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Thesis Abstract

This is an analysis of a sample of writings by Cindy Sheehan to identify her rhetorical strategies in her anti-war rhetoric. A selection of artifacts has been made covering the time of her activation after the death of her son through the time of her hunger strike in the summer of 2006. This analysis deems Sheehan as a feminist who arches from second to third wave feminist in voice. It also examines how Sheehan reframes the United States from a country with many small family units to a single national family unit. And finally, this paper will observe how Sheehan violates the expectation of civility with her cynical approach. Combining together, it is found that Sheehan holds many contextual factors that create a unique rhetoric of grief that may not be duplicated if all contextual factors are not identical for another rhetorician.
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Chapter One: an introduction

War can radically shape any society. But a quick study of many popular accounts of war and conflict reveal a bias. Strategies, battles, leaders and campaigns receive a tremendous amount of coverage in communicative domains such as cable television, cinema, and even school classrooms. Obviously, war radically reshapes the lives of the people who fight them. But it is also true that the families, friends, and communities of the combatants are also marked by the conflict. This thesis looks to the rhetoric of one American who had felt the impact of the war and made strong public commentary about it. But are the behaviors and rhetoric of this single person, Cindy Sheehan, unique? Does the vocality of Cindy Sheehan represent a fundamentally new phenomenon in wartime rhetoric? To investigate the historic relationship between families, soldiers, and the wars that their communities fight, we must look towards some of the earliest recorded conflicts in the Western tradition.

The widespread effect of conflict on the community has been understood for centuries. In ancient Greece, the two major city-states of Athens and Sparta were plagued by war. The Peloponnesian War (431 B.C. – 404 B.C.) represents a pivotal moment in Ancient Greece culture. By the end of the conflict, the loose collection of city-states began to coalesce on the European peninsula abandoning their historic connections to Asia Minor. Described in this way, the war of Athens and Sparta is purely an affair of geography and control. Fortunately, Thucydides’ account of these events does more than recount the shifting borders of ancient states. Of all the texts in his history, Thucydides’ account of Pericles’ funeral oration is one that is interesting to any scholar who may study rhetoric during wartime.
The oration is unique and very intriguing. It appears as an actual speech given by the leader of Athens to the Athenian people. As such, it is one of the very few complete speeches to emerge from antiquity. By carefully examining this text, we can better understand the exigence and context under which it was spoken. Furthermore, these considerations will give us an insight into the war-time audience and the families and citizens that first heard it.

**War and Rhetoric: Pericles’ Funeral Oration**

The funeral oration was a traditional speech given in ancient Athens. It was custom in Athens to give a public funeral for all of the soldiers who were killed in the first wave of war. This funeral’s custom was to lay all the soldiers’ bones in a tent two days prior to the funeral itself and allow the people of the nation to come and make any offerings they wished to their dead. The procession began after the second day and included one coffin for each tribe, which contained the bones of all of its fallen members and one additional coffin which was left empty to signify the loss of those soldiers whose bodies could not be found. This procession was open to anybody, whether citizen or foreigner, and the women related to any of the dead were often present to make their expressions of grief at the burial site itself (Thucydides, trans. 1954).

All the coffins were placed in the public burial site, just outside the city walls, in what was considered the most beautiful place in the region. At this final location, speeches were offered to the community on behalf and in honor of the fallen. The man chosen to speak for his reputation and intellectual gifts was expected to praise the dead. Once completed, the audience was expected to return to the city to resume their lives (Thucydides, trans. 1954).
When the time came during The Peloponnesian War, a funeral was held in Athens and the city asked Pericles to give the oration. After the bones were placed in the burial ground, Pericles took his place on a high platform and spoke. First, he told his audience, “Many of those who have spoken here in the past have praised the institution of this speech at the close of our ceremony. It seemed to them a mark of honor to our soldiers who have fallen in war that a speech should be made over them. I do not agree,” (Thucydides, trans. 1954). Pericles continues by explaining that he feels the soldiers’ actions showed their heroics and that should be enough because “Our belief in the courage and manliness of so many should not be hazarded on the goodness or badness of one man’s speech,” (Thucydides, trans. 1954).

Pericles tells his mourning listeners why he is there and what he is going to talk about. On why he is there, Pericles says,

Praise of other people is tolerable only up to a certain point, the point where one still believes that one could do oneself some of the things one is hearing about. Once you get beyond this point, you will find people becoming jealous and incredulous. However, the fact is that this institution was set up and approved by our forefathers, and it is my duty to follow the tradition and do my best to meet the wishes and the expectations of every one of you, (Thucydides, trans. 1954).

Since he has told us that he is going to give the speech because that is what is expected of him, Pericles then tells about what he wants to talk about. “I shall begin by speaking about our ancestors…They certainly deserve our praise,” (Thucydides, trans. 1954). He continues by saying “What I want to do is…discuss the spirit in which we faced our trials and also our constitution and the way of life which has made us great. After that I shall
speak in praise of the dead, believing that this kind of speech is not inappropriate to the present,” (Thucydides, trans. 1954). Pericles lays out the order of things of which he plans to speak here. This is important because he shows us that he is not going to give the dead priority in this speech, and in fact is going to tell the audience why he does not believe that speaking in praise of the dead is even appropriate. This particular preview is interesting because Pericles is preparing to use the history of Athens and its bloodshed to effectively meet the needs of the present day mourners. This was a good approach for Pericles because he did not feel as compelled to focus the entire speech’s attention on praising the dead, but instead emphasized honoring the sacrifices of the ancestors.

At this point in the funeral oration, Pericles begins to talk about Athens and its people.

Let me say that our system of government does not copy the institutions of our neighbors…and, just as our political life is free and open, so is our day-to-day life in our relations with each other. We do not get into a state with our next-door neighbor if he enjoys himself in his own way…We are free and tolerant in our private lives; but in public affairs we keep to the law…We give our obedience to those whom we put in positions of authority, and we obey the laws themselves, especially those which are for the protection of the oppressed, and those unwritten laws which it is an acknowledged shame to break, (Thucydides, trans. 1954).

These beliefs of openness, obedience, and tolerance are only the beginning of what Pericles tells his mourning listeners are admirable qualities of Athenians. Though Pericles leads with a discussion about how freedom is essential to the Athens society, he consistently returns to the overall need for obedience. This need for obedience is asserted
more than once to establish his role. Pericles is the current leader of this group of mourners, and his instance that his audience be obedient is not just to create good overall citizens, but also to allow for him to instruct the audience on their roles and duties later in this oration.

Pericles also stresses the superiority of the Athenian city-state. He is concise when he compares Athens to other city nations, “There is a great difference between us and our opponents, in our attitudes towards military security…this is one point in which, I think, our city deserves to be admired,” (Thucydides, trans. 1954). When Pericles is talking about military security, he is referring to the openness of their tactics. He feels this is admirable because the city is not to be secretive and because the soldiers and citizens rely on real courage and loyalties to each other. The other differences between Athens and other cities that Pericles praises included their love of beauty without the desire for extravagance, proper use of wealth, and “here each individual is interested not only in his own affairs, but in the affairs of the state as well,” (Thucydides, trans. 1954). The final reason that he gives for Athens being different from other cities is because “We make friends by doing good to others, not by receiving good from them,” and “taking everything together then, I declare that our city is an education to Greece, and I declare that in my opinion each single one of our citizens…is able to show himself the rightful lord and owner of his own person,” (Thucydides, trans. 1954).

Having spoken to the needs of the present moment, Pericles turns to addressing about the dead soldiers who were laid to rest that day. “This, then, is the kind of city for which these men, who could not bear the thought of losing her, nobly fought and nobly died,” (Thucydides, trans. 1954). The men who have died in service to Athens “have
blotted out evil with good, and done more service to the commonwealth than they ever
did harm in their private lives…so and such they were, these men – worthy of their city,“
(Thucydides, trans. 1954).

Though Pericles spoke briefly about the soldiers during his oration, he
immediately returns to speaking about the great city of Athens and how this day is about
the city just as much as it is about the fallen men. Pericles tells the audience that “what I
would prefer is that you should fix your eyes every day on the greatness of Athens as she
really is, and should fall in love with her. When you realize her greatness, then reflect
that what made her great was men with a spirit of adventure, men who knew their duty,
men who were ashamed to fall below a certain standard…they made up their minds that
at any rate the city should not find their courage lacking to her, and they gave to her the
best contribution that they could. They gave her their lives,” (Thucydides, trans. 1954).
This is Pericles explanation of the great traditions that Athens has had of noble sacrifice
of its citizens for the city-state’s greater good. He is establishing that there is not a need
to mourn for the soldiers that were being buried that day, but a need to rejoice in their
noble glory. It is because of these men who have died in service that Athenians can find
great courage and true heroism in Pericles point of view. He is continuing to establish
through this section that there is a need for obedience – in this particular excerpt, the
obedience is through subordination to the greater good and to the city itself, but there is
still a need for citizens to be obedient.

Pericles turns his attention from the dead to the living, and begins addressing
those who are in his audience that day. He speaks directly to the parents, the sons, the
brothers, and then addresses the women who are widowed. When he addresses the
parents, he tries to comfort them, and when he addresses the sons and brothers, he empathizes with their upcoming struggles, but when he addresses the widows, he tells them what their duties as women are. He tells the women “the greatest glory of a woman is to be least talked about by men, whether they are praising you or criticizing you,” (Thucydides, trans. 1954). After telling the women to find a way to avoid being talked about – to blend into the background of life – he departs with his finals words, “And now, when you have mourned for your dear ones, you must depart,” (Thucydides, trans. 1954). There is no question what Pericles wants his audience to do, he is telling each person that it is imperative that they leave the graves and go home.

When Pericles gives this funeral oration, he is asked to do so because of his scholarly values, reputation, and leadership. He is considered the leader of this funeral procession and the people of Athens are aware of his leadership and are prepared to listen to what he says. Pericles explains to his audience that he does not feel speech is what honors the fallen soldiers, but their noble actions in the battlefield shows how heroic they were. He continues to tell his audience what he feels are the most important reasons for these men to have died for their country, and what makes such a sacrifice noble and honorable. According to Pericles, sacrificing for one’s country is honorable, obedience is honorable, and the willingness to be open – to show one’s true courage – is honorable. The need to speak about those things is not honorable, and with that he tells his audience to mourn for their loss of loved ones, but depart and go home.

Recently, in the United States, one woman, Cindy Sheehan, publicly rejected these classical themes, and in so doing, makes a name for herself in the public sphere. Unlike her Athenian predecessors, she did not quietly return to the city and resume her
life. Instead, she continued to mourn—loudly and forcefully. In doing so, she brought up very specific questions about the conflict in which her son was killed. It is clear that Pericles emphasizes a particular kind of death—a noble death in the service of the state. This raises the question, is that what really happens when a family losses a loved one who went off to fight in a war? Are wars always just? Are the dead ever fearful? Do soldiers and citizens alike think about other things besides service to the State?

But at the same time, she also brought up many broad theoretical questions about the responsibilities of citizens and the limits of speech during times of conflict. Because of her public mourning, protesting, and doubting powerfully contributed to raising her to celebrity status. To better understand the context of Cindy Sheehan’s times and actions, it is necessary to first take a look at the conflict that triggered her public mourning.

**The Iraq War: A history lesson**

Most U.S. citizens, if not all, can tell you exactly where they were on the morning of September 11, 2001. This was the day that many in the U.S. had their first real experiences with terror and terrorism and it is a day that has lived on in United States’ history since. It has also be referred to as “the day when the world stopped spinning” (Jackson, 2003) in songs and manuscripts describing the events, emotions, reactions, and feelings of that day. According to CNN.com, at 8:45 a.m. a plane was flown into the first of the two World Trade Center towers (2001). Less than twenty minutes later a second plane crashed into the second tower. At 9:43 a.m. a third plane crashed into the Pentagon, while within twenty-five more minutes a fourth plane crashed in a field in Somerset County, Pennsylvania, assumed to be heading towards Washington D.C. like the third plane, but diverted when the passengers tried to overtake the hijackers (CNN,
2001). These four planes, two American Airlines and two United Airlines cross-country jets – all with full fuel tanks – all hijacked by armed terrorists and used as missiles when flown into buildings to cause mass destruction (Smithsonian, 2002). These four planes caused more than 3,000 deaths (Smithsonian, 2002) within a time period of less than two hours (CNN, 2001). Many things were changed in the U.S. because of these attacks including procedures within airports and actual signs of what most people call patriotism, legislation, and citizens’ beliefs of personal safety within the United States borders.

On March 20, 2003 the U.S. invaded Iraq in response to these September 11\textsuperscript{th} terrorist attacks. This invasion turned into what is known as the Iraq War, which still and at the time that this paper was written, continues. This invasion, under the codename “Operation Iraqi Freedom,” was rationalized to the U.S. public by the Bush administration by claiming Iraq had weapons of mass destruction that posed a looming threat to the U.S., as well as the rest of the world – these assertions have been proven to be false (CIA, 2005). Additional reasons given include concerns of terrorism, abusive persons in governmental leadership roles, and issues involving oil (CIA, 2005). Though this invasion was what appeared to be the government’s as a reaction to the attacks on 9-11 and many people supported such actions originally, since the invasion has occurred, many people have now called for the withdrawal of U.S. forces and an end to this war.

**Cindy Sheehan: A war mother’s perspective**

One of those people who have publicly called for the withdrawal of the troops is Cindy Sheehan. Motivated by the death of her eldest son, she has made it a personal mission to find a way to end the war, bring home the men and women servicing the U.S. military in Iraq, and to find a way to end President Bush’s presidency because of her
beliefs about him and his morals. Sheehan has made her mission clear by telling President Bush “We are going to do everything in our power to have you impeached for misleading the American people into a disastrous war and for mis-using and abusing your power as Commander-in-Chief,” (Sheehan, November 4, 2004). Since her son’s death, Sheehan has been a public figure surrounded by controversy because of her views, protests, and methods for expressing her dismay – all of which make her an interesting subject of a rhetorical study.

It is commonly said that the worst thing a parent could endure is to lose a child. It is assumed that the children will bear the burden of burying their parents, not the parents burying a dead child. On April 04, 2004, Cindy Sheehan experienced what would come to be known as the worst day of her life. On this day, her eldest son, Spc. Casey Austin Sheehan, was killed in action while fighting for the United States Marine Corps during the Iraq War (Sheehan, 2006). Casey was killed in an ambush only five days after arriving in Iraq; he was 24 years old and only had 46 days until his next birthday.

This loss of her child was enough to motivate Sheehan to become an active and persistent protestor of the war and of the government officials who she felt should be held accountable for the war and the death tolls. Sheehan became dedicated to the mission of ending the war and also to encouraging society to not accept war and violence as solutions to problems.

On November 4, 2004 – seven months to the day of Casey’s death – Sheehan released her first open-letter to President George W. Bush, her first piece of anti-war protest rhetoric. This letter, simply titled “An Open Letter to George Bush,” was the first of many written pieces of protest rhetoric, in conjunction with many protest speeches and
actions Sheehan quickly found herself in the lime-light of media coverage. This spark of attention only seemed to fuel the fire in Sheehan, and in less than three years she helped to co-found Gold Star Families for Peace, publish three books which were compilations of her protest rhetoric, and establish Camp Casey in Crawford, Texas.

Sheehan is probably most notable in the news as the woman who slept in a lawn chair for 27 days in August of 2005 outside of President Bush’s vacation ranch in Crawford, Texas waiting for an opportunity to ask him one simple question while he was vacationing. She waited to “ask him for what noble cause did her son die,” (Rostami, 2005). While she camped out waiting, Sheehan and other protestors erected over 800 plain white crosses along the roadside that leads to Bush’s vacation ranch (Williams & Williams, 2005). These crosses originally were being displayed along the beaches in Santa Monica, California, and were grimly named “Arlington West” until the local peace activists felt the crosses could better serve as support for Sheehan as she mourned the loss of her son and the rest of the protestors in Crawford (Rostami, 2005). Each cross was meant to represent a soldier who had died during the Iraq occupation and war.

These crosses created the backdrop for the media coverage of Sheehan’s month long protest outside Bush’s ranch, and the crosses greeted travelers less than two miles outside the ranch’s gates. The media was a constant component of this protest scene, but counter-protestors were only significant for a matter of hours during the 27 day long boycott (Rostami, 2005). In fact, a local radio show host was heard trying to rally a counter-protest, but only a small bus load of people showed up, and left within thirty minutes of arriving (Rostami, 2005).
Having developed a reputation as a vocal opponent to President Bush and the Iraq War, Sheehan announced her retirement from public life on Memorial Day Weekend, 2007. In a short four years of activity, Sheehan’s writings inspired several websites which posted her messages and led other blogs to continue the discussion she initiated. In addition to writing, Sheehan has traveled world-wide to speak, hold rallies, and participate in many protests and hunger strikes. But how could an ordinary housewife travel the route from anonymity to celebrity in such a short time? What are the characteristics of her rhetoric that makes her important to American political communication? Are these characteristics new? Or do they borrow from or carefully restructure ancestral rhetorical strategies?

This paper will examine Sheehan’s written work, because her writings generated so much attention upon publication and because these messages were reproduced, interpreted, and discussed on numerous blogs and websites, they deserve special attention. The works chosen are all designed as open-letters. This strategy suggests that even though they may be addressed to individuals, the implied intended audience is the American public as a whole. The artifacts considered include “An Open Letter to George Bush” on November 4, 2004, “Still Not Worth It,” an open letter to her opposition that was posted July 4, 2005, and the blog titled “Go Home and Take Care of Your Kids” that was posted on August 22, 2005. Also included in this analysis are the “Open Letter to George Bush’s Mama” from November 18, 2005 and a second “Open Letter to President George W. Bush” from November 24, 2005. The final three pieces of Sheehan’s rhetoric examined in this paper include “Matriotism” from January 22, 2006 which was designed to be read by patriots, “It’s Personal…” which was a blog posted on September 11, 2006
that was meant to be directed to male opposition, and “Hey George…an email from Cindy Sheehan to George W. Bush,” that was sent on September 12, 2006 as an electronic open letter.

These rhetorical artifacts were chosen because of the fact that each was a deliberately written letter that was given intricate details instead of an off-the-cuff speech with no preparation put behind it. These letters were chosen as a sample of Sheehan’s work because each letter was carefully planned, written, and addressed a variety of specific audiences. This variety of correspondents – President George W. Bush, Former First Lady Barbara Bush, Senator John McCain, etc. – gives depth into her writing through variety, but shows a consistency within all her written rhetoric.

This rhetorical analysis will begin by examining the artifacts through three different lenses. Collectively, the analysis of Sheehan’s overall style will be broken down into three major components that combined to create a very stylized “Rhetoric of Grief”. Writing as a mother of a child, Cindy Sheehan’s writings clearly emphasize a uniquely feminine, motherly style. Thus, Chapter Two considers how Cindy Sheehan fits into the Feminist Tradition. But more than being an angry mother, Sheehan also challenges all of the assumptions that Pericles built up in his Funeral Oration. Because she questions the nature and rhetoric of patriotism, Chapter Three considers how her Rhetoric of Matriotism invites citizens to re-imagine the meaning of both state and citizen. Finally, because of the highly flamboyant nature of her statements, Chapter Four considers how Sheehan’s style draws upon the Cynical Tradition of Diogenes to shock and build her audience. Between these three lenses of Feminism, Matriotism, and
Cynicism, I will argue that Cindy Sheehan has formulated an interesting, but deeply unstable rhetorical strategy.
Chapter 2 – A feminist approach to war protest

The United States of America is a country that has been built from revolution and radicalism. The earliest citizens of this nation fostered this reputation beginning with the Revolutionary War. This tradition has continued from the Whiskey rebels, the States-righters, the Unionists, the civil rights activists, the environmental movement, and others which have all contributed to a rich tapestry of history and culture for the U.S. Of all these movements, however, the most unique social movement is the feminist movement. Feminism is “a word that describes a social-justice movement for gender equity and human liberation,” (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000). Unlike so many of the other episodic movements, feminism has consistently been a central issue facing Americans. The feminist movement has done anything but fade away; in fact, it is the only social movement in U.S. history that is broken down into sections, called “waves.” Constantly evolving to the needs of the times, feminism continues to find its way into popular culture and media. This movement is also misunderstood because many individuals may embrace the central themes of the movement, yet deny being a part of it, or will put stipulations on their own personal involvement, or participate for individual causes rather than for societal changes.

For general purposes, a good definition of a feminist is simply labeling each and every woman and/or man who is politically and socially conscious so that she or he makes an effort to work towards equality – whether it is formally inside an organization or outside the actual social movement itself (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000). Within the women’s movement, feminism is the idea that a woman should be considered a whole human being, “not measured in relationship to male supremacy,” (Baumgardner &
Richards, 2000). This movement has attempted to reduce male supremacy throughout history, and it is easiest to break the long history of this struggle into the waves to study. The three waves of feminism – the second two considered part of the women’s movement - must be broken down to understand the feminist rhetorical approach used by anti-war activist Cindy Sheehan and her war protest rhetoric especially that of the “open letter format” she commonly uses.

**Feminism: A historical overview**

The first wave of feminism came in the early 1800s and lasted until 1921 when American women were finally given the right to vote. This time period is also called the women’s rights movement (Wood, 2003) or the women’s suffrage movement. This particular movement had to endure such a long time frame because of the lack of support and public consideration for legitimacy of women speakers (Wood, 2003). Though men were involved, this wave was mostly women fighting an all male government and a masculine citizenship for a feminine voice. The women’s rights movement moved into the Suffrage Movement with the Seneca Falls Convention held in New York in 1848, a convention to gain support for basic rights for women that were granted to white men by the United States Constitution. At this time, women were considered property of their fathers or husbands, not as human beings (Wood, 2003), and at the same time, there was a fight for the abolition of slavery which took away some of the women’s momentum because many people divided their time or prioritized abolition above women’s rights. These women, the Suffragettes, were radicals who were drastic in their means to gain attention, support, and eventually win the right to vote. There are contemporary feminists who believe the Suffragettes failed the feminist movement claiming that the right to vote
really means nothing and was not worth the struggles of those women in the movement because total emancipation was not achieved (Henry, 2004). No matter if one views this wave a success or not, the right to vote ended the struggle for the most part.

The second wave, seen beginning in the 1960s, lasted roughly until the mid 1990s in the U.S. (Wood, 2003), though some argue there are still second wave feminists around today and some claim to be second wavers. The second wave is also known as the modern women’s liberation movement and emerged through political means of women working for civil-rights and anti-war movements (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000). It is during this time that the white middle-class woman was confronted by feminist issues through Betty Friedan’s 1963 book “The Feminine Mystique” and from those whose inspiration began in Eleanor Roosevelt’s days as First Lady (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000).

Some of these second wavers were looking to continue what the first wave left off and fought for an Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the constitution to guarantee equality through legal means. The bulk of this wave’s legacy rests in the ERA, though many of the feminists involved do not consider this to be a defining issue or important at all (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000). In fact, the ERA was never approved, but some important results of these decades include Title IX, guaranteeing equal allocation of federal funds between boys and girls in public schools, gender discrimination is forbidden, and the right to have an abortion – which gave women the right to choose what was best for their own bodies – which lead to the much needed awareness of sexism that existed so that political consciousness could be raised to such issues (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000). The main slogan of this wave of the movement, “The personal is
political” exemplifies the desire to utilize women’s personal life experiences as groundwork for political revolution (Kroll, 1983). These experiences led members to identify the enemy as man, and tried to use this enemy as a tool for unification among the movement members (Kroll, 1983). Though the members of the second wave may not have succeeded in passing the ERA, through identification of an enemy, these women were able to build a foundation that opened many doors for women in later generations to walk through with less gender discrimination than encountered by those generations before them.

The contributions of third wave feminism builds from the foundation of second wave feminists, as second wavers built upon the work of first wave. The activists that were a part of the second wave of feminism created many opportunities for girls and women, and especially opened doors for the third wave of feminism to begin, though one problem still remained. Those who are now considered third wave feminists felt that the second wavers were still victims of inequality in search of restitution through the means of the oppressor. Those categorized as third wave feminists seek restitution through their own means and believe their own empowerment and proactive measures will best serve their cause in the end. Some consider this to be a post-modern approach, or post-feminism. The third wave feminists believe that the second wave did not succeed in building an important entitlement package. Third wave feminists are also more interested in taking action rather than delving into ideology (Wood, 2003).

Much like the second wave feminists, the third wave feminists do not have a clear date of origin. Most research shows that feminism reappeared in the public’s imagination and in the media around 1991 (Henry, 2004). It was with such events as the Clarence
Thomas and Anita Hill sexual harassment case and the release of the motion picture *Thelma and Louise* (1991) that seemed to create a reawakening of feminist issues that launched this third wave of the movement (Henry, 2004). These women of the third wave are different than the second waves for a few reasons including their approach to inequalities and their embrace of femininity and sexuality compared to the second wave’s tendency to eliminate makeup, trendy clothes and cultural femininity (Wood, 2003). This wave of feminists clearly does not include just women, but men as well. Though men played some part of all three waves, this wave found men emerging as prominent members and activists. In fact, the clear interest in improving connections between men and women is a dominant feature and defining concept of third wave feminism (Wood, 2003).

Each wave is broken down in further categories of types of feminists, such as lesbian feminist, black feminist, and Asian feminist; but in the third wave, there is an observable connectedness between all feminists that each brings her or his own background and do not try to find an agenda, but are motivated to combine these diverse versions of feminism into activism (Wood, 2003). The third wavers took a lesson from the second wavers and are more diverse and want to include minority women as well as men. These activists are much more proactive in approach and seek discernible results rather than simple legislative proceedings. This wave is looking for more change than a few simple legislative adjustments, but to actually change the system as a whole.

The second and third waves are less distinct in when each wave started, stopped, and the primary reasons for such waves, but a few distinctions can be made. It is with both the second and third waves of feminism that Cindy Sheehan’s anti-war rhetoric can
be most effectively examined through the feminist approach. To better understand how Sheehan’s work arches the gap between second and third wave feminism, one additional component to feminism; the concept of Matriotism also needs to be addressed.

Matriotism is defined as “love of one’s mother country, “(Oxford English Dictionary, 1971), and this concept is one that Sheehan feels is the counterpart to traditional patriotism. She feels that patriots are content in finding restitution through violence and war, while matriots want to find a non-violent alternative. This concept is addressed by one of Sheehan’s anti-war pieces and is an integral concept that will be addressed partially in this chapter, and with more depth in the following chapter.

Now that we have looked into the history of feminism, it is now necessary to take a look at the feminist rhetoric literature and tradition, and then use this background as supporting evidence when applied to Sheehan’s written anti-war rhetoric.

**Feminism: a rhetorical literature review**

The theory for the feminist style of women’s rhetoric began entering the communication discipline in Karlyn Kohrs Campbell’s (1971) work on the women’s liberation movement. Campbell concludes that because of the specific stylistic features and characteristics of the women’s liberation movement, there is a need for a new genre of rhetoric – feminist rhetoric (Campbell, 1971). The first characteristic that creates a need for a separate genre of rhetoric is the moral conflict that is created when equality is being sought for women. This moral conflict is different from any other demand for equality in American history because it is a clear contradiction of all sex roles evident in American culture. The battle for women’s liberation caused many women to become revolutionary, self-reliant, and independent – all of which were traditionally considered
masculine traits. Though the feminist rhetoric is traditional in its argumentation, justification, and scholarly style, it is obviously unique from traditional rhetorical genres because of the social and cultural context from which it occurs (Campbell, 1971).

Another characteristic that requires the need for a feminist rhetoric genre includes the legal aspects of the women’s liberation movement. This battle for equality was framed primarily as a legal issue. As recently as the 1960s, legislation in the United States clearly stated that women were not equal to men. For example, in 1961 the Fourteen Amendment states that it “prohibits any arbitrary class legislation, except that based on sex,” (Campbell, 1971). Marriage laws also limited potential equal rights of women by noting that spouses do not have equal rights and duties, but reciprocal depending on the husband’s discretion, these laws make the wife a property in the relationship, not a partner (Campbell, 1971). It is apparent from the wording that “marriage is a property relationship,” and the man owns the rights to property. In states such as Texas and Nevada, a husband can control all properties, including the disposal of property, without his wife’s consent – and that property can include a working wife’s wages, (Campbell, 1971). It is because of these laws and this type of male supremacy mentality that many women in the movement lived by the slogan “The personal is political,” (Kroll, 1983). With such legislation and common social or cultural beliefs of sex roles, there is a moral and scholarly dilemma on how to categorize the rhetoric that came out of the women’s liberation movement.

Campbell’s (1971) intentions of creating a feminist genre of rhetoric are based on the fundamental conflicts in values that are evident in defining masculinity and femininity. Because of the intense moral conflict involved in making men supreme over
women and the many values involved, what some would consider moderate reformist actions in the movement were categorized as revolutionary and radical because many people – men and women alike – felt that to meet the required changed would require major social changes that would be categorized as revolutionary (Campbell, 1971). This variance in viewpoints helped to create the distinctive stylist features of feminist rhetoric that Campbell categorized as part of a persuasive campaign (1971), but with distinctive stylistic rejections of traditional rhetoric in persuasive campaigns. Specifically, Campbell’s rhetorical model has some characteristics including the rejection of having clear experts or leaders to follow, adjustments to include audiences, and no commitment to certain programs or group action. Collectively, these stylistic commitments emphasize how the rhetoric serves to raise, yet maintain, a strong sense of mutual transaction between conscientious rhetor and the audience (Campbell, 1971).

For this consciousness raising tactic to truly be effective it must transcend through the audience to create a bond of sisterhood. This bond creates autonomy so that the message speaks to women through private, individual experiences – since up until this point, women had very few shared public experiences (Campbell, 1971). This method is attempting to reach the goal of making the personal political by creating awareness that what were thought of as individual problems were actually common and shared by many women. This style incorporates the affirmation and validity of personal experiences though necessary self-exposure and self-criticism to create autonomy and individually based decision making for one’s own desired level of action (Campbell, 1971). The final characteristic of feminist rhetoric developed by Campbell is the use of confrontational, non-adjustive strategies that attack the socially constructed reality of the society and
culture. This is done through a clear violation of what is considered feminine because it attacks the society’s values of decorum and morality – women are not supposed to revolt against what is accepted because women are supposed to be submissive and pleasing, especially within their homes.

Branching out from a woman’s private sphere experiences, the feminist rhetorical style includes many attributes including identification (ex. A mother speaking to another mother or a teacher to another teacher), promotion of audience participation, personal tones, use of personal experience, inductive reasoning, and employment of examples for support. It has been argued that because women have traditionally been restricted from being in the public sphere, the feminist style was developed with specific communication strategies (Dow & Tonn, 1993) with a basis within the private sphere. Once women ventured from small groups out into the public view with rhetoric of the women’s liberation movement, there became a feminist rhetorical style that is studied today. This change from personal, private communication to mainstreaming the women’s liberation movement is one example of how the leaders made changes to make the country more aware of the movement and its concerns.

A few things that can account for these changes include the increased number of women who ventured into the paid workforce and the political arena in search of changes within the law (Kroll, 1983). The feminist movement has always been linked to the government and is interested in developing fundamental changes to traditional political ideas (Barker-Plummer, 1995) and with the changes occurring in American culture, there was a need for rhetorical changes within the movement to make sure it was not forgotten and still a political driving force to better the lives of women. During the second wave of
feminism, some of the strategies included the actual work of defining the term “woman” (Kroll, 1983). These rhetors sought to define what/who a woman was by identifying her opposition – man – and give him characteristics that serve as the counter-definition of woman. This strategy evolved to become the total rejection of men and this rejection was another example of the movement’s slogan “The personal is political” (Kroll, 1983). Though this approach of identifying all men as the enemy is a noble attempt at seeking a cause, this approach would never allow the movement to go forth and succeed because it would never gain public acceptance – especially since the public the second wave women were trying to change included politicians, who were largely men in the 1960s.

The initial changes in rhetoric that were made lead to the visibility and support in the mainstream society of America happened when a branch of the movement changed the terminology from women being oppressed by men to saying that women were being treated unfairly and with injustice (Kroll, 1983). The terms injustice and unfairness increased awareness for the movement and helped to increase attention and create a mainstreaming effect in the early 1970s. This section of the movement did not ask for total reform of the political system in America, but instead these women asked that there be a change in the number of representative women active in the decision-making and policy proceedings that managed public life (Kroll, 1983) to help enable equal representation for all persons.

It is with this information that some questions about Sheehan’s rhetoric are raised. First, does Sheehan actually fit into the feminist movement or is she doing something new that is different? In this essay, I will establish how Sheehan not only belongs within the feminist movement, but how she actually connects the second and third waves
through her protest rhetoric. Second, why is Sheehan’s work important to feminist rhetoric and/or the feminist tradition? Though my analysis, I will show her importance through this ability to transcend the second and third waves naturally and also through her unique feminist style – though being a militant mother is nothing new, her approach is slightly different than what has been traditionally seen in American society.

**Feminism: A grieving mother’s turn to cry**

The first question that has been raised is whether or not Cindy Sheehan’s anti-war rhetoric is actually feminist rhetoric. After reviewing the style characteristics of feminist rhetoric, an examination of Sheehan’s actual rhetoric will show that it does belong in the feminist genre. The most obvious reason for this is because feminist rhetoric is based in a style that uses personal references, which she does in every aspect. In her open letter format, Sheehan writes letters, mostly to President George W. Bush, asking for an end to the war in Iraq by constantly referring back to her own personal experience of her son Casey’s death. Sheehan continually gives examples of the grief that both she and her family have experienced since the death of her son, and constantly uses these experiences as reason enough to end the war and bring the troops home. In a letter to the President about a year and a half after her son was killed in the war, Sheehan gives some insight into her family life since the death by saying, “[my] family is spending our second Thanksgiving without Casey…I am spending the day crying on a plane on my way back to Crawford,” (Sheehan, 2006). This is just one of many examples of how Sheehan brings up personal references in her rhetoric. To add validity to Sheehan’s rhetoric, she expresses her emotions and admits she has shed tears because of Casey’s death. These tears are an indisputable example of the extreme emotions Sheehan is feeling and the fact
that she is sharing her feelings continues to develop the argument that she uses personal references to address Bush.

Another example of this is when Sheehan addresses the question if her son’s death was worth the Iraqis having a free election in January of 2005. Though other issues are also addressed in this particular response, her personal references are plentiful including when she firmly states “I will never be able to celebrate another patriotic holiday without mourning what this nation has stolen from my family. I will never be able to look at an American flag without thinking of the uniform my son wore proudly that displayed that same symbol…No, Casey’s sacrifice was not “worth it”…” (Sheehan, July 4, 2005). This represents a rejection of the typical “economic” style used by politicians who believe deaths are “worth it” in the name of war and country.

Another style characteristic that is plentiful in examples to show Sheehan belongs in the feminist genre is the use of identification. Identification is the idea that even though all people are different, they have common factors that make them the same – not identical, but similar and creates a sharing process that enhances cooperation and reduces ambiguity (Stewart, Smith, & Denton, 2001). Simply put, identification finds the common group between people to create a bond through similarities. One group of people Sheehan uses identification to show a sisterhood is with parents – specifically mothers. She uses the collective term “we” several times to show signs of sisterhood with these other mothers whom she feels are part of the fight against the war with her, no matter if they are actively protesting with her or not. An example of this is when Sheehan says “[we] as mothers need to stop buying into the load of misogynistic crap that our children need our constant presence in their lives so they can thrive and grow…What
we as Moms need to stop doing is giving our children to the military industrial war complex to be used as human cluster bombs: to kill innocent civilians and perhaps to die…It is up to us Moms to make sure our children are whole and safe,” (Sheehan, August 22, 2005). This is not just an example of Sheehan using a “we” term, but a very proactive “we.” Sheehan continues in this particular example to claim that “[we] can start doing this by always opposing the wars that bury our kids,” (Sheehan, August 22, 2005); this is another example of identification with parents, but it is also an example of the feminist genre characteristic of promoting participation of audience members.

Sheehan calls for audience participation throughout her anti-war protest rhetoric by asking whomever is reading her open letters (or hearing her speak) to do their part in ensuring the troops are brought home and the perceived unnecessary deaths of America’s children can end.

The most prevalent characteristic of feminist rhetoric that Sheehan uses with ease is the personal tone. To obtain a personal tone, the audience should feel like the message being delivered is entitled for only them. Sheehan does something interesting to achieve this by using the letter format. For example, Sheehan composes letters that are addressed specifically to President George W. Bush and to Former First Lady Barbara Bush that show a personal tone. Sheehan shows a particular expertise in obtaining a personal tone through the use of the recipient’s first name, pulling out personal references of actions the recipient has performed, and through even referring to some of the recipient’s prior communication with her. When Sheehan makes these letters open to the public, any reader can recognize she is trying to maintain a personal tone when she says “Dear George…You don’t mind if I call you George do you? When you sent me a letter
offering your condolences on the death of my son, Spc. Casey Austin Sheehan…you called me Cindy, so I naturally assume we are on a first name basis,” (Sheehan, November 4, 2004). This use of first names is also an attempt to reduce the credibility of the president by deliberately avoiding formal features such as “Mr. President” or “Sir” and instead lowers his stature by calling him George.

Throughout the rest of this open letter, Sheehan refers to President Bush as George. Even when she is blatantly being sarcastic she is maintaining a personal tone. In closing she does this by saying “[thank] you for that, George. Have a nice day. God Bless America!” (Sheehan, November 4. 2004). In a second open letter to the president, Sheehan continues to be personal with the use of his first name and her opening to the letter is simply that. She again continues to refer to him by his first name of George throughout the letter and she maintains her personal tone by referring to each other’s families and recent activities as if corresponding with an old friend who has not been seen in a long time. This type of approach is seen in each of her open letters and can clearly be seen as creating a personal tone. In an open email to the President, Sheehan continues to create a personal tone by beginning the email with “Hey George,” (Sheehan, September 12, 2006). She ends this letter with another personal reference to the president with a post script stating “[by] the way, I am still waiting for your answer, George: What Noble Cause?” (Sheehan, September 12, 2006). In the letter to the former first lady Sheehan begins by saying “Dear Barbara,” (Sheehan, 2006) and continues by addressing things such as Barbara’s oldest child, her son, and signing the letter with the word “sincerely” (Sheehan, 2006).
With this it is clear that Sheehan does fit into the feminist rhetorical genre, but the second question is where in the second or third wave genre does her rhetoric actually belong? Is it possible that Sheehan’s rhetoric is actually a hybrid of the second and third waves both? If she is a hybrid, her work would be a combination of the victimized and agitated rhetorics.

**Feminist Rhetoric: a victimized mother**

In the anti-war protests of Sheehan, there is a feminist rhetorical approach being used, especially in her open letter format, which begins with second wave feminist characteristics, but swings into third wave feminism by the end of these public letters. Sheehan uses victimized language and symbolism near the beginning of her rhetorical pieces that reflects the second wave of feminism voices, but then transforms throughout the rhetoric and becomes a fundamental third wave feminist voice; with a clear call to action and activist language that reflects the post-feminism approach. In a letter written to President George W. Bush, Sheehan speaks frankly about her feelings about the situation surrounding the death of her son, Spc. Casey Austin Sheehan on April 4, 2004. Sheehan blames President G. W. Bush for her son’s death, explicitly stating “it has been seven months today since your reckless and wanton foreign policies killed my son…since your ignorant and arrogant lack of planning for the peace murdered my oldest child,” (Sheehan, November 4, 2004). These accusatory statements are vocalizing distrust and Sheehan’s belief of a wrongdoing, but are not active in approach. A little more than a year later, Sheehan wrote another open letter, this time to Former First Lady Barbara Bush, President G. W. Bush’s mother. This letter begins with language such as “[on] April 4, 2004, your oldest child, George W. Bush, killed my oldest child, Casey Austin
Sheehan...Casey was a dead man before George even became president and before he even joined the Army in May 2000,” (Sheehan, 2006). In this letter, Sheehan questions how G. W. Bush was raised by asking if he was taught to use words and not violence to create solutions. She even states that she “used to wash my children’s mouths out with soap on the rare occasion that they lied. Did you do that to George? Can you do it now?” (Sheehan, 2006). Though this question of using soap to wash out the president’s mouth could be considered active, it is still in the victimized voice of the second wave of feminism. Sheehan is not asking for any change in things by asking for such actions of using soap to be taken, but instead is simply asking for some restitution. Sheehan feels President Bush has wronged her and her family and is seeking to express her feelings of victimization to the Former First Lady.

Later in that same month, Sheehan released a second open letter to President G.W. Bush with further examples of her feminist approach and examples of second wave victimization. In this letter, Sheehan tells President Bush that “[my] family is spending our second Thanksgiving without Casey thanks to you and your lies. I am spending the day crying on a plane on my way to Crawford, coming again to ask you for a meeting,” (Sheehan, 2006). Sheehan again displays a sense of victimization in this letter’s beginning by showing her loss of a son because of the Iraq War, and by showing that she is being ignored by President Bush when she asks for a meeting to ask questions about her son’s death. Sheehan displays inactive feminism – a second wave trait – at the beginning.

In an open email about ten months later from Sheehan to President G. W. Bush, another example of second wave feminism is seen. In this example, Sheehan continues to
call out injustices and wrongdoings without calling for direct action or a direct solution. In this email Sheehan lists several injustices she has noticed including her dislike for Bush’s use of torture to gain information because it is “a crime against humanity” and “not even admissible in a court of law,” (Sheehan, September 12, 2006). She continues in saying “I don’t want you using me, as an American, to endorse your sadistic policies. If one of my fellow human beings has to be tortured to give me a false sense of security, then I don’t want it…I do not want to see one more blood splattered child in Iraq or Afghanistan screaming for their murdered family so we can ‘fight them over there’…I don’t want to see one more flag draped coffin coming home from the Middle East with the lifeless body of one of our own children. He/She did not die to protect me and I don’t want to be safe if it means the death of one of our precious commodities: a part of the future of our country,” (Sheehan, September 12, 2006).

**Feminist Rhetoric: an agitated mother**

Up until this point, Sheehan has shown she belongs in the second wave of feminism by appearing to be the victim in her words; however this may not be a complete analysis of her feminist approach. It is found that in these same pieces of anti-war rhetoric, Sheehan swings from victim role into agitator and activist, which are characteristics of third wave feminist rhetoric voice. In the first open letter to President G.W. Bush, the approach changes from expressing feelings of remorse for losing her son to annoyed citizen questioning her leader. Sheehan asks, “[you] feel so proud of yourself for betraying the country again, don’t you?...If you think I am going to allow you another four years to do even more damage, then you truly are mistaken. I will fight for a true vote count and if that fails, your impeachment,” (Sheehan, November 4, 2004). These
words were made public only two days after Bush won the presidential election to begin his second term in office. Sheehan shows more aggression in this part of her open letter and even makes a volatile threat to take President Bush’s job away. She ends this letter with another threat for impeachment of Bush by saying “thanks to you and your careless domestic policies, I am unemployed, so this will be my full-time job. Being your political downfall will be the most noble accomplishment of my life and it will bring justice for my son and 1125 (so far) other brave Americans and tens of thousands of innocent Iraqis your lies have killed.” (Sheehan, November 4, 2004).

In the letter to Barbara Bush, after describing her personal experience with watching her son’s flag draped coffin arrive, Sheehan again turns aggressive in her choice of words and language and calls for action from the recipient. “Besides encouraging your son to have some honesty and courage and to finally do the right thing, don’t you think you owe me?...Your son’s amazingly ignorant, arrogant, and reckless policies in Iraq are responsible for so much sorrow and trouble in this world. Can you make him stop? Do it before more mothers’ lives are needlessly and cruelly harmed. It has happened too many times already,” (Sheehan, 2006). These words are considered even more aggressively charged when the context of who this letter was intended – a former First Lady and the mother of the American President. For Sheehan to show such assertiveness and boldness is a clear example of third wave feminist rhetoric of activism.

A week after this letter was published; Sheehan sent another open letter to President G.W. Bush. Again, as discussed previously, she began passive and victimized, but by the end of this open letter she became aggressive and active. In true feminist rhetoric, Sheehan continues to use personal stories and references as a strategy to achieve
her goal in this letter of calling for end to the war by saying she doesn’t blame Bush for using his family to get out of his military duties during the Vietnam conflict because it was evil and disastrous, but “[what] I do blame you for is killing my son in another disastrous and evil war…I ask you to again do the right thing. Bring our troops home from Iraq. How many deaths do you think will be necessary before Casey’s is ‘justified’?...Please dignify all of the deaths by finally stopping the barbaric killing before you ruin too many more holidays for way too many more people,” (Sheehan, 2006). The final statement about ruining holidays is referring back to her personal experiences of preparing to spend her second thanksgiving without her son, a very strong emotional appeal. Sheehan is calling for a specific action in this letter’s conclusion; she wants the war to end and Bush to bring the American Troops home. She may not give any direct threats as she did in the first open letter to the president about impeachment, but she uses strong enough language that there is a threatening atmosphere imposed – a threat of revolutionary action which is a third wave characteristic.

In the final sample of how Sheehan arches from second wave to third wave feminism within her open letter, anti-war rhetoric, the email sent to President G.W. Bush has additional signs of active and aggressive language. Sheehan goes back to direct threats towards the president while continuing to use her personal references of her son and other mothers’ sons and daughters who have been killed in the war. In this email Sheehan becomes hostile with the president when she says, “I called on you almost two years ago to resign after you stole yet another election and I am calling on you to resign again. I don’t know how many more of our children and the world’s children have been killed in those two years. You are a disgrace and a danger to our country. You have not
protected me or my family. In fact you have endangered my children and my
grandchildren with your skillful recruitment tactics for al-Qaeda and people who never
dreamed of being my enemy before your policies killed their families. My great-
great-grandchildren will be paying off the black hole of a deficit that you are creating with
these unconscionable occupations,” (Sheehan, September 12, 2006). In this passage,
Sheehan not only asks for the president to resign, but also attacks his policies and time in
office by calling him a disgrace and danger. This language is aggressive towards toward
President G.W. Bush and his policies, which shows Sheehan’s archway from being the
second wave feminist who was a victimized grieving mother who just needed to express
her feelings to being the third wave feminist who is seeking action and direct change in
the perceived immoral military orders and political stronghold of President G.W. Bush
who decided to continue to send more troops to Iraq rather than bring them home to the
United States.

This observed archway between second and third wave feminist rhetoric is
important to the genre and needs to be recognized for what it is. The first important
component of this observation is that the feminist movement is still active. Though this
activism is not perceived as it was in the 1960s as women burning their bras in effigy,
there are still perceived inequalities that have kept this movement alive through several
decades and produced several forms of rhetoric. Another important feature Sheehan’s
rhetoric produces is proof that there is a blurred line between the second and third waves
that is easily crossed. It is not uncommon for people who have grievances to express
their emotions and discomfort, and then transform those feelings into words of action that
demand restitution. It is because of second wave feminists becoming vocal and raising
the American public’s awareness of inequalities in the society that there was a place in society for revolutionary third wave feminists to exist and call for direct action. These two waves will always be recognized as two separate commodities to the women’s liberation movement, but Sheehan is a great example of how the waves can work together to achieve common goals of bringing about change: first through vocalizing discomfort, then using aggressive tactics to call for a perceived needed change. This raises one troubling question that will be addressed later in this paper: Do you have to suffer like Sheehan has to get this kind of credibility or could anybody make the same moves and succeed?

The final component that makes Sheehan’s rhetoric important to the feminist tradition is her use of the term and idea of matriotism. Though this term is not a new one, it has not been a term or concept that has been found in contemporary rhetoric until more recently – nor can it be found in most reference books or websites. One might question the difference between being a matriot and being a patriot and the actual difference is as simple as one word. A patriot is someone who has a devoted love and defense of his/her country or nationality. In contrast to this, a matriot is someone who loves his/her mother country or alma mater (Latin for “kind mother”). The difference in these terms is the idea of defense, a patriot will fight for their country, while a matriot will love and nurture their country – much like the assumed difference in maternal and paternal instincts. The difference between a matriot and a patriot will examined further in the following chapter, but the concepts need to be introduced because idea of matriotism has become more common to followers of Sheehan’s work, especially since her January 22, 2006 writings on the concept.
The use of this concept of matriotism is another reason why Sheehan’s work is an important addition to the feminist tradition. The using of the feminine counterpart to a term such as patriot, which is inherently masculine, is a tactic many feminists have used throughout the movement to try to appear equalized in status by changing the language being used. The fact that Sheehan is using a term such as matriot is a final signal that she does truly belong in the feminist movement and that she is doing something important for the rhetorical tradition. This use of the political term matriotism does more than just show Sheehan’s importance to the feminist rhetorical tradition; it also shows how she does not necessarily conform to traditional political rules or expectations, but instead violates what has been found to be traditional values in the American government and political system and how it communicates – especially how women in politics are expected to communicate or express ideas.

In the following chapter, Sheehan’s use of the term matriotism and the concept of a matriarchal family unit will be examined in contrast to what is traditionally accepted in the U.S. (and its political systems, including the military) – the patriarchal family unit and the patriot community member. This analysis will be used to show how her feminist anti-war rhetoric is used to create a family-centered model of the United States instead of an economic or political model.
Chapter Three: A family fight through rhetoric, politics, and the meaning of war

Citizens of the United States are blessed with many freedoms and rights. Rights such as the right to freedom of speech, to peacefully assemble, and freedom of press are all components that make the U.S. unique. The U.S. Government gives its people the right to vote on representatives and issues, as well as actively show disagreement with current policies or actions. But “raising questions about the wisdom of government actions in wartime, particularly early in a war, is not easy,” (Baker, 2002). For the most part, citizens of the U.S. know that these rights are there to protect them and function without having to think much about such fundamental issues. However, the absence of these powers represents an important shift in the state-citizen relationship. What happens when rights are taken away from the citizens? Does their loss inspire desire to question the government? Or squash such desires? Moreover, what happens during wartime, when questions, issues, and policies will alter the course of many lives?

During times of war, discussions and questions about the United States government do tend to evaporate (Barton, 2001). The old adage that ‘politics stops at the water’s edge’ appears to be particularly true during times of global conflict. For Cindy Sheehan, this seems to be unacceptable. From her protests, she encourages more conversations – conversations that encourage depth and debate. Sheehan’s desire is for a loud discussion to attract attention to her points of views. This desire of hers violates all the instructions that Pericles gave in his funeral oration – Sheehan does not want to be obedient and subordinate, and will not return to her home as quietly as her Athenian predecessors.
Instead, she draws the attention of the U.S. citizens and its government officials. This chapter will explore Sheehan’s actual political impact – with a particular attention paid to the traditional role of patriotism during wartime and Cindy Sheehan’s countering Matriotic view. Once the differences between these two views are examined, this paper will expand upon the idea of how Sheehan re-imagines the nation as a single family instead of a country full of many separate families. Taking on the role of matriarch, Sheehan engages in a noisy discussion with the leader of the United States, George W. Bush. Sheehan’s argument with Bush resembles a family squabble, but her rhetorical strategy raises some important questions about the role of rhetoric during times of conflict. In this chapter, I ask:

1. What are the characteristics of Cindy Sheehan’s matriotic rhetorical strategy? 
2. What are the broader political implications of these choices?

**Patriotism: a traditional view**

According to dictionary.com, patriotism is a “devoted love, support, and defense of one’s country; a national loyalty,” (2007) and in the aftermath of September 11th, U.S. citizens performed various acts to show what they defined as their own acts of patriotism. Immediately after these events, more and more people were seen wearing an American Flag lapel pin on their clothes and “flag-waving is not surprising in the aftermath of a full-scale attack on American civilians. As individuals, we are all part of a severely traumatized body politic,” (Baker, 2002). Additional evidence of national camaraderie was seen with emergency personal flocking to ground zero and non-emergency persons heading to blood drives.
Though any of these actions can be considered acts of patriotism and show the United State’s citizens’ love and support for their country, these acts do not symbolize the loyalty and heroic sacrifices that Pericles claimed to be the most honorable of all forms of devotion to one’s country. Within two weeks of the September 11th attacks, President George W. Bush called for a more conflict-driven form of patriotism when he outlined the upcoming wars in Afghanistan this way: “Tonight, we are a country awakened to danger and called to defend freedom. Our grief has turned to anger and anger to resolution. Whether we bring our enemies to justice or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done,” (G.W. Bush, public presentation, September 20, 2001). Without expressing the stark details of war, Bush uses abstract terms and basic human emotions to activate the call to duty. Whether one grasps the full meaning of concepts like freedom and justice, or feelings of anger or resolution, Bush’s rhetoric speaks both philosophically, judicially, and psychologically. This kind of language is expansive and gives audiences a number of avenues to glean meaning. But just as importantly, it previews how a war will emerge in the near future. Framed as a philosophy and a catharsis, Bush’s call for justice resonated with much of the national audience, and that this call for justice should come through any means necessary.

According to Barton, it was only expected that “shared feelings of fear, despair, and a fierce love of country in the days after the twin towers” would exist (Barton, 2001). These feelings promoted talk of patriotism, and in turn, lead to a discussion of the future role of the military. Such discussions are important. First, it represents an articulation of the dangers and risks that the nation faces. Hill made this clear by stating “we’ve entered this era of a strange new war. These are dangerous times indeed. Our troops are spread
across the globe. Some are stationed in countries where they are not entirely welcome. The enemy deeply desires a holy war and missteps on our part could eventually produce one,” (Hill, 2001). Hill establishes that our troops are in danger. This danger puts those in the armed forces in the position to commit the ultimate sacrifice. These men and women are in hostile environments and are risking their lives in the defense of their country.

Second, it indicates that the nation requires a military chat to establish roles and norms. Two roles are of particular importance: the citizen and the solider. What kinds of tasks do they face in the newly inaugurated Age of Terrorism? How do these new tasks correspond or contrast with existing expectations? One danger of such moments is that the military could be overemphasized. Militarism is the “tendency to regard military efficiency as the paramount interest,” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1971) while nationalism is “the exalting of one’s nation and its culture and interests above all others,” (Barker, 2002). The ideal soldier is a subjective idea, but contains images of strength, bravery, sacrifice, and mostly of men. These terms of militarism, nationalism, and the concept of an ideal soldier are inter-related with when discussing conventional ideals of patriotism.

What is interesting about discussions of topics involving the military, patriotism, nationalism, and an idealized soldier is that all of them have a male-gendered connotation (Howard & Prividera, 2006). Some of the characteristics that define a soldier, nationalism, and militarism include toughness, competitiveness, and subordination of women (Howard & Prividera, 2006). In this way, militarism, nationalism, and perceptions of an ideal soldier to U.S. citizens are all considered masculine and part of a
patriarchal system of governance. In such frameworks, women continue to have a subordinate role and be dominated and discriminated against, in fact, it is a study of such masculinity that “denotes specific images and qualities of what it means to be a desirable man,” (Howard & Prvidera, 2006).

It is these masculine characteristics that have routinely described the role of the soldier. According to dictionary.com, a soldier is “a person who serves in an army; a person engaged in military service (2007), but the term soldier has many possible meanings including the description of being patriotic for being a national representative (Howard & Prvidera, 2006). We learned earlier that Pericles believes that a soldier is defined by his courage and willingness to be obedient and sacrifice his own blood and life for the cause of the country.

An idealized soldier would do anything for his/her country and would put the country’s well-being ahead of his or her own personal safety constructing a warrior hero who sacrifices for their country (Howard & Prvidera, 2006). The United States of America is built upon the strength and determination of its soldiers from the past right up to the present. It is because of these selfless persons dying for a cause that the U.S. is a free nation. Soldiers dying – or sacrificing – for their country is not a novel idea, but is something that has been expected and praised since there have been separately governed countries fighting one another.

This idea of sacrifice goes back as far as Homer saying “It is not unseemly for a man to die fighting in defense of his country,” (trans. 1948). Homer’s claim is that it is tasteful for a man to give his life in honor of his country. In the United States, soldiers sacrifice their civilian lives to ensure others have the rights and freedoms established in
the constitution. It is when soldiers, as well as many others including civilians, begin to
die that questions are raised about the necessity of those deaths and the need for war. For
Cindy Sheehan, the meaning of war fatally changed and it is because of her son’s death
and her distrust about the claims made before the conflict that she began her protests.
Such a personal trauma inspired a uniquely personal rhetorical style.

**The Nation as a Family: A metaphorical view**

For some, the idea of conceptualizing an entire nation as a family is far-fetched.
For Cindy Sheehan, this is a necessary way to frame the country in her protest of the Iraq
War. She is a feminist, and feminists use personal references and personal tones to their
rhetoric and by creating one family instead of a country with many families helps
Sheehan to maintain her argument that there are traditional views and expectations that
she does not agree with and wants to reframe for the entire country.

Sheehan recognizes the traditional views of patriotism as being willing to
sacrifice life for one’s country. This tradition of being willing to die for one’s country is
not new, but is not what the only option. Through her protest rhetoric, Sheehan is clearly
in disagreement with this traditional concept and appears to adapt George Bernard
Shaw’s more cynical approach to the idea of a soldier’s willingness to sacrifice claiming
“self-sacrifice enables us to sacrifice other people without blushing,” (trans. 1948).
Rather than it being an act of honor to die for one’s country, Shaw believes it is an excuse
to be able to kill others. It is in these acts of bloodshed that Sheehan finds the traditional
view to be less than desirable and gives a counter-solution through her use of a metaphor
to describe her idea national family unit.
Since Sheehan believes the traditional roles of patriotism are bad, and she has designed a new way to framework for the country that she feels is good, let’s look at how such good-bad metaphors can be found in traditional rhetoric. According to Osborn (1967), the archetypal metaphor using light and dark contrasts has five characteristics within rhetorical discourse that makes this type of metaphor stand out. These five components are necessary to create a figurative language that is universally understood and gives the audience words that create mental imagery of what is being metaphorically expressed.

First, archetypal metaphors are popular in rhetoric and it is common to find rhetorical critics using a light and dark metaphoric association when expressing judgments. This technique is selected frequently for its limitless possibilities of potential uses (Osborn, 1967).

Second, the use of a metaphor appears to be timeless. This approach, for example, has been used as early as Dante in his differentiating between God and Hades, and this example shows how the archetypal metaphor is also found cross-culturally. The use of light and dark references seems to meet to no barriers or boundaries (Osborn, 1967).

Third, archetypal metaphors are based in the foremost components of life. This type of metaphor is used with objects, actions, conditions, or experiences which are undoubtedly prominent and significant in a person’s perception. One example of a type of experience which is prominent in human perception is death (Osborn, 1967).

Fourth, this type of metaphor’s appeal is dependent upon its representation of simple human motivations. A basic motivation would be to put greater things above the
audience, and lesser things below. This example shows a man’s symbolic quest for power — to be above some, and possibly below others (Osborn, 1967).

The fifth characteristic of archetypal metaphors is the persuasive effectiveness of such metaphors. Since the appeal of an archetypal metaphor is typically universal, the fundamental, shared motives will reach a larger part of a rhetorician’s audience (Osborn, 1967). Since this type of metaphor is able to appeal to a larger section of an audience, it is typically more persuasively effective — a simple, but ideal reason to use such an approach more often.

Though Cindy Sheehan does not always use the terms light and dark in expressing her unique view of the national family, she expresses the good and bad components of the traditional patriotic family versus the nontraditional matriotic family throughout her work, especially in her protest piece titled “Matriotism.”

**Matriotism: a new look at an old concept**

Historically, many have taken a patriotic — the masculine counterpart to the feminine matriotic — view on how to love one’s country. Many have shown that they believe that to show one’s love for his or her country is to defend the country, to bring honor by sacrificing for the country (Howard & Prividera, 2006). However, in the U.S., there has been an alternative. Not everybody believes you must fight for your country to show you love it, and those people tend to be what is titled as a matriot. There are other ways to love one’s country — ways involving devotion, freedom, and above all, nurturing. A love of country is what is known as matriotism. Sheehan uses the concept of matriotism and its components in her protest rhetoric. The concept of matriotism is not one of Sheehan’s alone; she did not coin the term, but adopted it after hearing it used
by another protestor. This term is not one found in modern reference books, nor can it be found on modern reference websites such as dictionary.com, but it is found in older dictionaries and reference books. When Sheehan got the concept, she wanted to consider its ideology so that she may use it to “catalyze a new paradigm for true and lasting peace in the world,” (Sheehan, 2006). Sheehan felt this term would help her define a person who could love their country without having to fight wars and sacrifice human life for it. According to Sheehan, “matriotism is the opposite of patriotism. A yin to its yang, a counterforce to the violent militarism of patriotism,” (Sheehan, 2006) but still a “love of country” that will nurture instead of sacrifice lives.

There are two main differences between being a matriot and a patriot; the definition of sacrifice and the domestication of the two terms. The sacrifice required to be a patriot is the willingness to fight and defend his/her country, but a matriot does not believe that war and death is necessary to sacrifice for one’s country. This willingness to sacrifice goes back to the expectation of obedience to one’s nation-state that Pericles talked about in his funeral oration, but patriotism being framed in this manner may be outdated to some. Maurizio Viroli gave an alternative view of patriotism when he made the claim that “Republican patriotism meant politics: the politics of the ancients as opposed to the politics of the moderns; politics understood as good government and self-government as opposed to politics as bad government and government from above” (1995). This metaphor of patriotism resulting from either good government or bad government is more of what Sheehan wants to see result when she uses the matriotism counterview. She wants to see less obedience to the bad government from above, and more obedience to the self. Sheehan does not want the bad government to send any more
of the nation’s “babies” to war and does not want to see any more bloodshed or death, but instead wants to find a country that can rely on each person being noble enough to not create violence, but find an alternative solution to problems.

A second difference between a matriot and a patriot is the domestication of such concepts – patriotism is a term found used in any common household, while matriotism is no longer found in modern dictionaries nor modern internet reference websites. If these terms are used to define a national family or household, one describes a maternal household while the other describes a paternal household – both ideas are captured in Sheehan’s writings as necessary concepts to understand in order to comprehend why the U.S. government should listen to her pleas and bring the troops home and end the current war in Iraq. These three significant differences between matriotism and patriotism bring us to the question:

3. Is Sheehan’s use of this Matriotism concepts a benefit (or not) to her crusade to end the war?

On January 22, 2006, Sheehan released another open retort to the war proceeding titled “Matriotism.” Ultimately, Matriots are critics; they look at the good and the bad – especially the aspect of sacrificing life to show one’s love for their country. Sheehan begins this post with a discussion about patriotism. “When will we all know that patriotism in the U.S. has come to mean exploiting others’ love for country by sending them off to kill and be killed to protect the interests of the rich,” (Sheehan, 2006)? Here, she is quick to tell whoever is reading it that she believes the government has exploited those with patriotism by sending them off to war to kill or be killed by others in needless sacrifices that she feels all revolve around monetary issues (Sheehan, 2006).
Secondly, Matriots are people who are looking for peaceful solutions to contemporary problems. Sheehan describes a matriot as someone who loves his or her country who believes in all the good and right things this country can do, but recognized that when the country is wrong – especially a country like the United States – the country can be responsible for the deaths of thousands. Sheehan believes a matriot would never bomb, control, or murder innocent people. According to Sheehan, the most important characteristic of a matriot is that a matriot “would never send her child or another mother’s child to fight nonsense wars” (Sheehan, 2006).

In Sheehan’s description of what a matriot is, she says that a matriot would rather go to war herself to protect her children, but seldom choose to use violence when in battle or conflict. Matriots want to work for peace while patriots prefer direct conflict (Sheehan, 2006). Borrowing from feminist approach, a matriot does not have to be a woman. Gender does not determine a role in matriotism, it only matters that a matriot believes in and stands behind the ideals of peace and stand firm in fighting to end needless wars and unnecessary bloodshed (Sheehan, 2006). Sheehan’s use of matriotism is not only seen in this single protest article, but can be found when examining several of her other pieces, but the question remains of how her use of matriot ideals is benefiting or harming her crusade to end the war? Sheehan transfers her notions of what a family is onto the nation when she uses her matriotic ideals, and to better explore how this affects her crusade, it is necessary to understand the two types of families, how Sheehan views her and the nation’s families, and how she uses these concepts to enhance her protests.

According to George Lakoff, households can fundamentally shape our political understanding (1996). In his model, there are two types of households – the paternal and
maternal. There is one thing that is consistent with all types of families is that they are either members of a loving, motherly household or a part of a strict, fatherly household. Neither of these households is truly dependent upon gender, the motherly or fatherly descriptors can be used for the opposite sex and are only being used to demonstrate the differences in household types. Both types are very different, but maintain one commonality; both assumed that the system used in the household will be reproduced in the child’s childrearing (Lakoff, 1996).

A loving, motherly household is based around creating a happy living environment through nurturing interactions. The primary experience is “one of being cared for and cared about,” (Lakoff, 1996). This mode of childrearing is based on the idea that positive reinforcements and encouragement will create a self-disciplining, self-reliant, responsible adult. This type of parent seeks to protect children, and will communicate openly so the child understands the basis for decisions and why such decisions have been made (Lakoff, 1996). All decisions are assumed to protect and nurture the children, since the world is full of evils it is the parents’ responsibility to ward such dangers off (Lakoff, 1996). The whole idea behind the nurturing, protective parent is to maintain a child’s innocence through positive reinforcements and keep the child from losing his or her childhood too soon. This loving or nurturing motherly family is equivalent and comparable to a matriotic nation and how Sheehan portrays patriotism.

The opposite of this would be the strict, fatherly household and all it entails. The strict, fatherly household is comparable to a patriotic nation and what Sheehan describes as Casey’s “false patriotism” (Sheehan, 2006) that led him to join the military service and eventually sacrifice his life for his country. The strict, fatherly household is what is most
common to U.S. citizens as being “normal”. This is the family that has a father who is primarily responsible for protection and support of the family members (Lakoff, 1996). In this household, the father also has the primary authority to make decisions and set household rules. He sets strict rules for his children and when rules are broken, the children are punished enough to make it painful – usually with corporal punishments such as spankings (Lakoff, 1996). This father will show appreciation when rules are followed, but never coddles or spoils the child, while the mother is supposed to uphold the father’s rules and authority (Lakoff, 1996). This punishment type of system creates a mentality in the child, a self-discipline and self-reliance to obey rules through negative reinforcements and the parents to prevent any painful punishments. This type of family gives only tough love and the child learns from this how to survive and succeed in his or her own adult lives.

Though Sheehan and her family household may have been a strict, fatherly household in the past – something that can not be known, when her son was killed in action it quickly became a loving, motherly household. Sheehan frames her family as being different from a traditional patriot family through her rhetoric when she presents her family as having been pushed around by the national patriotic family. The descriptions of the two types of family households are important to grasp before being able to completely understand all of Sheehan’s arguments towards ending the war and arguments against President Bush and the Bush Administration. It is interesting to see how she not only uses family metaphors to describe her personal family and household, but also how she transcends the family metaphors to describe the nation and that national family of Americans.
The good family metaphors Sheehan uses include bringing “the rest of our babies home from this quagmire of a war,” (Sheehan, November 4, 2004). To Sheehan, a good national family would maintain the mindset that every child is their own and all citizens should care for all the children. She takes on this mindset to create her good family metaphor and refers to all “our babies” in different ways, but especially after speaking about her son, Casey’s, death. In this particular instance, she is telling President George Bush that she will “scream” until all of “our babies” are returned from war to prevent other families the suffering that her family went through as a result of Casey’s death.

The bad government family metaphors Sheehan uses include calling the American family a family consisting of “millions of sheeple who have had the wool pulled over their eyes by the bunch of hypocritical, bad shepherds who are running a disastrous herd over the world,” (Sheehan, July 4, 2005). The term sheeple is a clear insult as it refers to the millions of people who Sheehan feels are being too obedient to a bad government family. Sheehan is claiming here that Bush is the leader and the sheeple are the obedient ones, but that it is resulting in bad and damaging circumstances. She wants this metaphor to show that it is time for less obedience to the bad government from above – the national patriotic family – and more obedience to the good government from the self – the national matriotic family.

Matriotism: a mother’s fight for her family and her country

So how does all this talk about family, military, and patriotism interrelate to Sheehan’s war protests? These concepts are all intertwined and create a position to better understand how Sheehan shapes her arguments and protest writings to transcend her concept of a family onto the nation as a whole.
Sheehan constantly reminds her audience in her protest rhetoric that she has lost her eldest child, her son Casey, to the war in Iraq. She does not hide the fact that he was killed in action, nor does she hide the fact that she does not agree with the Bush Administration and the war in general. These comments could not have been made by someone who had not lost a close relative to the war, as then she could not position herself as grieving and in pain as she does when she refers to her son’s death as a murder and the president’s role as being the cause. This is not the only time she uses her loss as a catapult to uniquely position herself to be considered “allowed” to be critical and “allowed” to be angry and desiring a change in the course of action being taken. But the question is raised, would she have the same impact if her son was not one of the war’s casualties? Or, does she use his death to uniquely position herself – and possibly create a base for some credibility in being a protest leader? In her first letter as a protestor, she both personalizes and critiques the president by saying “Dear George…when you sent me a letter offering your condolences on the death of my son, Spc. Casey Austin Sheehan, in the illegal and unjust war on Iraq you called me Cindy, so I naturally assume we are on a first name basis,” (Sheehan, November 4, 2004). She continues in the next paragraph by describing how the President’s “reckless and wanton foreign policies killed my son, my big boy, my hero…it has been seven months since your ignorant and arrogant lack of planning for the peace murdered my oldest child” (Sheehan, November 4, 2004). Sheehan uses her loss of a son to allow her protest rhetoric to be personalized in a manner that is critical of the president. She is asking for permission to call him by his first name, only after she already does this. This approach shows that her loss of a son has created an angry mother who is ready to battle the bad father for sending the child to war and
allowing his death to result. To make matters worse, the upset mother feels the bad father was not compassionate enough with the death of her son because all he did was send condolences in a letter, and he was refusing to meet with her to have an open conversation about the war, and he was sending more “babies’ to the War – all are things the matriot is opposed to. The matriot wants an open dialogue, more personable communication, and fewer lives sacrificed in the name of a war.

Sheehan’s overall protest goal appears to be an end to the war and to return the troops from Iraq, but she does not do this by just protesting the president, but also other governmental officials that may play a voting role in ending the invasion. She frames Senator John McCain as being relationally disengaged. She claims that his thinking process is distorted because “he hasn’t had a loved one killed in this enormous tragedy of a war, nor does he have a loved one in harm’s way. It has not affected him personally one bit. What skin is it off McCain’s nose if our troops remain for a highly unlikely rosy outcome at the cost of thousands of more lives?” (Sheehan, July 4, 2005). Sheehan is expressing in this excerpt how she feels that McCain’s personal issues and personal life have shaped his political perceptions. Because he is not directly related to anybody who is in any direct danger of this war, Sheehan expresses that she feels that McCain does not feel it should matter. He is not losing sleep worrying about his own child being in harm’s way, so why should he worry about anybody else’s? Sheehan continues from this point to talk about how she would want to go back to this never happening to bring back her son and all of those who were killed for nothing.

She uses a similar approach when she address Former First Lady Barbara Bush in an open letter by beginning with “on April 4, 2004, your oldest child, George W. Bush,
killed my oldest child, Casey Austin Sheehan,” (Sheehan, 2006). Sheehan uses this type of opening with this letter to get Barbara Bush to identify with her as a mother, so that she can have her full attention when she continues on with an argument for why the war should end – she even goes on to partially blame the former first lady for the war because she is President Bush’s mother. “Did you teach George to use his words and not his violence to solve problems? It doesn’t appear so. Did you teach him that killing other people for profits and oil is always wrong? Obviously you did not,” (Sheehan, 2006). This approach is a strong approach to gain Barbara Bush’s attention only because of the fact that Sheehan has lost a son to the war and violence. Had Casey not been killed in action, this approach would not be as effective. Since Casey was killed, Sheehan is able to use her grief as a gateway to a more angry and aggressive rhetorical style particularly towards the President, the former First Lady, and U.S. Senators.

There is nothing fundamentally new about anti-war activists. The U.S. has a long tradition of citizens speaking out against war (the hippies, the beats, the isolationist, and the Tories are but a few). Sheehan is important because she stresses how her son’s death poses questions for the President and the federal government. She poses her questions as if she is just seeking to gain knowledge about her son’s actual death, but clearly she is questioning the purpose of the war and questioning the legitimacy of the Bush’s presidency in general. These questions are considered reasonable only because she lost her son – another example that she uses the element of losing her son to uniquely position her to be a more forceful war protestor. In a second open letter to the president, Sheehan wrote that she asked Bush “for what noble cause did you kill Casey and the others? Since then hundreds more of our brave young men and women have been killed in the
charade of Iraq. We can only guess how many innocent Iraqis have been slaughtered. You still have not answered my question,” (Sheehan, 2006). She blatantly calls the war make-believe when she refers to it as a charade, mocking the president’s decision to send the troops overseas. Using the term charade, Sheehan is expressing her opinion that this war is inexcusable. Had she called the War in Iraq a mistake, misunderstanding, or a fumble, she would have given the President an opening to not be the blame, but calling it make-believe creates an image that can only blame President Bush. On top of that, she questions why he has yet to answer her original question of why her son was killed. She wants an explanation for this “noble cause” for which she is unaware, but what affect would words like this have if the person saying them to the president had not lost a child or another loved one in the war itself? If a civilian was simply asking the president why so many people have died in this war, it is inconceivable that any media attention or any attention at all would be given to the person. Sheehan, however, was given a unique position to have the right to truly question this war when Casey was killed. She may not have been known before his death, but now people in the U.S. are aware of her and what she has been doing to protest the war and the Bush Administration in general.

It is clear and obvious that Sheehan has suffered. She lost a child, and where most people believe that the children should out-live the parents, this mother was forced to bury her child at a very young age because he chose to act upon his patriotic believes that it was his duty to defend his country. What makes this an important component is the fact that Sheehan repeatedly uses her own suffering and emotional pain as part of her anti-war rhetoric. The second question of this section is if her rhetoric represents a style where someone has to suffer. It is apparent in the artifacts being examined that she truly
believes someone has to suffer and it should no longer be her or the troops and their families. She believes that President Bush and his administration should take responsibility for all the deaths that have occurred since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and she does not seem to want to stop protesting until she has forced them to take responsibility and until they withdraw the troops and bring every last one of the soldiers home.

In her desire to find restitution for the deaths of her son and so many other sons and daughters of U.S. citizens, Sheehan continues voicing her opinion about the Iraq War and how she plans to seek justice for all those who have suffered at the hands of this war. In an email that Sheehan sent to the President – and made public – she tells President Bush that “I don’t want you using me, as an American, to endorse your sadistic policies,” (Sheehan, September 12, 2006). Later in this email, she tells the president what she does want instead when she declares “I called on you almost two years ago to resign after you stole yet another election and I am calling on you to resign again…You are a disgrace and a danger to our country. You have not protected me or my family…If you won’t resign, then I hope Congress wakes up and finally does the right thing by impeaching you and the rest of the liars in your administration. The world can’t wait much longer for justice,” (Sheehan, September 12, 2006). Sheehan is not calling for any physical harm to the president or any direct physical suffering, but by calling for his resignation or impeachment, she is seeking to make sure he goes through some career, financial, emotional, mental, and moral suffering for what has happened to her family and thousands of other families in the U.S. and Iraq.
This is not the only time Sheehan’s words show she is seeking to make sure the President suffers. When it comes to calling for a resignation or threats of impeachment, there are plenty of examples of Sheehan’s call for Bush’s suffering including:

“George you don’t care or even realize that 56,000,000 plus citizens of this country voted against you and your agenda. Still, you are going to continue your ruthless work of being a divider and not a uniter. George, in 2000 when you stole that election and the Democrats gave up, I gave up too. I had the most ironic though of my life then: “Oh well, how much damage can he do in four years?” Well, now I know how much you have damaged my family, this country, and this world. If you think I am going to allow you another four years to do even more damage, then you truly are mistaken. I will fight for a true vote count and if that fails, your impeachment,” (Sheehan, November 4, 2004).

Here again, Sheehan is seeking a means to create a cause for the president to suffer, almost in a form or retribution for what she has lost. Though she continually seeks to cause pain and suffering for the president through her rhetoric, that is not the sole method of how her anti-war rhetoric represents a style where somebody has suffered through a perceived injustice.

Sheehan’s rhetoric also represents this style of a suffering because of what she has personally already gone through. The losing of her son created a pathway for her protest rhetoric to be created, but without Casey’s death, her words would be empty and what some would consider frivolous. She would have no basis for what she is fighting for, but with the suffering she has experienced, her words are more filled with emotion and have the potential to create a much larger impact on the United States society because of who
can identify with her. Any person who has lost a loved one as a result of the war - or any war of the past - can relate to the pain and suffering Sheehan is speaking about when she talks about dinner with her family but without Casey sitting there. When Sheehan speaks about holidays, it is a powerful statement about rituals marked by absence. Sheehan seems to understand this and uses this technique effectively in conjunction with her attacks on the president, the war, and the injustices that she feels are occurring under the government reign of the Bush Administration. “My family is spending our second Thanksgiving without Casey thanks to you and your lies. I am spending the day crying on a plane on my way to Crawford, coming again to ask you for a meeting,” (Sheehan, 2006). Sheehan’s appeal to emotion is clear and easy to spot, but on top of that she is appealing to anybody who can identify with her major problem; she wants to meet with President Bush just to ask some questions and find some closure about her son’s death, but he has refused time and time again to have this meeting. Anybody who has ever wanted something but has somebody preventing it several times would understand this appeal.

At this point, it is clear that Sheehan has used two specific and unique rhetorical strategies that are only successful for her because of circumstances within her life that not every war protestor could possible obtain – a “maternal rhetoric”. She is uniquely positioned to make her claims against the war because of the element of losing her son, Casey, where not every war protestor in the U.S. has experienced the death of a child from the war. This occurrence sets Sheehan apart for many of the protestors, but recognizes the fact that there are thousands of families that have lost someone to this war and thousands more families who still have loved ones serving in the military and
stationed in Iraq. Because there are so many families and citizens that have been affected, or are still being affected by this war, Sheehan’s use of this tragic loss in her family unit is a powerful tool and a unique rhetorical strategy.

The second strategy that is unique to Sheehan’s rhetorical style is the rhetoric of loss – she has lost a child and is using that as a rhetorical tool in protests. She has been the one to suffer through most of these events and will continue to suffer most of her life because he son died so young, but she has turned her suffering into motivation to create the suffering of somebody else. Sheehan demonstrates that she recognizes that her rhetoric would not be nearly as controversial nor as effective had she not suffered prior to it. Through her suffering, she is seeking restitution for her loss and the losses of so many others, and that is why she is calling for the president to take responsibility for what has happened and therefore cause him some personal suffering as well. To find a way to get President Bush to resign or impeached would be an acceptable resolution to what Sheehan sees as the ultimate problem existing in the U.S. since it is his presidency and administration that are keeping the troops in danger in Iraq. She feels that if the President was to take responsibility and resign, or if he was forced to face the consequences and was impeached, then she would be making a significant difference. This difference may not bring her son back or discontinue her or her family’s suffering, but it would give the opportunity for a domino effect to help end other families’ suffering. If the presidency was changed, there would be a potential change in the military’s involvement in Iraq, which could lead to several families having less of a chance for the same suffering Sheehan’s family has been through. If she could create this situation, there would be a chance for the troops to withdraw – which would prevent any more children dying.
There is one final question to be answered to fully understand the potential influence Sheehan has on the political realm inside the wall of the United States of America. When it comes to the concept of Matriotism, how does the use of matriotic ideals affect Sheehan’s crusade to end the war? To answer this, it is important to clearly understand how Sheehan’s rhetoric contains matriotic concepts, including an entire protest letter about matriotism, and then how it may affect any overall anti-war efforts.

Sheehan’s views about what patriotism entails includes a key component that she feels must exist or one is not a patriot. She feels patriots must be willing to sacrifice life in the name of one’s country – you must be willing to go to war and die for your country to be a patriot in this view. Sheehan recognized that since her son lost his life while serving in the U.S. military, that she does not necessarily agree with the idea that somebody has to be willing to die to be patriotic. When the term matriotism was brought to her attention, she grasped the concept because it allowed for a citizen to love his or her country, but also allowed for that person to recognize when the government makes mistakes. Sheehan believes “a true matriot would never bomb cities and villages, or control drones from thousands of miles away to kill innocent men, women, and children,” (Sheehan, 2006). Sheehan shows through much of her rhetoric that she does not want any more children to die because of the Iraq War, she feels the war is being fought for a viable reason and wants to see it end rather than see more casualties occur. Interesting to add is that she does not use the term children to refer to the young children who have been innocently killed during the war, but rather every mother’s child that is involved – and since all humans are born from a mother’s womb, she is referring to every person involved including military, civilian, men, women, American, and Iraqis alike.
Sheehan portrays the characteristics of being a matriot in all of her protest rhetoric, not just in the letter titled “Matriotism.” In all of her written rhetoric she expresses her love for the United States and how much she wants to make it a better place, and also how she does not agree with sending the military into a war that will lead to unnecessary casualties as the Iraq War has produced. Nothing can be mistaken about how Sheehan feels about the deaths in Iraq, she does not feel even one death was worth it. She demonstrates her matriotic views when she sent an email to President Bush on September 12, 2006. She specifically tells him that she does not want her citizenship to be used as an excuse to continue any violence when she tells him that “I don’t want you using me, as an American, to endorse your sadistic policies,” (Sheehan, September 12, 2006). She continues with an accusation of what his policies are really producing, rather than peace. “I don’t feel safer. I feel like you are killing my precious babies to further your greed for power and riches,” (Sheehan, September 12, 2006). In this example, she is using her family metaphor to incorporate all of the men and women serving – not just her son. She refers to “her babies” when in reality only one of her children was serving in Iraq while the younger two were still at home with her.

Sheehan continues her campaign against an unnecessary and unjust war in an open letter to President Bush on November 24, 2005, where she pleads for him to respond to her inquiries for what noble cause her son and so many other persons were killed while serving in Iraq. Staying with the idea that one death is too many, Sheehan begins to seek out a reason for why these deaths of “her babies” have happened at all. In closing of this letter she makes one final attempt to make a difference by stating “bring
our troops home from Iraq. How many deaths do you think will be necessary before Casey’s is “justified”? 58,000? One was too many,” (Sheehan, 2006).

In her reflection protest posting titled “Still Not Worth It,” Sheehan talks again about her views on whether the war in Iraq and her son’s death was worth it after seeing the first free election in Iraq in 2005. Her response is as expected from anybody who knows her anti-war sentiments, “No, Casey’s sacrifice was not “worth it” and George needs to do more than wave his flag and manipulate our sense of patriotism. He needs to march his girls to a recruitment center and send them to Iraq to fight the terrorists that his moronic and callous foreign policies have recruited or he needs to wake up and smell the apple pie and bring our other sons and daughters home, now!” (Sheehan, July 4, 2005). Again she refers to all of the military as the country’s children by asking for our sons and daughters to be brought home. On top of this, she demonstrates the matriotic view of peace by specifically telling her audience that the sacrifice of life was not worth it to her – especially now since her son’s own death. She also addresses how she feels the concept of patriotism has been manipulated by the president. She uses the metaphor of President Bush waving a flag as an example of how he has shown his patriotism, but is clearly mocking this in a sense when she tells him that more needs to be done than simply waving a flag – he should take responsibilities for what she feels are his mistakes and bring the troops home.

This metaphor of President Bush waving a flag also shows how his patriotism has not resulted in his actual sacrifice to the War in Iraq. President Bush has two daughters – neither of which are serving in the military – and he has not had to go through the same grief that Sheehan has faced since losing her own son in the war. If the President was a
true patriot – in the obedient sense that Pericles spoke of in his funeral oration – then he would be willing to sacrifice his children in the name of the nation, but seeing how neither of his children is involved, it appears he is only willing to sacrifice through others, and thus is not a true patriot in traditional terms.

Now that Sheehan’s use of matriotic ideals is seen through samples of her anti-war rhetoric, the question remains if this affects her crusade to end the war positively or negatively. It appears that it may be doing more harm than help at this point in time, simply because of the misunderstanding that exists in the United States about the term and its variation from patriotism. Many Americans could be offended to hear her say that patriotism is a bad thing, but until one recognizes how she defines patriotism, this misunderstanding may continue to occur. Not every U.S. citizen believes that a patriotic duty means one must die for his or her country, or let their child die for the country, but instead believe patriotism is displayed by wearing that flag lapel pin, hanging an American Flag on their porch, or through habits such as buying American made products rather than imports (Barton, 2001). Until the United States and Sheehan define the terms in the same manner, a misunderstanding of what Sheehan means when she talks about concepts of patriotism and matriotism will continue and allow her to be viewed as being unpatriotic herself.

Since Sheehan is already viewed as being unpatriotic (Rostami, 2005), she has violated one expectation of U.S. citizens at a time of war. In the following chapter, an examination of what other expectations Sheehan is violating will be conducted to show that she has not only violated expectations of courtesy and understanding, but is being cynical in her rhetorical style when speaking to President Bush, Former First Lady
Barbara Bush, and to any other person who opposes her war protests and efforts to bring the U.S. military forces home from Iraq.
Chapter 4: Cindy the Cynic

Within the democratic society like the United States of America, there are multiple opportunities for citizens to express their opinions about policies, legislation, politicians, and the government through a variety of means, both formal and informal. Letters to elected officials or letters to the editor of a local newspaper are an established part of this political discourse. It is nearly unthinkable that even the strongest opinions about politics could launch a civil war or insurgence on the government and its officials. Even in those instances of hotly contested elections, politicians maintain this civility through events such as public debates on the issues. Only when campaigns turn to the use of mud-slinging tactics – which is more common today – does one see a lack of civility.

Civility: what we expect

The impulse towards civility seems to have a strong resonance in the American political culture. But it is not the only impulse. Moments of contestation have made a profound impact on history. The suffragettes, the protestors, the activists, the labor organizers and even the Founders can all claim the merits of incivility. But what happens when a citizen’s opposition to a policy – or even the entire government – evaporates completely? Will it produce a person committed to being an apolitical non-voter? Or will it produce a completely new form of explosive anger? Profound doubt marks popular fictional characters like Homer Simpson, but it also marked the all too real emotions and actions of people like Timothy McVeigh. To explore these competing dynamics, we must first understand the concept of civility itself. In doing so, we will also investigate civility’s emotional counterpart cynicism. After an examination of these
central concepts, we can see how the tension between civility and cynicism, and between foolery and anger, that plays an important role in Cindy Sheehan’s anti-war rhetoric. Finally, this chapter will consider the potential effects of this rhetorical style.

To begin, let’s examine the concept of civility. When defined, civility is the “art of civil government, politics”. But, it also contains notions of “courteousness and politeness” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1971). Politeness and courtesy are characteristics of how any person would like to be treated. Any person hopes that they can just expect such things. But some people, such as politicians, may actually depend on civility. Because democratic politics involves a competition of voices and ideas, a rhetoric of civility allows the expression of values and the possibility of compromise.

Kenneth Burke (1968) tells us that such arrangements are part of a rhetorical form. Communicators develop and then work to satisfy expectations with one another to aide in more efficient communication. This is what Burke refers to as “form” (1962). Form facilitates communication because it systematically leads the audience from one component of a text to another part, helping audiences identify a sequence, understanding such sequences, and ultimately, to make judgments about quality of the text (Burks, 1985). Quigley (1998) tells us that the establishment of Formal rhetoric helps to build a sense of identification between the audience and the speaker. Burke (1962) describes how form allows the audience to feel like they are each a part of the rhetorical event that is occurring because the audience is then “not merely receiving, but were itself creatively participating in the poet’s or speaker’s assertion,” (Burke, 1962). Because the audience feels like a creative participant in the rhetorical work, the formation of sequences “readily awakens an attitude of collaborative expectancy,” (Burke, 1962) and this helps to create a
universal component of form – or expectancy – between the audience and the rhetor. Moreover, it often works subconsciously, without either party realizing it. Whether it is lecturers introducing themselves to their students, or cashiers at a fast food restaurant, or a news anchor presenting the evening news, all are bound by a set of Formal conventions that help to make their individual tasks easier. So it goes in the worlds of education, commerce, mass media, – and also in the world of professional politics.

Even though it may not be intentional, an audience does expects certain things from rhetorical artifacts – which is what Burke labels as form – and as long as we get our expectations, form is satisfied (1968). However, when the sequence, or form, is broken, we have what is called expectancy violations. In the specific case of Cindy Sheehan being analyzed here, form can help the audience to feel similar or connected to her and her anti-war messages – not through her use of form, but in her expectancy violation of civility.

In today’s society, to teach a child how to live a life of civility is to teach that child to balance desire with sound moral decisions (Carter, 1998). Civility has already been defined as the “art of civil government, politics” and “courteousness and politeness” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1971), but there is more to the concept that must be understood before applying it to Sheehan’s anti-war rhetoric. Ideally, civility is a concept that is usually desired as a lasting value in all people. A value that citizens of a society normally want instilled in us by our family. In the previous chapter we discussed the difference between a traditional paternal family and Sheehan’s desired maternal family, as well as a created framework for our national family. Hopefully, all three types of family will teach children to maintain civility, especially since it is believed that the
family is where lifetime habits are formed (Carter, 1998). It is in the family where morals and values are taught because it is believed that such things are not simply innate, but taught (Carter, 1998). Where does a person learn to live a life of civility? To learn civility, one must be taught how to live by the courteous rules of respect and manners within the immediate family and within the society’s family as a whole (Carter, 1998).

So what is civility as a rhetorical concept? We have already seen how civility is defined by the dictionary, but there is more to this concept than the simple definition. According to Uslander, civility makes compromise possible (2000), even across ideological lines while be willing to listen to an opposition explain him or herself (Meyer, 2000). More than a rhetorical style, civility is a value that allows its holder to give respect to others no matter where varying views can arise – personally or ideologically – and the ability to recognize other perspectives without being insulting, but instead being courteous. This definitional approach does not eliminate criticism, but does encourage productive, organized debates without a demonstration of explicit hostility towards one’s opposition (Darr, 2005).

From this working definition of civility as both a value and a rhetorical style, we can observe how Sheehan, at times, fulfills the Formal expectations of professional politics. But at other instances, she abandons these requirements completely. To grasp this tension with her style, we must turn away from the decorum and precise rhetoric of civility. We must turn towards an altogether different mindset and a correspondingly different rhetoric, one where Formal violations are not only assumed, they are demanded.
Cynicism: when the civility expectation is violated

If civility is the expectation or form for political rhetoric, what happens when activists violate such form? Especially when a political social movement is voicing dissent with the government, or a politician, or a policy, or a course of action such as going to war; is the violation the opposite of civility? Is it merely the concept of incivility? It could be assumed that the opposite of civility, incivility, would be the result of the form violation, but it is the contention of this paper to argue that Sheehan goes further than incivility and isn’t just uncompromising, unfair, and disrespectful, but actually becomes cynical in her anti-war protest rhetoric. This can be found evident because she not only ignores all courtesies of civility when she protests, but also because she goes further beyond that simple violation with her personal attacks on President Bush, his governmental policies and procedures, his actual election into office, and the Iraq War.

This section will discuss a working definition of cynicism, and how cynicism is the expectancy violation of civility through Burke’s concept of form. Next, the concept of what the rhetoric of cynicism truly entails will be developed. Finally, an analysis will be made to show how Sheehan’s protests are using the rhetoric of cynicism as a key method in her open-letter format.

Cynicism is what results when people – for this paper, we are specifically talking about social activists – lose their civility. There is always room for cynics in a democratic society, but only in certain arenas. In the political aspects being discussed here, sometimes it is hard to separate the cynics from those who are simply disagreeing
with another, but a distinction needs to be made because a cynical opponent violates all assumptions of normative behavior.

The original archetype of the cynic dates to ancient Greece, and can be found most clearly in the person of Diogenes. There are many tales told about Diogenes by his contemporaries and later philosophers, but the most telling relates to his walking around daytime Athens with a lit lantern. When queried about this strange behavior, Diogenes reputedly said, that he was looking for an honest man in Athens (Chaloupka, 1999). Bitingly satirical and deliberately ironic, Diogenes makes his point clear. Even with the assistance of the sun and his lantern, he will not find his honest man. Some may regard this maneuver as a stunt, but it was a memorable stunt that made an important comment on civil life in ancient Athens.

The cynical style of Diogenes always sought to unsettle the status quo. At a time when some philosophers espoused a life of poverty, Diogenes challenged them directly. He did so not through argument, but by actually living on the streets. During this very public display, Diogenes told the onlookers that the life of poverty that was being promoted was not only untenable, but actually a cover up for political privileges and personal comforts (Chaloupka, 1999). His intentions were to continue to live a life of poverty, but always maintain his good humor and shamelessness (Chaloupka, 1999). According to Sloterdijk, Diogenes was the first to resist a government using cynicism and by doing this he created uncivil explanation (Sloterdijk, 1987). Diogenes was the first social activist to be uncivil and cynical in an openly visible style. It is because of Diogenes that we even have the term cynic or the concept of cynicism.
Citizens of Athens began calling him a dog because of his public show of bodily functions and living standards because he was living the life of a stray dog. This is how the term for cynic was developed. The Greek term for dog is “kyon” (Chaloupka, 1999). In Greece, Diogenes’s style of philosophy became “kynic” which is where “cynic” comes (Chaloupka, 1999). Stray dogs are noisy and potentially even dangerous when they cross our path. Such creatures are not bound by the conventions of their domesticated counterparts. They do and act as they please in an open setting – because it is the only one they have.

By extending this metaphor, we can appreciate how a rhetoric of cynicism operates. It thrives as an expectancy violation and generates attention for itself by abandoning Form and convention. Because it is so unorthodox, it can be viewed as threatening. People expect the government and politically sophisticated people (politicians, social activists, congress, etc.) to resolve issues and disagreements formally. Thus, when those norms are violated, the perpetrator is more than simply disagreeing with a political position; they are openly challenging the regulative norms that have been institutionally or culturally developed.

How does cynicism relate to Cindy Sheehan? It is this paper’s contention that her anti-war written rhetoric is cynical in nature. This paper will also show how Sheehan’s style does not adhere to the modalities frequently used by social activists and political rhetoricians.

Diogenes may be the first Cynic, and he is a unique individual. As a lone voice among thousands of Athenians, his style was noteworthy, but times have changed and city-states evolved from feudal monarchies and then again into modern nation states.
Would Diogenes make the same kind of mark in our high-speed, interconnected world of mass communication? Contemporary cynics have been forced to evolve as well and embraced the idea of group action. Occasionally, individual cynics can unite with others and bond for a shared cause or purpose. In this sense, cynical communities resemble religious communities. Religious communities are based in common threads of belief, faith, and trust. These communities pan across time for years, or even centuries, and gain members by accentuating the positive qualities of their faith and trust base. Contrary to this community of trust, a cynical community would be one based in ideas of suspicion and doubt. Sheehan and her anti-war cohorts would be one example of this type of cynical community. Sheehan does not trust the United States government, specifically President Bush, and believes all citizens should be suspicious of his presidency to a point where no one can trust or have any faith in his dealings any longer. She has such suspicions of President Bush’s presidency she has called for the impeachment of Bush rather than wait it out until the end of his term.

This community that Sheehan has begun is based in doubt and wants to gain additional membership by persuading other citizens to believe in their negative perceptions of the current U.S. government situation – especially the war in Iraq. A cynical community must persuade others to put trust in them all while proclaiming their lack of trust for others. This type of persuasion demonstrates just how contradictory a cynical community can be perceived by others.

The rhetoric of cynicism that Sheehan demonstrates is that of the aforementioned community. This is a rhetoric that exemplifies anti-trust in something – in this case it is suspicion of the government – but all the while hoping to persuade others to trust in the
message being delivered to increase its number of supporters. The rhetoric of cynicism would be engulfed in suspicions and doubt, as well as being visibly disrespectful in a deliberately ironic manner. Since this is the form violation of, the rhetoric of cynicism would also be uncompromising and would lack the desire to hear the other party out, but instead wants its message to be the only one that is considered valid.

Sheehan and her group of anti-war protestors are trying to use this type of rhetoric to gain additional support from United States’ citizens to band together against the government and its decision to go to war. Sheehan’s use of such a concept as cynicism could opens a door for many others to use it. This is a concept that was used in Ancient Greece and could possibly be used in many other situations, especially protests. To show how this is done, an analysis will follow to demonstrate how Sheehan uses cynicism in her protest rhetoric, and also a discussion will follow on how this type of rhetoric may or may not be able to span the test of time.

The rhetoric of cynicism: Cindy the Cynic

Sheehan is not unique in being cynical, but she is unique in other ways. Using Burke’s concept of form, several expectations can be created for how a social activist protests the United States government. A few of those expectations include marches, sit-ins, rallies, and protest speeches. U.S. citizens expect petitions and posters as well as any form of voiced digression that is not violent or too obstructive. It is when a protest becomes violent or obstructive to every day living that form is broken. Sheehan has not broken form in the idea that her protests have remained peaceful and she has given several speeches and hosted several rallies to bring awareness to her disagreement with the government, President Bush, and with the Iraq War.
One way that Sheehan has broken form and created an expectation violation is with how she has done some of her protesting. Even though she has done the speeches and such, she has also used a format that is different and not what is expected. Sheehan has used what is referred to as the open-letter format to express her views. Sheehan has taken the simple format of a letter – a written correspondence between two people – and made it a tool in how she has reached so many people. This format is an expectancy violation for a couple of main reasons. First, letters are expected to be private correspondences from one person directly to another and ideally will have nobody else reading what was expressed. Letters have been published throughout history, but normally this publication only occurs after the death of the author or recipient. Sheehan writes letters to President Bush and Former First Lady Barbara Bush, but makes these letters open to anybody to read by publishing them in her books and posting them as blogs on her websites to ensure anybody can have access to them.

A second way Sheehan violates expectations is how she addresses various people in her letters. Sheehan is quite informal in her addressing of the president, his mother, and many other political persons who traditionally are given some form of respect through titles or proper names. In Sheehan’s letters, she addresses President Bush by his first name only, and with informal openings such as saying “Hey George,” (Sheehan, September 12, 2006). She addresses President Bush’s mother, the Former First Lady by calling her “Bush’s Mama” or simply calling her Barbara (Sheehan, 2006). These informalities shows Sheehan’s lack of respect for the president and his mother, as well as for the titles they both hold. A lack of respect is a violation of civility, since the
definition given for the purpose of this paper included the need to give respect to all opponents and all opposing ideas and concepts.

The third major way Sheehan has breaks form in her protest is through her distrust. Since civility is our expectation, Sheehan violates this with her direct sparring with the President. There are several examples within the chosen pieces of Sheehan’s protest rhetoric that demonstrate how she violates civility by being uncompromising, resorts to name-calling, and does not see both sides to any of the disagreements. There is also enough to show how she becomes cynical with examples of suspicion, doubt, and anti-trust laden rhetoric.

To begin, let’s take a look at how Sheehan violates the expectation of civility through examples of her rhetoric. In her first open letter to President Bush, and really her first active protest attempt, Sheehan shows her contempt through her use of one-sided comments that do not allow for her opposition to have any opportunity to express a differing view. She says to that President Bush that “it has been seven months today since your reckless and wanton foreign policies killed my son,” (Sheehan, November 4, 2004). In this same piece, Sheehan calls President Bush ignorant and arrogant, dishonest, and claims that he is a thief.

In this same piece, Sheehan continues to attack President Bush in an uncivil manner when she questions him. “You feel so proud of yourself for betraying the country again, don’t you? You think you are very clever because you pulled the wool over the eyes of some of the people again. You think that you have some mandate from God,” (Sheehan, November 4, 2004). Even though it may appear that Sheehan is asking the president questions so that he may respond and a civil debate may ensue, she is
actually being sarcastic and uncompromising because she wrote this in an open-letter that
was published on the internet knowing the president could not adequately respond to the
allegations without risking his own credibility.

She continues to make attacks on President Bush’s credibility and presidency
when she goes into details about why she feels he is a thief. She is not talking about
stealing material items like clothes or electronics, but instead is talking about stealing the
presidential office when she states that “George, in 2000 when you stole that election…I
gave up,” and saying “it has been two days since your dishonest campaign stole another
election,” (Sheehan, November 4, 2004). Sheehan’s uncompromising view is evident as
she is not willing to believe that George W. Bush could have won either election, but
instead insists that he stole both of them by being deceptive and untrustworthy.

A little more than a year later, Sheehan continues to violate the civility
expectation in another open letter to President Bush. She again brings up that she blames
him for the death of her son through all of his lies and continues to question his noble
reasons and the noble causes for such a war (Sheehan, 2006). In this particular letter, she
is also noted for calling President Bush a war criminal and the “new bad guy in town” for
using chemical weapons while bombing cities when President Bush had said Saddam was
a bad man for using such tactics on innocent people (Sheehan, 2006). In fact, by the end
of the section about chemical weapons, Sheehan resorts to simply calling Bush by the
name of Saddam to reiterate her point that she feels Bush is out of line for continuing the
war efforts (Sheehan, 2006).

About 10 months later, Sheehan continued her incivility on President Bush with
an open letter that was actually an email she had sent to the President, and then posted it
online for the public to view and read. In this one, she again calls President Bush a liar, but on top of that she is seen calling him a criminal for his crimes against humanity (Sheehan, September 12, 2006). She then talks about her disgust for the President’s greed and claims to him that “you are killing our children so that Coca-Cola can open a bottling plant in Afghanistan and so that Exxon and Haliburton can achieve wealth only dreamed of by King Midas,” (Sheehan, September 12, 2006).

Sheehan again go back to talking about the presidential elections and is quick to call President Bush a thief and refer to him stealing his elections into office in this piece (Sheehan, September 12, 2006). Instead of just referring to the elections being stolen though, Sheehan takes her incivility a step further in this letter when she says “You are a disgrace and a danger to our country. You have not protected me or my family. In fact you have endangered my children and grandchildren,” (Sheehan, September 12, 2006). So the name-calling continues when she calls him a disgrace and a danger, and again when she declares him a non-protector of people. Sheehan uses the name-calling to establish her points of disagreement with President Bush, but he is not the only target of such open letter approaches.

In an open letter to Former First Lady Barbara Bush, Sheehan continues to show signs of incivility through the use of personal attacks, name-calling, and a lack of compromise. She goes right after the president’s mother by questioning how she raised her children. “Did you teach him that killing other people for profits and oils is always wrong? Obviously you did not,” (Sheehan, 2006). She includes a personal attack about how Barbara did not raise President Bush to use words instead of violence to solve problems – and says these things in an attacking manner to insinuate that she blames the
Former First Lady for the war and her own son’s death during the war. She even tells Barbara that President Bush has bad manners and is inaccessible (Sheehan, 2006).

Sheehan continues the name-calling and exclaims “The Angel of Death that took my son is your son,” (Sheehan, 2006). This attack on President Bush is not only an example of Sheehan’s incivility towards Bush by calling him the Angel of Death, but also an uncivil comment made towards the Former First Lady because this statement is about her child. Sheehan continues this type of civility violation attack when she asks “Besides encouraging your son to have some honesty and courage and to finally do the right thing, don’t you think you own me…an apology for the cruel and careless remark you made,” (Sheehan, 2006)? She then returns to insulting the president and questioning his upbringing by saying “Your son’s amazingly ignorant, arrogant, ad reckless policies in Iraq are responsible for so much sorrow and trouble in this world. Can you make him stop? Do it before more mothers’ lives are needlessly and cruelly harmed. It has happened too many times already,” (Sheehan, 2006). This is just one more example of how Sheehan is not civil in her protests because she is seen name-calling with a lack of a desire to compromise.

In an internet blog, Sheehan writes another open-letter that is meant for an unknown man that chased her around yelling at her, as well as for any other person who believe she was showing a lack of love for her family by being a protestor. In this letter, she again shows her violation of the civility expectation with how she speaks to the recipient. First, she starts with the name calling and says she assumes he is probably inebriated and later goes back to this when she calls the unknown man “Drunky McRepublican” (Sheehan, September 11, 2006). She calls him tipsy and drunk several
other times throughout this posting. Sheehan continues the name-calling throughout this letter with attacks such as calling him naïve, an ignorant loudmouth, and irrational (Sheehan, September 11, 2006).

Now that we have seen how Sheehan violates the form of civility, it is time to look at how her rhetoric is not only uncivil, but more so how it is cynical in its own regard. So far, we have seen name-calling, one-sided arguments, and uncompromising tactics towards the opposition. For Sheehan’s rhetoric to be a violation of civility, and truly become cynical, it must go further and be laden with doubts, suspicions and distrust of government and specifically President Bush.

One of the key marks of a cynical style is its ironic showmanship. Like Diogenes’ lantern, Cindy Sheehan employs a symbol of her own self. Her twin status as a mother, a giver of life and as the parent of a fallen soldier, expected to support the reasoning for his her son’s death are powerfully inverted. In this letter with her cynical stylings are visible:

Dear George, do you know what the hardest work of all is? Trying to digest the fact that the leader of the country that your family has fought for and died for, for generations, lied to you and betrayed your dear boy’s sense of honor and exploited his courage and exploited his loyalty to his buddies. Hard work is having your country abandon you after they killed your son. Hard work is coming to the realization that your son had his future robbed from him and that you have had your son’s future grand-children stolen from you. Hard work is knowing that there are so many people in this world that have prospered handsomely from your son’s death (Sheehan, November 4, 2004).
In this passage, Sheehan shows she believes she has been lied to by the president, that he is not trustworthy of doing the right thing, and that she has personal suspicions that her son, Casey, died while others profited from the War in Iraq. She doubts the reasons for this war, and doubts there is a noble cause for her son’s death. From the cynical perspective, trust is not only unnecessary, it is dangerous. As the matriarch of her own family, Sheehan emphasizes and inverts the meaning of “hard work”. This trope has been repeatedly used by President Bush during his term when describing his plans in Iraq. Sheehan redefines the meaning of “hard work” by emphasizing the losses experienced by her family. She describes how her own family has been “abandoned” by the country and her son’s future was “robbed”. Repetition can be an effective rhetorical device to emphasize a point. But rather than continue to discuss her own losses, she finished with a flourish by drawing attention to those individuals, agencies and corporations that have “prospered handsomely” at the same time. These rhetorical switches are deliberately uncomfortable. “Work” becomes pain management, “War” means profit, “Courage” implies exploitation, and “Leader” defines liar. No, these are not easy definitions, but they are so contrary to our political expectations, that they cannot fail to grab our attention.

Sheehan’s suspicions and doubts of Bush’s good intentions continue to be evident in her second open letter to him a year later. In this instance, however, she is challenging the manner in which Bush defines freedom and democracy and coyly accuses him of not standing for either,

Do you know the kind of freedom and democracy you like? Where no open dissent is allowed, no one is able to petition the government for redress of wrongs,
where our e-mails can be read and our library reading materials checked up on and analyzed? Your kind of freedom and democracy smears brave patriots as cowards and traitors for daring to speak out against your murderous policies, (Sheehan, November 24, 2005).

Here she is referring to her doubts that he is seeking to do things for the greater good of the United States, but instead she is expressing her suspicions of how Bush is performing wrong-doings against the citizens. With a cynical insight, Sheehan juxtaposes well-known rhetorical God-terms with practices and policies that violate conventional civic expectations.

In the open letter that was emailed to President Bush, she really digs deep into her knowledge of what is going on to show her doubts that President Bush is enforcing morally acceptable tactics in the war. In fact, Sheehan doubts it enough that she is willing to accuse the president of being the cause for several war crimes and crimes against humanity. She begins her claims definitionally: “Torture is a crime against humanity, George, and information gained from torture is highly compromised and not even admissible in a court of law, so basically, the information you have been cruelly gleaning from “suspected” terrorists is useless in protecting America,” (Sheehan, September 12, 2006). She is openly accusing the president of knowingly using torture to gain information. This shows she doubts his use of acceptable interrogation tactics and her suspicions that he is the reason for the crimes against humanity to have ever been used.

In the letter written to the Former First Lady Barbara Bush, Sheehan continues her critique of War in Iraq and George W. Bush, but does so through the Presidential family.
Political families usually attract the most attention during political campaigns and then disappear from the public stage after the campaign has ended. Except for first ladies (Eleanor Roosevelt, Hillary Clinton), politically successful siblings (Robert Kennedy, Jeb Bush) or troubled relatives (Billy Carter, Roger Clinton), most Presidential families tend to stay out of the media spotlight unless there is a campaign. Thus, when Sheehan directed a letter to Former First Lady Barbara Bush, President Bush’s mother, she was flaunting right through this implicit rule.

Sheehan accents her transgression by violating the presidential family ‘rule’ by breaking another social convention of questioning a person’s parenting style. In questioning how President Bush was raised, Sheehan questions the Bush family’s attitudes towards violence: “Did you teach George to use his words and not his violence to solve problems,” (Sheehan, 2006)? “I also used to wash my children’s mouths out with soap on the rare occasion that they lied. Did you do that to George? Can you do it now? He has lied and he is still lying. Saddam did not have [weapons of mass destruction],” (Sheehan, 2006). Here Sheehan is not only expressing her doubts about the president and how he behaves, but she is also being cynical about how Barbara Bush raised her son and is questioning if the Former First Lady would ever try to discipline her son for lying and being violent. Moreover, she phrases her comments as a question. Questions can be an effective rhetorical strategy because they invite answers to seek their fulfillment. An unanswered question is distasteful in courtrooms, on university exams, and in everyday conversation. Since it is unlikely that Barbara Bush will ever answer these questions, the lingering rhetorical effect is to invite the reader to question the silence, and to answer it for themselves.
Sheehan continues in the open letter to Former First Lady Bush about the noble causes for the invasion and occupation of Iraq. She expresses her suspicions that there is a lack of noble causes and expresses her dissent towards this war in several passages. “[Your] son said that he killed my son and the other brave and honorable Americans for a “noble cause.” Well, Barbara, mother to mother, that angered me. I don’t considering invading and occupying another country that is not a threat to the U.S.A. to be a noble cause,” (Sheehan, 2006). Sheehan continues with this rant by including some dissent for who all has been killed since the 2003 invasion by claiming “I don’t think invading a country, killing its innocent citizens, and ruining its infrastructure while your family and your family’s war-profiteering friends become rich is a noble cause,” (Sheehan, 2006).

Not only is Sheehan’s cynical rhetoric filled with doubt and a lack of trust in the government, but she is also cynical in how she views the reasons for the war at all. She believes that the War in Iraq is being fought to help a few people or companies profit financially and is quick to announce her suspicions in a cynical manner.

Through these examples, it is clear the Sheehan’s anti-war protest rhetoric is far from being considered civil in manner, and includes several components of name-calling, one-sided arguments, and she appears to be quite uncompromising with her opponent. What is also clear from these examples is that Sheehan’s rhetoric goes further than just being uncivil, and becomes the form violation of civility – and results in the rhetoric of cynicism. The rhetoric of cynicism must include suspicion, doubt, and distrust to be cynical in nature, and Sheehan is seen combining all three components several times throughout her open letter format.
The final question that has been left unanswered in this chapter is whether or not this type of rhetoric is able to span the test of time. The rhetoric of cynicism has been clear to find in Sheehan’s anti-war protest letters, but can her cynical community last and expand in the same manner as a religion continues to grow and exist? Sheehan has been protesting the War in Iraq and President Bush since November 2004, but that is less than a three year period at the time this paper is being written in the Spring of 2007. Recently, Sheehan announced her retirement from protesting, but that does not mean the rhetoric of cynicism can not be capable of spanning across time. In fact, it is clear since this type of rhetoric began in Ancient Greece with the story of Diogenes, that it can be reformed and revamped to be used again and again. It is in this capacity for reinvention that gives the rhetoric of cynicism its strength. However, that does not mean that a particular cynical political or social movement could sustain itself. For example, what effect would Cindy Sheehan have if she was not the mother of a slain soldier? What effect could she have in 2010 when George W. Bush is no longer President of the United States? These questions reveal an important weakness in cynical rhetoric – which is that it draws on social conventions to build its transgressive style. But like everything else, conventions can change. To remain a persuasive, ironic force, so too must the cynic. As much as love and faith, distrust and doubt are always a part of the human condition. A cynical rhetoric trades on these emotions and as long as they are part of the human experience, cynicism is always a possibility. In this sense, Cindy Sheehan is simply one in a long line of doubters through time, who found a transgressive message that epitomized the doubts and fears of her era.
Chapter Five: The Rhetoric of Grief

During times of war, it is expected that lives will be lost. During the ancient war between Athens and Sparta, Pericles set out to give the citizens of Athens instructions and traditions about how to grieve for their losses. He told them that the components that made Athens such a great place were its openness, obedience, and tolerance. When Pericles’s speech was over, he asserted his leadership and instructed his obedient audience to finishing mourning and to depart from the funeral. He instructed those listening to go home and continue to live their lives, even though they had lost loved ones to the war, everyday life must continue.

Cindy Sheehan went through a wartime loss in 2004. Her son, Casey, was killed in action serving in the United States military. Though it was established as tradition for Sheehan to have mourned and then depart, she reversed this tradition and decided to speak out against the war because she did not feel her son’s death was justified. Sheehan decided to use her son’s death as a catapult in a crusade to seek an ending to a war she felt was not noble, honorable, or necessary.

It was this decision that resulted in the rhetorical artifacts that were examined for this paper. Sheehan is important to rhetorical criticism because she brings an interesting and unique style to anti-war protests. Sheehan’s approach in protesting the War in Iraq and President George W. Bush creates a format that combines three components to collectively become a Rhetoric of Grief. Sheehan’s effective use of the feminist rhetorical tradition, the metaphor of a national family, and the Rhetoric of Cynicism combine to create her distinctively stylized protest rhetoric. To better understand the
importance of studying Sheehan’s rhetoric, it is important to review what has been found thus far.

After determining that Sheehan was in fact fostering the components of feminist rhetoric through her use of identification, personal examples, and a personal tone, it was necessary to establish where within the feminist tradition she fit. After examining the nine chosen pieces of Sheehan’s rhetoric, it could be found that Sheehan did not fit into the second or third waves of feminism exclusively, but actually was clearly arching between the two waves. In the beginning of each rhetorical piece, Sheehan appears to be a victimized mother who is upset because of her son’s death. She is found to use victimized language and speak frankly about her feelings, but as her open-letters progress, Sheehan progresses into a third wave feminist. As a third waver, Sheehan utilizes an agitated tone and begins using an active tone seeking changes in the policies of the war. These observations of Sheehan’s use of the feminist tradition confirm that the movement is still active, and that there is no clear line between the second and third waves of the movement.

The second component of Sheehan’s unique style of rhetoric is her metaphor of the national family. This metaphor begins with Sheehan’s use of the term Matriotism. Matriotism is the feminine term for patriotism – the major difference between the two is patriots believe in defending one’s country, while matriots believe in nurturing one’s country – and both are seeking to illustrate a devoted love for the country. Sheehan uses the Matriotism concept to reframe the United States into a national family, which results in what appears to be a mother contesting a father when she stands up against President Bush.
The imagery of the national family is how Sheehan uses a metaphoric view within her anti-war protest rhetoric. Sheehan frames President Bush as the father who is willing to send the children of the nation off to war with the possibility of dying, while framing herself as the nurturing mother who does not want to see any child of the nation sacrificed for the Iraq War. Once these two family models are understood, Sheehan uses metaphorical language to show how the father and his child-sacrificing household are bad and the mother and her child-nurturing household are good. Beyond the idea that even though the father is willing to sacrifice the children of the nation, Sheehan’s rhetoric also shows that she feels the President has manipulated the concept of patriotism – she feels he has not fulfilled the required sacrifice to be a true patriot since neither of his own children are enlisted in the military, and therefore are not in harm’s way as her child had been. Sheehan expresses that her matriotic family has been more patriotic because of Casey’s death and expresses that the government seems to only be willing to sacrifice other people’s children, not their own.

This view of patriotism and framing the President as unpatriotic violates how U.S. citizens are expected to act during times of war. Citizens are expected to be, as Pericles instructs his audience, obedient and tolerant. Sheehan’s violation of this is not the only expectancy violation she commits. These expectancy violations combine to form her Rhetoric of Cynicism – the final component of her Rhetoric of Grief.

If civility is what is expected of people, when Sheehan violates this expectation it results in a Rhetoric of Cynicism; not only is it uncivil, but it is also goes beyond being uncompromising and disrespectful by being suspicious of the United States government and its leaders. This type of rhetoric is not new – Diogenes was the original cynic in
Ancient Greece – but Sheehan’s utilization of this approach exemplifies how the cynical rhetoric can be found throughout time.

This type of cynical approach can be reinvented and reformed to be used again and again throughout history and into the future, but that does not mean that through cynicism, Sheehan’s anti-war movement could sustain itself. Many factors must be considered before finding a social movement, such as this one, can sustain itself across time. Sheehan’s movement relies on factors that can change, and once one variable changes the movement itself is at risk of folding. The mere fact that the war could end, or the fact that President Bush’s presidency will end could create enough change that her rhetoric would not be effective.

Combing the three components of feminism, the national family metaphor, and the Rhetoric of Cynicism creates the rhetoric of anti-war protestor Cindy Sheehan. Combined, these components come together to create her Rhetoric of Grief. Sheehan is uniquely positioned to use this Rhetoric of Grief. She uses the fact that she lost her eldest child in the Iraq War as a catapult in many ways, and is effective in showing how this personal experience has made her credible enough to protest the war and President Bush; she uses the fact that she is a woman and a mother effectively to place herself at the head of a national household that needs to come together as a family instead of sending her children to a war where too many have already been killed.

Protesting war is not a new phenomenon in the United States, so what makes Sheehan’s work important and noteworthy? It is important to look at Sheehan’s rhetoric because she is bringing a new approach to protests that can not be ignored. Sheehan is reversing what has been established as tradition, and using modern technologies – such as
emails and blogs – to create a new opportunity for many others to become engaged in politics. Sheehan does not rely on conventional methods, such as marches and speeches, but uses these conventional methods in addition to her online blogging, open letters, and the creation of Camp Casey – the headquarters of her anti-war movement – to create a tidal wave of messages to the government and civilians that she is not in favor of the war or of President Bush’s policies. This tidal wave of messages resulted in intense media coverage of Sheehan and her protests, which made her work appealing to study.

This paper specifically focused on a collection of Sheehan’s written rhetoric that was formatted as open letters to specific persons (some obvious, some inferred) because it was found to be a unique approach. These pieces of rhetoric were found archived online and in published books and each was found unique because every letter had an intended audience, but was designed to be read by anybody willing to read it. Sheehan’s rhetorical style is noteworthy because it encompasses older themes – such as feminism, form (expectation), and cynicism – but brings a modern twist to each component which makes it more appealing to a contemporary audience.

Would Sheehan’s messages be as effective or credible had her son not been killed in the war? It is doubtful her messages could have been formed with such emotional backing and heartfelt concern for the well-being of all citizens had Casey not been killed in action. Sheehan would not have the reasons nor the drive behind her messages had her son not been a casualty in a war she did not understand, and she also would not have a reason to want to ask the President for an explanation had her son never enlisted or been deployed. The grief of losing a son overwhelmed Sheehan in such a fashion that she used
her loss to create a backing for her fight to speak with President Bush and her fight to see an end to a war she felt was unjust and unnecessary.

In Ancient Greece, Pericles told Athenians who were mourning the loss of their loved ones in war “when you have mourned for your dear ones, you must depart,” (Thucydides, trans. 1954). He used his authority as the funeral orator to tell the citizens of Athens that it was the obligation to be obedient and go home. He instructed the women to not bring attention to themselves, and using the word “depart” was telling them to return to their daily lives. To Pericles, mourning a fallen soldier was not an honorable reaction to an honorable death. Sheehan did not heed this traditional reaction, and when her son Casey was killed in the Iraq War, she became the focal point of the anti-war protests. She drew attention to herself as the “face” of this anti-war movement and never did depart and go home as Pericles had instructed his Athenian audience to do.

On Monday, May 28, 2007 – Memorial Day of that year – Sheehan displayed a change in priorities and announced she was going to heed the instructions of Pericles. In an open-letter titled “Good Riddance, Attention Whore…” her desire to retire as the “face” of the movement was announced. Sheehan gave several reasons, but the most noteworthy part of the announcement was when she said she has “reached the conclusion that if I am doing what I am doing because I am an "attention whore" then I really need to be committed. I have invested everything I have into trying to bring peace with justice to a country that wants neither,” (Sheehan, May 28, 2007). In this section, Sheehan expressed her disdain for being considered an attention grabber, and also her belief that the United States does not really want peace and justice.
In her farewell letter, Sheehan said “I am going to take whatever I have left and go home. I am going to go home and be a mother to my surviving children and try to regain some of what I have lost” (Sheehan, May 28, 2007). She announced her intention to do just as Pericles had instructed the women of Athens, she was going to return to her every day life. She was going to depart.

Whether or not this letter was the end of all of Sheehan’s anti-war protesting is yet to be seen, but she did not just announce her departure without one final cynical comment, but this time it was not to just President Bush. This time, she commented to the entire United States and its citizens’ tendency to be complacent when she said, “Good-bye America…you are not the country that I love and I finally realized no matter how much I sacrifice, I can't make you be that country unless you want it. It's up to you now,” (Sheehan, May 28, 2007). And with this statement; she went home.
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