

Messaging For Peace: My experience

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Hello, I'm Lisa Leitz, and I am a military spouse. As a peace activist and academic, especially in the interdisciplinary fields of Peace Studies and Sociology, this requires you come out or at least prepare a declaration like you are introducing yourself at an AA meeting. However, by being in both communities—one working toward peace and justice and one paid to enact war, I have been given incredible access to the ways that peace and justice messaging influences different groups of people and the ways that movements construct strategies for such messaging.

Thus, I draw on my 20+ years involved in and observing peace movements (and 30+ participating other social justice topics) along with working with undergraduates on numerous social justice issues since I began teaching in early 2004. In addition to the 10-year ethnography of what I called the “military peace movement” or veterans and military families in the anti-Iraq and Afghanistan War movement, I have also actively studied and/or participated in other peace activism, the animal rights movement, and economic justice and homelessness activism. My early background was in the anti-rape & sexual harassment movement, leading into my scholarship and oversight of student groups dealing with the reproductive justice movement and other activism on behalf of gender and sexual identity equality. Today as editor of *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change* I oversee the publication of peer-reviewed scholarship about this topic as well. All of this is to say that professionally and personally, my focus is on making systemic changes that make the world better.

This paper is intended to translate my experiences and expertise on the antiwar movement into lessons for the future, for myself and for others invested in peace and justice

activism. I hope to make suggestions that can be utilized by the nuclear disarmament movement; both the antiwar and nuclear movements share a similar location within the realm of (inter)national security. The all-volunteer force and the fact that U.S. wars have largely been fought abroad in the last century allows for greater similarity between these issues; both wars and nuclear threats may seem abstract and unimportant for most Americans. Thus, despite the enormous percentage of the national budget devoted to national security (typically estimated at 50% of the discretionary budget of the U.S.), and the threats both have on life, these issues struggle for prioritization in the national consciousness.

Thus for this work, I encourage a consideration of messages, but I do so as more than the what (or go beyond the words, slogans and stories) to examine the who and the how of messaging. To assess who, I think we must consider both the target, or the types of persons we are trying to influence, and the messenger/speaker. Regarding the how of messaging, I draw on the scholarship around frame resonance and other types of movement reception, that attempt to examine both audience thinking and emotions. We need to focus on how does the messages make people feel and how do those emotions encourage memory and spur actions. Some emotions are more productive for having messages resonate and produce action in favor of a movement.

Target and Movement Identities

Targeting the Public: Attention

In the summer of 2005, major media attention was focused on Cindy Sheehan; the cable networks of CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News along with the major news magazines and papers spent considerable attention on her antiwar protests outside of President G. W. Bush's Texas

ranch. In the hot August heat and humidity, Sheehan and her supporters camped in a ditch, and set up signs and memorials. Although Sheehan was not alone when during the four weeks (in fact she left to visit her sick mother for a short time), one could be forgiven for thinking that Cindy was the only or most savvy one there. of the military peace movement in the ditch where the protest was allowed in rural Texas. Cindy was grieving the loss of her son, and her questions and heartbreak over the U.S.-led war in Iraq resonated with a good deal of the American public. The public gave her standing, as a grieving mother. the movement called this “skin in the game.”

Cindy Sheehan’s son, Army Specialist Casey Sheehan, was 24 when he was killed in Iraq in April 2004; Casey had reenlisted after his initial commitment as an enlisted soldier, and the timing suggests that he knew he’d likely go to Iraq. He had been there less than a month before being killed in combat. On Mother’s Day of 2004, Cindy Sheehan went to Santa Barbara, California to memorialize Casey and share her grief at a display of crosses that was put in the sand beside the tourist attraction of Stearns Wharf. Artists, activists, and the local chapter of Veterans for Peace had created and maintained this weekly vigil of acknowledging the war dead since November 2003. The candlelight vigil that Mother’s Day was where she made one of her first speeches and began to attract attention from the media and other antiwar activists.

In grief and in opposition to the war, Cindy connected with Military Families Speak Out, and over time they put her in touch with other parents of deceased soldiers; by the end of 2004 these bereaved families, whom the military designates as “Gold Star families” created an organization that was part support group and part activism: Gold Star Families for Peace. By early 2005 the group had attracted some media attention, and Cindy’s ability to travel (no young children, no career, and substantial payout from Casey’s death) allowed her to speak to numerous peace organizations across the Southwest.

Veterans for Peace invited her to speak to their 2005 Dallas convention. At the end of her speech to the hundreds gathered for the conference, Sheehan announced that she was going to demand a meeting from President Bush to get some answers about the war, which had not uncovered links to 9/11 or weapons of mass destruction, from. The President was vacationing at his Texas ranch, less than two hours away from the convention. Sheehan rode the red, white, and blue Veterans for Peace bus to Crawford, Texas, with a couple dozen veterans and a handful of military family members. The protest became known as "Camp Casey" using military lingo for their new ditch home on the road of Crawford that led to the Bush ranch. This small group was soon joined by thousands of like-minded supporters, especially as word spread via MoveOn, then one of the major organizers in anti-war and liberal politics. Many of these individuals had compelling stories as grieving parents and veterans that were carried by newspapers along with quotes from the dozens of celebrities (such as Martin Sheen and Joan Baez) that came to Camp Casey. They also attracted counter-protests and enraged locals, some who spat or shot guns in the air.

Two years after the U.S. entry into the Iraq War, most media outlets had cut back coverage of the war significantly, and American attention had shifted to economic and other domestic issues. Political journalists, bored by the vacation and Texas location of the President, pivoted to cover a grieving mother and a supposedly callous president who refused to meet with her. This provided a new angle, and one that confronted the higher cost to the U.S. military than had been expected by the military brass. Further, Cindy and her supporters constantly repeated, a key question of "why," and influenced American acceptance of the causes of the war.

Although 2005 was a very different media landscape, a good story with a sympathetic everyday person standing up to power is critical to attract and keep attention. In telling our

stories and pushing forward those we hope to use to attract attention, first, we need to consider what may help a story resonate. It mattered that Cindy was a mother—gender was a key component of her visibility, and grieving mothers are often the targets of attention in any tragic story, including guns in schools and the Benghazi embassy attack. While there may not be many grieving mothers alive affected by the use or tests of nuclear bombs, nuclear threats have the potential to produce a multitude of grieving mothers. Further, what made this simple story so compelling, was that the movement was not trying to answer Cindy’s question of “why did we go into this war?” but maintained the narrow focus on the lives seemingly lost for nothing. Considering this, perhaps the lesson of simplicity is most useful for the nuclear movement in attracting attention and illuminating an antiwar frame. We can see this is research that suggests **Single-war antiwar movements have the fortune of** crafting a simple narrative without confronting the wider nationalist or militaristic tendencies of their country (cite), and movements generally benefit from the greater efficacy of single-issue protest (Gamson 1990). Peace movements rarely have direct policy influence or access to policymakers, and thus they must public opinion, and hope to influence politicians afraid of losing their jobs (McAdam and Su 2002).

Speakers and Patriotism, Militarism, and Expertise

As a grad student at UCSB in 2002 I helped to organize campus-community protests during the drumbeats of war in Iraq. UCSB has a long history of radical protest, so it was unsurprising to me when faculty and students expressed disagreement with government plans to pursue military action in Iraq. We gathered in parks and at key intersections along with holding teach-ins about the wars in the Middle East. On September 21, 2002 the media estimated about

400 participants protested along Santa Barbara's main tourist and commercial area, primarily walking with signs, music, and chanting from the beach about a mile to a park. As an early grad student I was naïve in my understanding of veterans past involvement in antiwar activity, particularly during Vietnam, so I was surprised and mesmerized by the men wearing hats that signified their military service, primarily in Vietnam and Korea, along with their banner that proclaimed them “Veterans for Peace”. Over the next few weeks, I watched as participants asked them to stand at the front of the parade, and they became the de facto parade leaders for the months of street marches.

Veteran leadership was widely accepted as a form of veteran authority based on their experience with war. I saw veterans asked to lead marches in downtown Los Angeles, Washington, DC, New York City, and numerous smaller cities and towns across the United States. This contrasted the targeting of the peace movement as unpatriotic, naive, irresponsible, and dangerous. It was critically important post-9/11 for the antiwar movement, facing the surge in patriotism in the U.S., to demonstrate its claims to that concept (Coy, Woehrle, and Maney 2008; Heaney and Rojas 2006). The veterans offered an embodiment of the peace movement rhetoric that peace was patriotic.

Veterans referenced their oaths to the U.S. constitution rather than to a single president or policy. This allowed for patriotism to be redefined as commitment to democratic ideals rather than loyalty to any politician’s war policies. Peace and antiwar movements provide a challenge to the very definition of the core duty of a government to protect its people. However, by doing this with people connected to a military and with experience in a specific war or with policymaking, a movement can claim expertise in line with that offered by the government itself.ⁱ

The difficulty of bringing peace politics inside government to policymakers can be seen when the largest global protests in history, the February 15, 2003 global protests opposing the soon U.S.-led war in Iraq (Rucht 2010), failed to convince American politicians to not engage in the war. Once the war began, with significant public favor (cite Pew), my attention gradually shifted to politics, and in the fall of 2004, I was asked to moderate a panel with Elizabeth Edwards, wife of then Vice Presidential candidate John Edwards, for Panhandle (Florida) for Kerry. Although I was relatively new to volunteering with the organization, Elizabeth had asked to meet with a military spouse when she came back to Pensacola, FL, where she had spent time during her father's Naval career and where her parents were married. Her father, like my husband, was a Navy pilot, so I was chosen to moderate a discussion with her. Shortly after this, I was asked to join the campaign as part of a group called "Military Moms on a Mission." We women, not all of us mothers, whose purpose was to question Bush's policies on Iraq and overall treatment of the military. This was to counter the "swiftboating" of John Kerry, which questioned the legitimacy of Kerry's purple heart, earned in Vietnam as a captain of a swift boat; much of the ire derived from Kerry's antiwar protests after his service, which was seen as disloyal to the country and veterans in some conservative circles.

Of course, the Johns (Kerry and Edwards) lost that election, but I see my time on the campaign trail as instructive of the rarity of bringing a peace voice into traditional politics. We brought an explicitly antiwar challenge to current U.S. policy to stages with now President Biden and former Secretary of State Madeline Albright. During a standing room only event in Morgantown, West Virginia, hundreds of locals (and the CSPAN audience) stayed for nearly minutes of conversation about the lack of military preparation for the Iraq War, its effects on

military families, and questions of whether we should have gone there in first place. One member of the group discussed her son Zachary's experience during two Marine deployments and described herself as a registered Republican. She said, "The president lied to us about why we were going in, he rushed to get in there, he wouldn't listen to his generals, he wouldn't listen to anyone."

During the first week of my time on the campaign trail, we were asked to do an interview with Fox News (it was the first of three with two being live). They incorporated our perspectives into a larger article on "Security Moms" or women for whom war and international issues drove their voting, and which they believed made up a significant chunk of the electorate. I was quoted discussing how killing civilians leads to terrorism. I cannot say I see much of that covered on Fox, and I doubt they've brought many Sociology or Peace Studies scholars there to discuss war and peace. Instead, we typically see generals or people from foreign policy think tanks, typically hawks, asked to provide a perspective. This time 4 antiwar women, with varying levels of foreign policy background, were heard; all because we had a military connection. We were afforded standing on the topic—with some perhaps even offering us expertise. We also were invited into the realm of politics and held small as well as large meetings with policymakers—we got to be part of the conversation on national security, which is still rare for peace movements.

Emotional Appeals

Make 'em Cry—Shared Humanity

After living on Naval Air Stations in the U.S. South, I returned to Santa Barbara and to graduate school in 2005. A Mississippi woman I had befriended while my partner was stationed at NAS Meridian accompanied me on my cross-country drive, and when we arrived, I offered to show her the area. I took her to the beach and its popular tourist attraction, Stearns Wharf. There we saw the original visualization of America's war dead in Iraq, the so-called Arlington West. My companion, Anne, cried and took time to chat with the volunteers handing out literature. She took many pictures and extra handouts to share in her Mississippi Episcopal church and her friend groups. I was impressed with the tactic and the activists' weekly commitment, but with my life so closely tied to the war, I was less surprised or moved. However, Anne's reaction caused me to look around at how many tourists stopped to talk with the activists and just how many seemed to have tears in their eyes. Anne could not stop talking about the memorial display, and she asked my housemates and friends about it. Most had seen it, and they agreed it was sad and powerful.

Arlington West became my Sunday morning ritual for nearly three years and sporadically for the year after that. Every Sunday I was in town, I went to Stearns Wharf to help set up, take down, and/or maintain the so-called Arlington West display that helped to make Cindy Sheehan who she was. Members of VFP, MFSO and other local peace activists carefully lined up the white wooden crosses into regimental rows in the sand. We made a name tag to document each U.S. casualty, because every week we would have some family, friends, former teachers ,or neighbors who would come to pay their respects. While the display acted as a memorial for these people, its intended purpose, and one it served well in my estimation, was that it kept people's awareness on "the human cost of war."

While at Arlington West I talked with thousands of people. I know that general number not because I took meticulous notes, but because of the tens of thousands of postcards/literature I handed out. For most of my time at Arlington West, my husband, David was deployed aboard the USS Nimitz, flying missions in Afghanistan, Iraq, the South China Sea, and interacting with Russian bears (planes..). I told people about that, and it always seemed to result in a shocked head pull back or a physical startle. So many would teer up or try to hold my hand. Some would say they had “nearly forgotten about” the wars or just assumed the politicians were right, but after seeing the memorial and talking with me, many promised to learn more. Others told me that they supported the war, but that they had questions. For those who said they opposed the war, some said it inspired music (Annie Lennox) or other forms of engaging to try to end the war.

It wasn't just me who talked with the tourists and other visitors. Every new person was given informal training about their work at Arlington West, and largely only veterans and military families were allowed the work of engaging passersby. It was intentional because the activists said we made a greater impact on them. One veteran stood out because of his white beard and infectious smile. In his Austrian accent he told me about his work as a Hollywood sound engineer and his work behind as a radio operator in Europe during the war. Mischa Seligman's hat often caught people's eye, and they asked if he really was a WWII veteran, and many wanted to know what he thought about the war and protests against it.

Reaching beyond the Choir

The stories of most of today's military members are not as simple as choices between war and peace. They are choices about access to jobs, health insurance, and opportunities. Let me tell

you the story of retired colonel and former member of the State Department, Anne Wright. When I interviewed (Mary) Anne Wright she recalled her own reasons for joining the military. In her junior year at the University of Arkansas Army recruiters visited her school. She remembers her strong desire to get out of Arkansas and go beyond the three jobs that she believed were available to her sex,

The opportunities were being a schoolteacher, being a nurse, or being an old lady. And all three are very honorable professions, but I didn't want to do any of them. I wanted to travel and unfortunately it was during the Vietnam War. And yet the group who came through the university had jobs for travel. The main group was the U.S. Army. "Join the Army, see the world." And women at that point weren't given arms training, weapons training. You were non-combatant. And most women were nurses, but there was the women's Army Corp. Administrative.

The summer before my junior year, they said they had this thing called the College Junior Program. You go for two weeks and just see if you like the Army. So...and will pay you an exorbitant sum of money. At that time is, like, \$200. And it was, like, "Oh, that will be interesting....and it sure doesn't look like the Army is hard. All you do is march. And I can march." And that would pay for other things that I wanted to do during the summer. So, I went to it and had a very fun time. The people were doing the same thing I was, getting money from the military. We weren't about to join the Army. We had such a good time and we said, "Well, if we all join, then the next year we will all go through basic training together and that's twelve weeks, or whatever it was at the time. And uh...we only have to serve two years and the Army said if you join up we'll pay you through your senior year of college. And all of us wanted money... Well, I wanted to get out of Arkansas. So, it was to get out of Arkansas really. And get away from the three jobs available for women.

Well, the first year I went to the Presidio in San Francisco. That was a good reason to stay for a while when your first assignment is something like that. And then I decided I wanted to go to Vietnam. I wanted to see what was going on there, but I didn't get

selected because they were so few that went over there. And I ended up going to Europe in a small little NATO Command in the Netherlands and so for two years I was up there. It was really great getting to see the world. And I liked the world so much that I didn't want to stop.

And after two years when the Army said that I had to go back to Fort Bragg, Alabama, which was home of the U.S. Army Corp. I said, "Thank you very much, I've done my time. I'm getting off active duty." I stayed in Europe for another three years as a civilian and traveled around and took trips all over the world...cheap little hippy trips, like going to London to Katmandu over land in six months.. (During Army Reserve duty) I got a job with the U.S. Navy that was in Athens, Greece in 1972 and then stayed in the Army Reserves and flew back to Europe or to Germany to do active duty time.

While Anne's extensive experience in the military, rank as a retired Colonel, and her later experience in the diplomatic corps set her apart from many other veterans I have met in the movement, her motivations and understandings of the military and patriotism did not. In fact, they are much more similar to the people the peace movement struggles to reach.....

I think of Anne Wright when I think of extraordinary women of her generation, and it was the Army, during war time, that allowed her so many opportunities denied to other women of her generation. For some in the military peace movement, deindustrialization and the lack of money or grades for higher education made the military attractive. For some, like Geoff Millard whose New York National Guard Unit had been called up following 9/11, the fear of terrorism and the general patriotism of the moment had had a profound influence on decisions to stay in or sign up for the military. On paper few might expect that these individuals would take part in the peace movement, but I offer the banality of their militarism, to demonstrate that perhaps more people are reachable than could be considered. AND these people whose experiences look like those we might link to Trump or to the wider right, are exactly those we should use to reach beyond the

activists on the left. We need a broad movement to address any peace-related issue. There are so many money and military connections (MIC) that work against the peace movement...

Applicability to Northern Ireland, soldiers' prominence elsewhere...

Give them Hope

Vision for a better future??

If the Iraq war offers us lessons in how to grab and hold media attention, it also shows us the limitations of strategies aimed at the public and media. Although public opinion turned against the war, politicians continued to fund it and look for military solutions in Iraq for at least another decade. The over-reliance on targeting the public and media, rather than policymakers, seems to have substantial consequences for the movements' inability to translate their demands into policy.

References

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¹ It should be noted that veteran authority within the antiwar movement was not monolithic. In Santa Barbara, CA alone, the acceptance of military veterans caused frustration by some grad students and likely others who saw their whiteness, presumed heterosexuality, and symbols of patriotism as problematic to a wider, more global left cause (see Currans, et al 2011). I, too, had complicated feelings about the military then—and to be honest, I still do.