

US and Venezuelan Presidential Masculinities in the First Decade of the 'War on Terror'

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Certificate of Authorship / Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

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- 'Using Mutual Hypermasculinity as a Framework for Understanding Global Politics: Hugo Chávez Versus George W. Bush'
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Abstract

This thesis is situated in the transdisciplinary field of feminist global politics, which explores the toxic and mutually constitutive relationship between war, militarism and masculinities. In particular, I examine this relationship in the political sphere through a new theoretical lens: the construction, performance and embodiment of presidential masculinities. The thesis concludes that presidential masculinities function as ‘militarising manoeuvres’ (Enloe 2000) that can propel, legitimate, rebrand or even camouflage militarism and thus warrant new modes of feminist attention. I use the presidential masculinities of George. W. Bush, Barack Obama and Hugo Chávez to investigate US-Venezuelan relations, geopolitics and militarism in the first eleven years of the ‘War on Terror’ (hereafter ‘WOT’) (2001-2012). My overarching research questions are: How have US presidential masculinities and the ‘WOT’ shaped Chávez’s presidential masculinity and politics? What does this tell us about the relationship between presidential masculinities, their role in global politics and their relationship to militarism? Unlike most scholarship in the field, I use both the concepts of *hegemonic masculinity* and *hypermasculinity* to inform my theoretical framework. Methodologically, I employ multimodal discursive research methods to analyse presidential rhetoric, policy, performance and visual discourse in both traditional and non-traditional ways.

Through a relational approach to US-Venezuelan masculinities, this thesis shifts the focus of the ‘WOT’ to the Latin American region and describes the new forms of militarisation the ‘WOT’ made possible in Venezuela. I argue that Chávez embodied and performed a 21st century subaltern hypermasculinity under Bush but renegotiated his presidential masculinity when Obama was elected to the White House. Chávez was forced to depersonalise and deracialise his anti-imperial rhetoric and presidential masculinity to accommodate the new globally popular and black president of the ‘white empire’. Thus, this thesis further cements feminist claims that masculinities shape global politics and vice versa. I also offer original research on the ever-changing relationship between militarism, masculinities and war in the USA, with a specific focus on the post-Bush, post-9/11 period during Obama’s first presidential term. While Bush embodied a traditional and highly militarised Anglo-American hegemonic masculinity, Obama performs a contemporary, hybrid presidential masculinity that is demilitarised and characterised by a post-hip-hop, ghetto-style cool. Despite such contrasting masculinity politics, Obama has further

institutionalised Bush's 'WOT' both at home and abroad, camouflaging ongoing US militarism via his unique presidential masculinity. I argue that Obama has recast US presidential and hegemonic masculinities in contradictory and harmful ways. The key contribution of this thesis, then, is revealing new understandings of the masculinisation and militarisation of politics in the Americas during the 'WOT'.