion.

It is happening everywhere: a radio DJ here in Winston-Salem calling for the closing of our borders to Arabs, mass e-mails threatening deportation, store clerks in New York being beaten behind their counters, a mosque in Australia bombed – the list goes on.

Are we really that blind in our anger and pain? We all want the people responsible for this brought to justice, but does that mean that every Arab walking down the street was a conspirator? By calling for the deportation of Arabs or by bombing mosques, how are we any better than the terrorists who bombed innocent Americans because of grievances they had with our government?

I understand that I am perhaps preaching to the choir. As a group of educated, worldly, and conspicuously draft age young people, we are perhaps (hopefully) more inclined to seek justice for those who are guilty by association instead of by birth. But are we not part of this American community that everyone is so happy to

see coming together? When the Winston-Salem DJ asks callers what they think of the deportation of Arabs from this country, are we not just as much the public as a Winston resident?

This school has long been described as a "bubble" school and as we make efforts to reach outside of that bubble to help and support people in need, I suggest we also reach out and truly take a stand in this awakening American community.

I beg you to speak out against the wrongs that are being committed against your fellow Americans. I beg you to take a stand and let people know that this type of behavior, this method of coping, is not only inappropriate but outright wrong. Nothing is accomplished by more needless body bags.

The people who believe that attacking, threatening or getting rid of Arabs is the answer to our problems believe also that they have the support of the American people. We need to let them know that this is not the case.

The flags that wave from balconies, doorways, walls, and signs shine, as symbols of an amazing American spirit that I believe truly existed. Please don't let this symbol, this spirit, be tarnished by the deeds of other Americans acting on its behalf. Speak out against this aggression, and do it today. If we remain silent, then we are no better than the terrorists ... we simply lack the plane.