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In this paper, I conduct a critical discourse analysis of the Morehouse College Appropriate Attire Policy and discuss how issues of race, gender, and sexuality converge to reveal both overt and hidden meanings embedded in the policy. I also consider how power is used towards “other” black college men who neither fit neatly into prescribed gender norms, nor foster representations of “good” black men. I situate this critical policy analysis in the context of two ideas: bipolar masculinity and the politics of respectability, and offer implications for the use of intersectional frames in scholarship and research on men and institutional policies.

Keywords: Black men; policy; gay

BETWEEN me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? They say I know an excellent colored man in my town…To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word. (W.E.B. DuBois, 1903, p. 1, The Souls of Black Folk)

Bayard Rustin and James Baldwin represent two compelling examples of what it meant to be black, gay, and a problem. Rustin was a major strategist of the Civil Rights Movement, organizer of the March on Washington, and confidant/advisor to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (Podair, 2009). Baldwin, too, was active in the Civil Rights Movement and vocal about the ravages of racism. He was a black intellectual who wrote a range of highly regarded literary works, some of which focused on gay themes (McBride, 2005). Rustin and Baldwin had a great deal in common as two of the greatest thinkers and activists of their time. Yet, what they had to offer the world was stifled only by the convergence of their race, gender, and sexuality. Some would argue that they suffered the greatest criticism from black people. The intersections of their identity situated them, according to DuBois (1903), as a problem.

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Scholarship that introspectively examines the complexities of identity among men who occupy multiple marginalities is scant at best. Wingfield (2008) asserts there is a gap in intersectional research that centers the experiences of men of color. Insights on intersectionality may be particularly helpful for understanding their complex identities in systems of privilege and oppression. Intersectional lenses have most often been used to understand the experiences of women of color, and rightfully so (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Dill, McLaughlin, & Nieves, 2007). However, in this paper, I rely on an intersectional lens to highlight how the perceived identities of African American gay and bisexual men intersect and converge with oppressive institutional policies at a historically black college. According to Harper and Gasman (2008), HBCUs are constructed as “highly conservative in nature, avoiding any challenge to the status quo, suppressing student expression, speech, and life choices” (p. 337). The men in their study indicated that LGBT students are largely ignored on campus and that institutional polices were particularly restrictive in terms of sexuality and sexual orientation. However, it should be noted that HBCUs are far from being a monolithic group. Each institution has its own traditions and culture that make it unique. Many HBCUs have formal student organizations for LGBT students and take a more liberal approach to supporting students’ diverse sexual identities. For example, Campuspride.org indicates that 21% of HBCUs have LGBT organizations on campus. Patton (2011) noted that several HBCUs work in collaboration with the Human Rights Campaign Leadership Summit. Other HBCUs invite speakers to campus who cover issues related to LGBT concerns and are now offering courses to highlight the contributions and lives of black LGBT people (Master, 2013). Furthermore, LGBT centers are slowly becoming a trend at HBCUs. Bowie State University, North Carolina Central University, and Fayetteville State University have all established LGBT campus centers (Master, 2013).

To engage intersectionality, I conduct a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the Morehouse College Appropriate Attire Policy (MCAAP) and discuss how issues of race, gender, and sexuality converge to reveal both overt and hidden meanings embedded in the policy, as well as how power is used to “other” particular students. I situate the policy in the context of two ideas: bipolar masculinity and the politics of respectability. “Bipolar black masculinity, seeks to seduce heterosexual black men into accepting the right to subordinate others as compensation for [their] own subordination” (Cooper, 2006, p. 853). The politics of respectability, coined by Higginbotham (1993), refers to efforts among African Americans to distance themselves from stereotypes and presumed inferiority by embodying a public image that garners respect. According to Harris (2003), historically, “by linking worthiness for respect to sexual propriety, behavioral decorum, and neatness, respectability served as a gatekeeping function, establishing a behavioral ‘entrance fee’ to the right to respect and the right to full citizenship” (p. 213).

Using these ideas, I examine the potential effects this policy has for students at this institution and discuss how the intersections of gender, race, and sexual orientation play out in nuanced ways that socially locate black, gay, and bisexual college men on the margins and reveal complex, deeply rooted systems of domination and power within and beyond the campus environment. I respond to critical questions regarding tradition at one HBCU and the extent to which it upholds an ideology of respectability while simultaneously promoting blatant exclusion.
HBCUs, the African American community, and homophobia

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are often noted for their ability to foster social environments that are positive and nurturing for students, particularly those who might not have otherwise entered college. Step shows, marching band performances, and other opportunities available through various black student groups illustrate the capacity of HBCUs to create social environments that are welcoming to students. As incubators and disseminators of African American culture, HBCUs offer a variety of academic, leadership, and involvement opportunities (Allen, Jewell, Griffin, & Wolf, 2007). Studies have shown that black students attending HBCUs are more likely to become involved in leadership and involvement opportunities than their counterparts at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) (Kim & Conrad, 2006). It is clear that campus involvement is a major facet of the student experience at HBCUs.

However, more recent media portrayals have pegged HBCUs as conservative and traditional institutions, suggesting that they foster environments that may be perceived as limiting by some students. For example, Patton (2011) stated, “HBCUs rarely have student organizations, offices, centers, or other resources devoted to LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) concerns” (p. 77). Moreover, many HBCUs continue to practice conservative politics reminiscent of “in loco parentis” that have long ago lost their appeal, such as setting curfews, meddling in student media, and limiting support for faculty research and expression (Nealy, 2009). For example, Morehouse College recently announced 11 new rules for how students should dress, and rule number nine forbids students at this all-male college from donning women’s clothes, including dresses, tunics, and pumps (Bartlett, 2009). This particular aspect of the policy has received considerable attention because it raises concerns about whether Morehouse is truly an inclusive campus environment. Moreover, it suggests that administrators may subscribe to heteronormative ideologies of masculinity that dictate who is worthy of being defined as a “Man of Morehouse” or a “Morehouse Man.”

As noted, HBCUs are bastions of black culture and in many ways are reflective of the larger values and beliefs of African Americans. Yet, numerous scholars (Brandt, 1999; Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003; Fullilove & Fullilove, 1999; Herak & Capitiano, 1995; Kennamer, Honnold, Bradford, & Hendricks, 2000; Lewis, 2003; Morales & Fullilove, 1992; Savin-Williams, 1998) have indicated that a large majority of African Americans are vehemently against homosexuality due to reasons such as conservative religious beliefs, deeming it unnatural and perverse, accepting the belief that it weakens the race, or presumptions that it lessens the options for heterosexual African American women to have same-race mates. Cole and Guy-Sheftall noted, “There is considerable evidence … of negative attitudes toward homosexuality within African American communities that have complex origins and manifestations” (2003, p. 168). One manifestation entails the gendered implications associated with lesbian, gay, and bisexual African Americans. For example, African American men who identify as gay or bisexual must grapple with the constructions of masculinity within their communities, which rely on traditionally held stereotypes (Washington & Wall, 2010) and thus, are not considered to be real men. The notion of being a “real” man is latent with heterosexist undertones that involve marriage to a woman, taking care of one’s family (namely children with a woman) and modeling manhood for other African American men. In this regard, men who identify as gay or bisexual are not perceived to measure up to such standards, making them less than
a man (Patton, 2011). Those who express their gender in non-conforming ways, refusing to or choosing not to abide by larger standards of masculinity are also presumed to be gay. Thus men who may display effeminate characteristics, for example, may be presumed to be gay, whether they identify that way or not; the same is true for men who participate in gender bending. These presumptions often stem from other men’s fear of femininity. O’Neil, Helms, Gable, David, and Wrightsman (2010) describe this fear as, “a strong, negative emotion associated with stereotypic feminine values, attitudes, and behaviors” (p. 33). Consequently, this fear can result in homophobia and other patterns of negative behavior (O’Neil et al., 2010). Kimmel (2000) explained that, “homophobia, the fear of being perceived as gay, as not a real man, keeps men exaggerating all the traditional rules of masculinity” (p. 215).

While African Americans acknowledge the existence of homosexuality, it is not overwhelmingly accepted. The acceptance that does occur exists in the form of “open secrets” suggesting that African Americans have an awareness of homosexuality, but refrain from engaging in any serious dialogue regarding its implications. White (2001) argues that the refusal to tell only certain stories regarding African Americans is dangerous. She stated:

In the arena of sexuality, we have allowed our history under racism to dictate what we tell about ourselves. It is true that racists have equated blackness with perversity and out-of-control libidos. But the silence around queer lives will not counter that racist narrative. Most important to me is that queer youth are forced into homelessness and an increasing number are murdered for breaking with the politics of respectability. (p. 24)

hooks (1989) argues that it is incorrect to assume that the African American community is a monolithic group and that they are more homophobic and heterosexist than other groups in the United States. The case may simply be that discussions regarding homosexuality have not taken place as often and simply need to be addressed. Negy and Eisenman (2005) declare that African Americans and other ethnic groups have nothing to lose and a great deal to profit by re-examining their intolerance toward LGB populations as well as non-gender-conforming individuals. Perhaps the largest hurdle is overcoming the societal norms that forbid open discussion on this topic. HBCUs can play a major role in facilitating this conversation. When such conversations take a backseat, particularly in academe, students often suffer the consequences. Through tackling the denial and silence of this issue, Cole and Guy-Shelfall (2003) assert that African Americans will gain a broader perspective of the ails within this community and move toward courage, acceptance, and empowerment. This article will certainly contribute toward bringing this conversation to the table as HBCUs continue their legacy of uplifting and educating African American students.

**Conceptual framings**

I am a Negro faggot, if I believe what movies, TV, and rap music say of me. My life is a game for play. Because of my sexuality, I cannot be black. A strong, proud, “Afrocentric” black man is resolutely heterosexual, not even bisexual. Hence I remain a Negro. My sexual difference is considered of no value; indeed it’s a testament to weakness, passivity, the absence of real guts-balls. Hence I remain a sissy, punk faggot. I cannot be a black gay man because by the tenets of black macho, black gay man is a triple negation. I am consigned, by these tenets, to remain a Negro faggot. And as such
I am game for play, to be used, joked about, put down, beaten, slapped, and bashed …
(Marlon Riggs, 2001, p. 293, Traps)

The quote above has significant meaning for the concepts used to frame this paper. In a matter of seven short, rich sentences, Riggs characterizes the challenges endured as an African American, gay man. He explains the limits placed upon who he is and who he can become. In this section, I describe two concepts that can be useful in better understanding the forces that have influenced his narrative.

**Bipolar masculinity**

Cooper’s (2006) conception of bipolar masculinity is grounded in an intersectional framework that characterizes black heterosexual men at the extreme ends of a gendered continuum. On one end exists the “Bad Black Man,” while the “Good Black Man” is located at the other. Cooper states, “The Bad Black Man is animalistic, sexually depraved, and crime-prone. The Good Black Man distances himself from black people and emulates white views” (p. 857). The construction of these bipolar images of black men is not by accident. Cooper contends that such images “resolve mainstream whites’ post civil rights anxiety” of their history of excluding black men and a present shift of accepting some black men (p. 889). The resounding question to address this anxiety is based upon determining who belongs and who does not; hence, the practice of identifying some black men as good (a small minority) and the remainder as bad. By engaging in bipolar images of black men, Cooper explains, “whites surely cannot include all of us into the mainstream” (p. 892). Thus, media overrepresentation of black male images as violent, overly aggressive, athletic, and womanizing permeate societal discourses to manufacture a belief that most black men are bad (and should be excluded) while a small few are good (warranting inclusion). Unfortunately, the notion of inclusion is just that, a notion. It hardly exists in any substantive way for Good Black Men. Cooper states, “That is a false inclusion because it seeks men who are phenotypically black, but culturally white” (p. 896).

In order to contextualize the Bad Black Man, Cooper offers several historical references pertaining to how black men have been treated over the centuries. He notes that it was commonplace for black heterosexual men to be imagined as bestial and animalistic, having little control over their sexual desires. He explains that not only were men treated as animals and chattel during the enslavement period, they were presumed to have animal body parts (e.g. tails). By imagining black men as animals, it became easier to criminalize them, particularly for acts of rape against white women, whether the acts were consensual or non-existent. Given that black men were viewed as a threat to the sexual piety of white women, white men were compelled to control black men by criminalizing and inciting fear of them. This ultimately justified the murders, castration, and hanging deaths of black men (Jackson, 2006). The imagery of the Bad Black Man persists today through the overrepresentation of African American men in prison and the media’s preoccupation with the size of the black male genitalia (see Jackson, 2006). Thus the intersections between raced and gendered experiences for black men become clear.

In his discussion of the Good Black Man, Cooper notes that black heterosexual men assimilate to white norms and work to distance themselves from other black
people, namely Bad Black Men. He explains that the Good Black Man can also be situated historically, for example, through Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin, which features the main character Uncle Tom, who “endured slavery with Christ-like patience” (p. 880). Presently, the Uncle Tom caricature is synonymous with the concept of “selling out” or referring to those who have sold out as “an Uncle Tom.” An Uncle Tom will sacrifice and sell out the black community in exchange for personal benefits from white people. The Good Black Man is concerned with transcending race or at least downplaying it to be viewed as equal and having no relation to the Bad Black Man. The Good Black Man also attempts to desexualize himself to avoid being perceived as a threat and to engender comfort among whites. He presents himself as non-aggressive and compliant. According to Cooper, “In a sense, he must become a Good White Man” (p. 883). The Good Black Man is valuable to white interests because he is less likely to challenge the system. Cooper suggests that the image of the Good Black Man has been corporatized. He states:

In order to succeed, black men will engage in behavior that conforms to corporate expectations. It turns out that corporations provide assimilationist incentives designed to make it likely that only those black men who affirm white male norms will succeed. That approach is successful, as those minorities who make it to the upper echelons of corporations tend to adopt strategies that do not promote, and sometimes even harm, the interests of their racial group. (2006, p. 884)

Good Black Men are also valuable to the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity, that is, through their emulation of heteronormative, white maleness, they reproduce the very power structure that dominates them. Moreover, this reproduction is accomplished through Black men’s oppression and domination over women and sexual minorities.

The sheer threat of being perceived or depicted through Bad Black Man imagery, provides Black men with an incentive to emulate characteristics of the Good Black Man. The Good Black Man is one who can be readily accepted into mainstream society because he has sacrificed a part of himself to obtain this acceptance. The performance of bipolar masculinity is problematic for several reasons according to Cooper. It encourages black men to believe that they should adhere to white male standards of masculine representations. It also means that by adopting white male heteronormative standards, black men can prove their worthiness through the subordination of individuals (women and LGBT peoples) who are perceived to be lower on hierarchies of identity. Participation in such subordination becomes “a form of compensation” or a trade-off to deal with the oppression that black heterosexual men face. Such behavior is considered “compensatory subordination”:

the idea that people who are subordinated may seek to compensate themselves for their own oppression by subordinating others. By doing so, however, they accept the principle that identities should be hierarchized and thereby weaken their ability to reject the legitimacy of their own oppression. (Cooper, 2006, p. 901)

When heterosexual black men engage in acts of compensatory subordination they can use patriarchy to subordinate women, and heterosexism to subordinate gay and bisexual men. Lastly, the entire system of bipolar masculinity acts as a scheme of seduction, convincing black men to buy into the same identity hierarchy responsible for their own oppression. It produces a false dichotomy that incentivizes black men to assimilate toward being Good Black Men. The result of the bipolarity of black masculinity is a lack of any nuanced image for heterosexual black men to fit into.
These representations of black heterosexual men are considered to be bipolar because they shift from one end of the spectrum to the other allowing limited opportunities for the construction of alternative characterizations of black men. Cooper contends that this idea of bipolar masculinity is directly related to intersectionality, “because it is the product of the combination of narratives about blackness in general and narratives about black masculinity in particular” (p. 858). Cooper not only encourages black men to examine their place in society’s identity hierarchy, but also states that they cannot be successful as long as they “take pleasure” in exerting power over others who are lower on “gender and sex orientation hierarchies” (p. 860).

In the end, Cooper calls for a “post-hierarchical black masculinity” that resists identity hierarchies and does not rely on the enactment of compensatory subordination. Thus, to successfully challenge heterosexual black men’s treatment under the white supremacy hierarchy, “we must refuse to exercise dominance under the patriarchal and heterosexist hierarchies” (p. 905).

**Politics of respectability**

In *Dark Continent of Our Bodies: Black Feminism and the Politics of Respectability*, Frances White (2001) masterfully encourages readers to consider how the politics of respectability both sustain and stifle African Americans. She states, “the ideology of respectability is one of a number of strategies that African Americans have developed to create unity” (p. 14). The politics of respectability refers to a particular discourse of resistance used by African Americans to foster self-esteem and agency among themselves. In discussing the Black Baptist Women’s Movement, Higginbotham explains, the politics of respectability provided black women with self-esteem, a sense of agency, and the courage to engage in their own self-definitions as well as to challenge and resist the racism and dehumanization that they faced. Their promotion of this ideology was twofold in that they wanted to present a positive and acceptable public image of black women to white Americans and prove that they were worthy of respect. White (2001) contends these women also wanted to “regulate black behavior” (p. 37). They wanted to serve as role models of what proper behavior should look like and to uplift the black community by, “implant[ing] middle-class values and behavioral patterns among the masses of urban blacks who retained rural folkways of speech, dress, worship, and other distinct cultural patterns” (p. 196). While the goal was for African Americans to present themselves in ways that disproved the multiple stereotypes, including accusations of intellectual inferiority, perceived laziness, and presumed moral bankruptcy, Higginbotham contends that this movement of women “reflected and reinforced the hegemonic values of white America, as it simultaneously subverted and transformed the logic of race and gender subordination” (pp. 187–188). However, she expresses an increased concern that coalitions among African Americans have been too narrowly focused on racism to the detriment of acknowledging how African Americans are simultaneously socially located within the intersections of multiple systems of oppression based upon gender, sex, and sexual orientation.

On one hand, this ideology of respectability operates as a form of resistance for African Americans against negative stereotypes, stigmas, and accusations of immorality leveraged by a society dominated by infinite white/hetero patriarchy. By adopting a politics of respectability, historically African Americans could reject these
ideas through outward performances and presentations that demonstrated their ability to behave in morally upright, respectable ways. It required that African Americans remain forever mindful of how they are publicly perceived, lest they succumb to their own dehumanization. However, Gross (1997) asserted that despite this enactment of the politics of respectability:

Its ideological nature constituted a deliberate concession to mainstream societal values … This strict adherence to what is socially deemed “respectable” has resulted in … the proliferation of analyses which can be characterized as culturally defensive, patriarchal, and heterosexist. (p. 1)

In other words, the politics of respectability allow African Americans to revise themselves in ways to ensure that they are constructed in a positive light and deemed worthy amidst a cadre of images and discourses that counter their humanity. However, this same ideology reinscribes oppression by adhering to hegemonic standards of what it means to be respectable. Thus, respect is embedded in “sanitized narratives” (Gross, 1997) that present an essentialized view of African Americans. Such narratives are guided by dominant representations of patriarchy, heterosexism, sexism, and classism, while ostensibly ignoring or failing to make visible the experiences of those who are most marginalized by these systems (e.g. lesbian, gay, bisexual, women, and poor African Americans). The politics of respectability thus becomes a double-edged sword that not only limits the construction of African Americans, but also caters to and reinforces dominant, hegemonic ideologies. Collectively, bipolar masculinity and politics of respectability draw close attention to the contradictions that African Americans face in society. On one hand, there is a desire to be respected, received well, and perceived as a positive representation of blackness. On the other hand, however, are latent and looming systems of oppression that define these desires through lenses rooted in racism, patriarchy, sexism, hegemonic masculinity, homophobia, etc. Both frames reveal the complexities of intersectionality and how they can be used to engage critically to understand overlapping systems of oppression and domination.

Methodological perspective

Understanding CDA

CDA has not been widely used in higher education research, but when employed as a frame, the research has resulted in a critical examination of an important topic in the field. For example, Iverson (2007) examined the discourses prevalent in institutional diversity policies. Her analysis revealed discourses that negatively depicted people of color as commodified, at risk, and on the margins. Ayers (2005) used CDA to uncover neoliberal ideology in community college mission statements and how these institutions often reproduce class-based inequities.

The minimal use of CDA may be reflective of a lack of knowledge regarding what it is and how it can be useful in higher education research. According to van Dijk (2003), “CDA is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (p. 352). Though there is no finite canonical structure associated with CDA, this framework is geared toward revealing and responding to the structure of discourse and its subsequent use as a tool toward the (re)production of inequitable outcomes and the maintenance of
dominating power regimes. CDA as a central framework allows researchers to identify and deconstruct social issues, while acknowledging the discursive nature of power and how power is located within discourse. Through CDA a relationship emerges between history and present-day contexts, revealing elements that have shaped and continue to shape the power dynamics embedded in various types of texts. The use of CDA also makes clearer the connection between the discourses that emerge from these texts, cognition (or how we think about or make meaning of the texts to (re)produce discourses) and the larger social world (van Dijk, 2003). As an analytical tool, CDA can provide an interpretive lens to illuminate issues of power that do not readily reveal themselves and serve as a framework to disrupt, challenge, and generate alternative perspectives of reality mediated by power relations and hegemony.

van Dijk (2003) references two concepts associated with CDA: micro and macro approaches and power as control. In order to engage in CDA, analysts must be able to connect micro- and macro-level discourses. For example, later in this paper, the Morehouse Appropriate Attire Policy is a form of text at the micro level. However, through the use of CDA, I will provide an analysis that links the discourses stemming from those texts to macro issues of power, hegemonic masculinity, and intersectionality.

Power as control, describes van Dijk’s (2003) assertion that power is determined by the extent to which one group is able to exert control over the thoughts and actions of another. Power exists in a number of forms and can be used at the discretion of the holder. While in some instances the use of power may be blatant, it may also “be integrated in laws, rules, norms, habits, and even a quite general consensus” (p. 355). Thus, in other contexts the enactment of power can be highly insidious and barely noticeable. Such forms of policy represent hegemonic ideologies that are taken for granted and rarely questioned. van Dijk cautions that power is differential and depending upon to which type of power one has access, there is tremendous potential to shape discourses whether they be political, educational, social, or personal. For example, in the classroom, teachers possess the power to determine and control the types of discourses that occur in those spaces through the syllabus, topics covered, and class structure. Similarly, through rules, regulations, and policies, campus administrators can largely assert their authority and dictate discourses on campuses regarding campus culture, processes, and the curriculum.

Power is also exercised in controlling the minds of others through discourse and thus reproducing further dominance (van Dijk, 2003). For example, people rarely question ideas and beliefs unless they are inconsistent with what they believe or think they already know. There tends to be a ready acceptance to authoritative entities such as the media, teachers, and/or religious leaders. As a result, power becomes situated in specific contexts based on the perceived power of authorities (van Dijk, 2003). Similarly, some individuals are “obliged to be recipients of discourse,” meaning by sheer context they digest the available discourses. For example, middle school students have no power or control over the types of textbooks they use in class; nor do they possess the power of voice to challenge the information presented to them or the knowledge and resources to seek out other perspectives. CDA also examines “how discourse structures influence mental representations” (p. 358). Thus, the manner in which topics are treated and the amount of attention they receive can influence how individuals engage a topic and the emphasis or importance they place on the topic. For example, the media’s emphasis on a particular
news story might be indicative of the level of importance an individual places on that issue through personal thought or in conversation with others.

**CDA as method**

CDA does not have a standard method of analysis (Huckin, 1997; van Dijk, 2003). How various texts are analyzed depends heavily on the genre from which they stem (e.g. political speech, journal article, course syllabus, and policy report) and how the genre is situated in a given social context (McGregor, 2003). All genres have a given structure and in this case the genre is the dress code policy, which dictates how individuals within an organization (schools, hospitals, corporations, etc.) should dress. In this study, I use CDA to examine the MCAAP to draw clear connections between the language used to situate the policy and the exercise of power embedded within the policy. The analysis of the policy was framed using the following questions: (1) How does the MCAAP reveal power relations between administrators and students?; (2) How are issues at the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality revealed through the policy?; and (3) How does an all-male HBCU context shape or reinforce discourses of masculinity?

To respond to these complex questions, I relied on Huckin’s (1997) and McGregor’s (2003) suggestions and summaries of conducting a CDA. First, I began by reading the MCAAP without a critical lens. In this stage, I asked no questions of the text to get a sense of how the policy might be understood by an ordinary reader with little familiarity of the institution, its context, or the policy itself. In stage two, I reread the policy, using an explicitly critical thought process. As I read, I raised questions about the text, how it was constructed and the overt, as well as subtle messages it might convey to diverse audiences. However, I was conscious of Huckin’s advice about remaining cognizant of the first read because it, “allows the analyst to focus on those features that seem to have the potential of misleading the unwary reader” (1997, p. 81). In the next stage, examining the text as a whole, I identified its genre (dress code policy) and components (discussed in analysis), understanding that “genre becomes a means through which the institution extends power” (McGregor, 2003, n.p.). Next, I focused on the framing of the dress code, placing particular attention on the perspectives embedded in the dress code, the foregrounding/backgrounding of concepts that were either given or deprived of prominence in the text, and omission of information from the code. I also searched for presuppositions in the text, or taken-for-granted language. Finally, for the framing, I looked for instances in which particular voices conveyed perspectives that would either be deemed relevant or dismissed in relation to their legitimacy and credibility.

After analyzing the larger text as a whole, I transitioned the analysis to focus on sentences, phrases, and words. There is a host of strategies to conduct analysis. I chose to place emphasis on topicalization or what components were situated as the topic of a given sentence or phrase. I examined how power relations were situated in terms of who is considered as having power vs. who was considered devoid of power in the policy. I examined the role of agency in how power was depicted in the policy, presuppositions of power, and insinuations that may have been used to insert double meanings in the text. Finally, I examined the text for connotations that were used to conjure particular imagery to shape the discourse, how the tone of the text was situated to communicate an authoritative voice and the use of register to determine levels of formality within the text that signal to readers how seriously a text should be taken.
Throughout, I highlight ways in which the aforementioned CDA concepts emerge and then extend the analysis by revisiting the concepts of bipolar masculinity and the politics of respectability to reveal the hidden meanings and implications of the policy for Morehouse College and the students who attend the institution.

The Morehouse College context and the “Morehouse Man”

Morehouse College was founded in 1867 as Augusta Theological Institute, with a mission to cultivate black men for the clergy and teaching. It later underwent two name changes before becoming Morehouse College in 1913 under the leadership of John Hope. Since its establishment, Morehouse has maintained a reputation for producing graduates who are national and world leaders in politics, medicine, education, and other professions. According to Jones (1957), Morehouse, “has distinguished itself singularly, if not spectacularly, in preparing Negro men for a virile, intelligent, and progressive leadership and for effective participation in a Christian and democratic society” (p. 231). He goes on to share how in its first 90 years, Morehouse had been effective in producing college and university presidents and professors, religious leaders, medical doctors and personnel, lawyers, business men, journalists, and professionals within a host of industries. Today, Morehouse is the largest private, liberal arts college for men in the United States (https://www.morehouse.edu) with graduates that include film director Spike Lee, actor Samuel L. Jackson, civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and several other well-known and respected black men.

Throughout the years, the Morehouse reputation has been rooted in a history of tradition that recognizes the cultivation and development of students into the “Morehouse Man.” The concept of the “Morehouse Man” has been in existence for over a century and reflects the attitudes, values, and influence of the men who have led the institution, including John Hope (1906–1931), Samuel Archer (1931–1937), and Charles Hubert (1937–1940) (https://www.morehouse.edu; Rovaris, 2005). However, it was the keen influence of President Benjamin Mays (1940–1967), that brought the “Morehouse Man” into greater consciousness. Mays, perhaps the most revered president of Morehouse (Rovaris, 2005; Teel, 1982), worked to instill the “Morehouse Man” concept and cultivate it in a way that was embodied in the students while attending and upon graduation from the institution. Mays’ conception of the “Morehouse Man” was based on a belief that students needed to view themselves as men, not boys, who were capable of accomplishing great things as students and as alumni. These men were expected to graduate and not only become successful professionals, but also successful people who were purpose-driven, committed to racial uplift and supportive of their communities (Rovaris, 2005). He wanted Morehouse graduates to be leaders engaged in a process of “transcending this perceived nothingness” (Rovaris, 2005, p. 119) that had been placed upon black men in society. Under Mays’ leadership, students were encouraged to generate and challenge ideas. Moreover, students “were given ample freedom of expression and were encouraged to exercise it” (Rovaris, 2005, p. 121) with thoughtfulness and substance.

The tradition of the “Morehouse Man” has continued to evolve over time, with a decreased emphasis on racial progress and serving Black communities. Rovaris noted that the decades of the 1980s and 1990s reflected a student-driven attitude toward greater attention on “personal, professional, and economic advancement –
characteristics supposedly, shared by other college students” (p. 121). He suggests that the “Morehouse Man” concept certainly exists but has not been as transformational under later presidents as it was under Mays’ leadership.

More recently, the “Morehouse Man” concept was attached to specific characteristics that were outlined by President Robert M. Franklin (2007–2012). Franklin is credited with the “Five Wells” concept, designed to foster an identity among the Men of Morehouse (current undergraduates) as “Renaissance men with social conscience and global perspective” (Morehouse.edu). According to Franklin, Renaissance men are: (1) well-read, with the knowledge and capacity to demonstrate their intellect and “contribute to any conversation;” (2) well-spoken, with the skills and charisma to express themselves verbally and in written contexts with ease; (3) well-traveled, with experiences beyond their comfort zone and physical location that extend to other countries and experiences that instill them with a global worldview; (4) well-dressed, in terms of presenting their best selves in public and having an understanding that all students represent the public face of Morehouse and should conduct themselves as future leaders; and (5) well-balanced, meaning that students should exercise a healthy lifestyle that encompasses care for one’s mind, body, and spirit.

One of the things sustaining Morehouse over the years has been a steadfast mission to produce men who are leaders and world-changers, characteristics that represent the “Morehouse Man.” Despite the changing tides of educational and societal landscapes, Morehouse remains diligent in its commitment to realizing its mission. Berg, Csikszentmihalyi, and Nakamura (2003) maintain:

the evolution of institutions, like individual development, requires a balancing of continuity and change in response to the changing environment. This does not mean submitting willy-nilly to external forces. Rather it means these forces be integrated with the institution’s internal vision for a better reality. (p. 41)

In the following analysis, I consider how the MCAAP operates as one way that the institution is attempting to maintain its mission, while also grappling with changing environments and external forces.

**CDA of the MCAAP**

The MCAAP is a dress code. Dress codes as a genre have a particular structure that makes them different from other forms of text. The components of a dress code include rules or expectations for what is acceptable dress and how such attire should be worn. Dress codes convey norms regarding not only what should be worn, but also who can wear particular types of clothing. Thus, a given dress code may signify messages about gender and gender expression (e.g. women must wear dresses or skirts, men must wear suits and trousers), a particular occupation (e.g. hospital personnel who wear scrubs or white medical coats), or cultural identity (e.g. specific religious attire/garb). Overall, dress codes exist to provide guidance for how individuals should present themselves and send social messages about what is or is not acceptable in a given context. To gain a sense of what may be some of the underlying messages associated with the MCAAP, the 11 rules (taken directly from the policy) are listed below. The policy lists the following rules as examples of inappropriate attire and/or appearance:
(1) No caps, doo-rags, and/or hoods in classrooms, the cafeteria, or other indoor venues. This policy item does not apply to headgear considered as a part of religious or cultural dress.

(2) Sun glasses or “shades” are not to be worn in class or at formal programs, unless medical documentation is provided to support use.

(3) Decorative orthodontic appliances (e.g. grillz) be they permanent or removable shall not be worn on the campus or at College-sponsored events.

(4) Jeans at major programs such as, Opening Convocation, Commencement, Founder’s Day, or other programs dictating professional, business casual attire, semi-formal, or formal attire.

(5) Clothing with derogatory, offensive, and/or lewd messages either in words or pictures.

(6) Top and bottom coverings should be worn at all times. No bare feet in public venues.

(7) No sagging – the wearing of one’s pants or shorts low enough to reveal undergarments or secondary layers of clothing.

(8) Pajamas shall not be worn while in public or in common areas of the College.

(9) No wearing of clothing associated with women’s garb (dresses, tops, tunics, purses, pumps, etc.) on the Morehouse campus or at College-sponsored events.

(10) Additional dress regulations may be imposed upon students participating in certain extracurricular activities that are sponsored or organized by the College (e.g. athletic teams, the band, Glee Club, etc.).

(11) The college reserves the right to modify this policy as deemed appropriate.

*All administrative, faculty, students, and support staff members are asked to assist in enforcing this policy and may report disregard or violations to the Office of Student Conduct.

A full analysis of the policy is beyond the scope of this paper. Rather than addressing each individual point contained in the policy, I discuss general observations and themes that resonate throughout and relate directly to the “textual manipulations” mentioned in the methods section (Huckin, 1997). After reading through the policy and suspending judgment, the regulations for attire “appear” to be reasonable. After all, Morehouse is a private institution and should possess the authority to implement policies as deemed necessary. Moreover, as the nation’s only all-male HBCU and given the reputation the institution has built for producing extraordinary men and leaders, it may come as no surprise to the average reader that the administration enacted this policy to maintain what it perceives to be a positive and respectable image. However, following a more thorough review of the policy, a number of issues become evident with how the policy is written and the social messages it conveys. For example, rather than referencing the policy as a “dress code” it is called an “appropriate attire policy.” Interestingly, the policy neither explains nor justifies what is considered appropriate dress for students. Rather than foregrounding what types of clothing are acceptable, the policy outlines what is not acceptable, or clothing deemed inappropriate. Moreover, the term “appropriate attire” is used as a presupposition or taken-for-granted language as if there is a standard that universally defines what the term “appropriate” means. The language also suggests an omission because the policy does not explicitly indicate who has the power (within the
institution and beyond) to decide what is or is not appropriate, and for which audiences what particular types of clothing are appropriate.

The policy as written provides connotations, or clear imagery of what unacceptable clothing entails. However, particular rules (1, 7, and 9) begin with the word “NO.” The use of this word suggests that among the rules, these three are absolute, meaning there will be no tolerance where these clothing items are concerned. In other words, the modality or tone of the language in these particular rules assumes “an air of heavy-handed authority” (Huckin, 1997). The words contained in other rules (1, 3, and 7) conjure up imagery of a certain type of black man. Words such as “grillz,” “sagging pants,” and “shades” immediately connect black men with stereotypical images of dress associated with “thug life,” gangsta rap, or hip hop culture in general, indicating that the culture itself and what it represents are negative and Morehouse students should not be associated with negative images. To be sure, hip hop culture, particularly the music, has come under criticism for misogynic innuendos about women and overtly homophobic lyrics. Moreover, sagging pants have been associated with prison culture (and “looking like a fool”), while grillz have been linked to young black men in pursuit of a “bling-bling” lifestyle. All of these images as situated in the policy criminalize black men and potentially invite discrimination (Collins, 2004). Perhaps stereotypes associated with this type of dress prompted the creation of the rules outlined in the policy. In other words, those who crafted the policy may have been attempting to steer students away from representing such images that conflict with the image of a Man of Morehouse. The policy leaves no room for acknowledging that for some students at Morehouse, the decision to represent in these ways may actually be reflective of the backgrounds from which they came and the social realities of their lives, or as Collins noted, “tensions between actual thug life and a commodified thug persona that was marketed and sold in the global marketplace” (Collins, 2004, p. 160).

In general, the policy fails to acknowledge why these or any other rule in the policy were written. Moreover, the policy lacks any acknowledgment of other messages that dress can communicate, meaning that how a student dresses may say significant things about how he chooses to represent himself. As Harper (2009) stated, “there are different definitions of success and many different ways to negotiate the outward expression of one’s success” (p. 193). Perhaps the Morehouse College administrators balk at this type of dress because it dredges up a history of negative, damaging images regarding black men. Because oftentimes perception is reality, a student who dresses as a thug is presumed to be a thug. But, what if this same student has a 4.0 grade point average and is actively involved in the life of the campus, garnering respect from fellow students. Then, does it really matter what type of clothing he chooses to don? Unfortunately, the policy leaves no room for the existence of multiple images of expressing oneself through clothing and accessories. While the men in these rules are not positioned as gay, bisexual, or having effeminate characteristics, they are grouped as Bad Black Men according to Cooper’s (2006) description of bipolar masculinity. The men represented in these rules are marginalized just as those in the ninth rule.

Perhaps the most problematic aspect of the policy is the ninth rule that prohibits the “wearing of clothing associated with women’s garb.” This particular rule is an insinuation that gender is to be performed in a particular way that is more traditional and normative. More specifically, gender roles are to be performed in masculine
ways only, and any presentation beyond this is unacceptable. Therefore, administrators are subtly communicating to students that transgressing gender restrictive boundaries is neither honored nor respected. The policy instead, firmly creates boundaries designed to dictate dress and by doing so emphasizes the social norms of male gender roles. Also underlying the ninth rule is the belief that there are specific ways to perform black manhood and masculinity on the campus, certainly not through women’s attire. During an interview with CNN, the vice president of Student Affairs was quoted as saying, “We are talking about five students who are living a gay lifestyle that is leading them to dress a way we do not expect in Morehouse men” (Mungin, 2009). However, this statement implies that either these students were perceived to cause a real threat or that it is not a matter of five students, but several who dress in women’s attire, warranting a full rule in the actual policy. Furthermore, the unspoken messages communicated through this policy connect feminine presentation with sexual orientation, particularly being gay. As a result, a student who chooses to dress in women’s clothing is automatically gay and this is not what Morehouse “men” are expected to be. Several scholars have written about the consequences that occur when both males and females transgress gender boundaries. The act of transgressing is viewed negatively overall, but males experience heightened negativity in comparison to females in that they are presumed to be homosexual. In their discussion of the sexual orientation model, Sirin, McCreary, and Mahalik (2004) stated:

male gender role transgressions are punished more harshly than female gender role transgressions because cross-gendered roles are closely associated with being labeled a homosexual for men and bring with them all of the negative evaluations that accompany homosexuality in men. (p. 120)

This rule has dual meanings, the first being that the attire is simply not allowed along with other forms of clothing mentioned in other rules. It leads the reader to see all of the rules as equal. The second meaning is more complex, unspoken, and controversial. The second meaning that gender should not be transgressed in any way that challenges heteronormative masculinity, is insinuated, allowing the writers of the policy to express a perspective without explicitly addressing the underlying concerns. “Because of deniability, insinuations can be especially powerful elements in any kind of discourse” (Huckin, 1997, p. 84).

Another point of analysis deals with how power is used in the policy to situate students. In this case, an analysis of the framing of the policy is warranted. While the policy is framed as a dress code, another frame is also present, one that situates students as a problem. Though the policy refers to clothing, it is difficult to imagine this clothing without also imagining who will be wearing it. The policy as written, situates the “problem” with students who wish to dress in the clothing outlined in the policy. In other words, students who do not wear these clothes and conform to expected dress are positively situated (Good Black Man); whereas students who do wear these clothes are the institution’s problem and are negatively situated (Bad Black Man) through the policy. The dress of these students is not only seen as problematic, but the students themselves become the problem (detrimental, a threat) for Morehouse. They potentially ruin the reputation of the institution and threaten the image of Cooper’s notion of the Good Black Man. Thus, the larger issues center on where problems are situated; who has the power to define the problem; who exercises the power to identify those culpable for the problem; and who decides on
how the problem should be resolved. In this case, the students are the problem and the policy has defined them as such. The implementation of this policy is the solution. But might there have been other strategies for communicating with the students at Morehouse? The administration could have embraced a more forward-thinking, developmental approach that would place the institution at the forefront of redefining and rethinking black male gender presentation at this single-sex institution to ensure that all students who attend feel a sense of belonging. Instead, the focus is on enforcing the policy; hence, use of the term “rule”. Students who do not abide are made to feel threatened. Gender non-conformity in this sense, is criminalized through the policy and students who do not follow must face consequences.

Another aspect of the policy is the differential relationship between administrators and students. It appears that students may not have had a substantive voice in the creation of the policy. Language such as “additional dress regulations may be imposed …” as noted in the tenth rule suggests that this policy was forcibly put in place regardless of how students may have felt and that additional policies can be created at the pleasure of the institution. Terms such as “regulations” and “imposed” reveal that power resides with the administration of the college, not with students. The eleventh rule demonstrates this even further in that “The college reserves the right to modify this policy as deemed appropriate.” Again, unquestionably the power belongs to the administration to make these rules, impose them upon students and change them. One hidden interpretation is that students are not perceived to have the capabilities to make “appropriate” choices in clothing. Thus they have to be told how they should dress, because they are incapable of thinking for themselves, indicating the paternalistic undertones embedded in this policy or the valuing of an “in loco parentis” philosophy. The tone of this policy is highly politicized. The words possess power and dominance and are not only reflective of the writers or those who possess the authority to control the enactment of the policy, but also of a larger system of what counts as black masculinity. The writers not only determine the discourse, but also exercise agency in legitimizing it as truth. They govern the conversation surrounding the discourse including what the discourse is and how it’s discussed. Thus, the voices of the students are silenced and their perspectives are deemed powerless, worthless, and invisible, except in terms of actually policing the policy.

The analysis presented above is an attempt to address the discourses underlying the policy on a micro level. This analysis can certainly be expanded on the macro level as recommended by van Dijk. I do this by applying the two main concepts noted earlier, politics of representation and bipolar masculinity. Both ideas lend themselves to a more nuanced analysis on the macro level to reveal issues of power related to the policy. Moreover, such an analysis can reveal how intersections of race, gender, and sexuality are reflective of the convergence of larger regimes of power.

Discourse in this policy is used to constrain and sacrifice personal identity in order to strengthen institutional identity. Morehouse College has garnered an extremely prestigious reputation and is known for producing many successful black male leaders. It should not be surprising that as the only historically black college for men, the administrators, alumni, and students wish to preserve its solid academic reputation and its overwhelmingly positive public image. Having students who dress in women’s clothing, grillz, doo-rags, and sagging pants is an imminent threat to the
institution that serves as alma mater to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and several other notable black men. Students who dress in these ways could diminish the history and legacy of Morehouse.

The framework of bipolar masculinity is helpful in this analysis. Clearly, the students who wear sagging pants, grillz, and doo-rags represent the Bad Black Man, thus they are not worthy of inclusion in white mainstream society. Moreover, they represent a direct threat to the Good Black Men, who in this case are students, faculty, and administrators who conform to the rules of hegemonic masculinity. Through the enactment of the policy, Morehouse administrators have engaged in compensatory subordination (Cooper, 2006). Not only have they used their power to subordinate students in a broader sense through the imposition of the policy, they have specifically identified those who should be subordinated. However, underlying this subordination is the larger oppression that black men face in society. Several scholars (Bush, 1999; Hunter & Davis, 1994; Levant & Majors, 1997; Majors & Billson, 1992; Staples, 1978) contend that black men lack full access to dominant forms of masculinity, thus they compensate for this by marginalizing other black men. Through these acts they become Good Black Men in that they distance themselves from specific types of men who do not fit within traditional (code word: white) norms of masculinity and ultimately contribute to the maintenance of the same oppressive systems that dominate them.

A lingering concern regarding the policy is how rule nine, which focuses on women’s garb, has been conflated in a way that has prompted particular attention. When situated historically, the issue becomes clearer. Battle and Bennett (2000) explained that homosexuality was not only seen as a mental illness but a conspiracy by whites to destroy African Americans, particularly black men. This type of pathological thinking is still very present today. Battle and Bennett stated, “Unfortunately, even education doesn’t stem the tide – educated populations within Black America tend to be more homophobic than their white counterparts” (p. 36). In considering the policy, a hidden scenario of links becomes clear:

Black men who dress in women’s attire are gay. Any man dressing as a woman wants to be a woman. A man who wants to be a woman is weak. He is not a real man, nor is he worthy of being a Morehouse man. He poses a threat to the image of strong Black men, thus he must be silenced.

This type of thinking is reminiscent of McBride’s (1998) critique of Frances Cress Welsing’s (1974) work, “The Politics Behind Black Male Passivity, Effeminization, Bisexuality and Homosexuality.” McBride argues that Welsing’s scholarship implies a single definition of black manhood. In referencing her writing he states:

Again, there is an essence to what black manhood is … To be a man is to be strong. And strength, in Welsing’s logic, is the opposite of weakness, which can only signify at best as effeminacy or passivity and at worst as bisexuality or homosexuality … the implication of this logic is that in a world devoid of racism or white supremacy, there would be no black male homosexuality. The result is that black male homosexuality is reducible to being a by-product of a racist program … an argument which privileges race discourse over other forms of difference in its analysis of black oppression. (p. 372)

Similarly, this argument relates directly to bipolar masculinity. The administrators as Good Black Men have cast an image on students with non-gender-conforming characteristics as subordinate and unworthy of inclusion on the Morehouse campus. The non-gender-conforming characteristics mentioned in the policy are embedded with
“coded gender language” (Kimmel, 2000) that suggests that men who have such characteristics are not manly enough. More troubling is how race and gender performance converge with sexual identities to oppress these men, but race remains at the forefront rather than as a consideration at the intersections. This outcome is very reflective of Riggs’ (2001) depiction of black masculinity in that it “admits little or no space for self-interrogation or multiple subjectivities around race” (p. 296). Furthermore, Kimmel’s (2000) work “Masculinity as Homophobia” is especially telling. Kimmel tackles two ideas in particular that resonate with the MCAAP. First, Kimmel explains that homophobia sits at the crux of how manhood is defined; therefore, men assert power over other marginalized bodies to deal with the fear that brings about homophobia. Kimmel defines homophobia as follows:

The fear that other men will unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, that we are not real men. We are afraid to let other men see that fear. Fear makes us ashamed because the recognition of fear in ourselves is proof to ourselves that we are not as manly as we pretend. (p. 214)

In essence, the MCAAP may have been constructed not simply to maintain a certain institutional reputation, but also to maintain the construction of the “Morehouse Man” as a leader, world changer, and one who is presumed to be heterosexual. The second point he makes, relevant to this analysis is the reality of a “politics of exclusion” that allows men to feel more secure about themselves and their manhood by excluding any population that might prompt insecurity or disrupt hegemonic notions of masculinity. This politics of exclusion is “the manhood of racism, of sexism, [and] of homophobia” (Kimmel, 2000, p. 218).

The politics of respectability also play heavily into the construction and imposition of this policy. The administrators of Morehouse are adhering to the politics of respectability, in that creating this policy allows them to encourage a gender presentation among its students that is deemed respectable in the mainstream. On one hand, supporters of this policy agree that it was needed. Given the ongoing debates and media stories regarding the appropriate attire policy, it is clear that not everyone disagrees with the policy. For example, in a Diverse Issues in Higher Education blog titled “The House Rules,” Pamela Reed (2009) refers to the policy as a “clarion call” to urban black youth and states, “Some argue that the policy is draconian and designed to stifle self-expression. Others-present company included-view the stance of the Morehouse Administration as courageous and long overdue” (n.p.). Adopting the policy perhaps provides a way for Morehouse to resist negative images that have been associated with black men historically and presently.

The authority of the Morehouse administrators is implicated in how they have exercised their power to decide that they will speak on behalf of African American men. However, in the midst of reclaiming the positive black male image, the Morehouse Man becomes a monolith; a cookie-cutter image of sorts. In addition, this positive black male image acts discursively to distinguish between and separate African American men and African American gay, bisexual, or non-gender-conforming men. Thus, African American men are relegated to a space solely predicated upon race instead of an intersectional space where issues affecting black men from a number of perspectives can be embraced. The appropriate attire policy limits the pertinent discussions that could occur at Morehouse and instead reinscribes heterosexism, homophobia, and patriarchy. The monolithic Morehouse Man and the positive black male image are symptomatic of the larger issues that affect the black community.
Unfortunately, LGBT African Americans are treated as invisible because what constitutes “the black community” is limited to issues of race. McBride (1998) explains:

The phrase “the black community” functions as a shifter or floating signifier … There are many visions and versions of the black community that get posited in scholarly discourse … Rarely do any of these visions include lesbians and gay men. I want to see a black anti-racist discourse that does not need to maintain such exclusions in order to be efficacious. (p. 366)

**Implications for intersectionality research**

The literature and CDA contained herein present major implications for how intersectionality research in higher education should be approached, particularly with regard to black men and their experiences with diverse, marginalized identities. What this analysis revealed is threefold. First, it reveals that intersectionality as a framework, while powerful for understanding women of color, has tremendous potential for also examining structures and policies that can affect men of color; in this case black men. Second, this analysis brings to light the discourses surrounding men and masculinities. Through using bipolar masculinity as a theoretical framework, the concept of the “Morehouse Man” in some ways gets bolstered through the MCAPP. In other instances, the concept gets challenged by using the bipolar masculinity framework to engage a more critical way of thinking about constructions of manhood and masculinity, particularly when compounded by race, gender, and sexuality. In other words, how people think about and construct manhood and masculinity where black men are concerned, is, whether intended or not, embedded in intersectional politics and politics of respectability. Moreover, it is situated in a larger framework of masculinity in which, “Men share very unequally in the fruits of patriarchy; hegemonic (white, middle- and upper-class, and heterosexual) masculinity is constructed in relation to femininities and to various (racial, sexual, and class) subordinated masculinities” (Messner, 2000, p. 8).

Third, the analysis suggests that issues relevant to LGBT populations need to become more central in educational discourses about black people. For decades, race has been the cornerstone identity to situate educational issues including but not limited to access, retention and completion, levels of involvement and engagement, the widening achievement gap, etc. I argue however that educators, administrators, and researchers in post-secondary education cannot know the real complexities of any of these issues fully without considering the intersections of identity that encompass race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and other structures of marginality. A consideration of how these intersections work and the outcomes they produce can have significant implications for college students, as well as how their identities are influenced by larger, interconnected, and overlapping systems of oppression. Most important in pursuing intersectional research is bringing greater attention to the experiences of students who occupy multiple spaces of oppression. As Cooper (2006) stated, “Everyone has an intersectional identity …, but the consequences of intersectionality are much greater when someone must confront multiple subordinated categories at once” (p. 864). Through using an intersectional approach there is a greater likelihood that the nuances of identity can be revealed, as well as how various identities and categories of difference manifest themselves in a larger post-secondary context that is reflective of societal injustices.
One area where intersectional research could particularly be beneficial is in the analysis and interpretation of campus policies. The prominence of policies in higher education is not new, indeed it is normal to find policies on any and all college campuses. Less common are policy analyses conducted to reveal latent power relations and the convergence of multiple oppressive structures that negatively affect minoritized populations. In this paper, I attempted to do that by analyzing the MCAAP. In conducting the analysis it became abundantly clear that intersectional research is necessarily political. It also is important to capture historical perspectives and link them to present-day inequities. In other words, context is extremely important and can have a profound effect on power dynamics. Another facet of the analysis, and perhaps most important is how intersectionality can be used as a powerful tool not only to examine policy but also to uncover the complexity of policies that on face value may appear fair and reasonable.

While I did not use more popular literature associated with intersectionality, I identified key conceptual ideas that were useful in allowing intersectional perspectives to emerge. As noted in the introduction, intersectional analyses have typically been associated with the experiences of women of color. Given the context of the Morehouse policy and its relation to black men, I sought frameworks that could still address intersectionality, but from a perspective that engaged the experiences of black, gay, and gender non-conforming men without presuming that current understandings of intersectionality could simply be transferred to the experiences of these men. In this way, future research can be critical in expanding current understandings of intersectionality as a framework.

It is highly important for researchers to be mindful of the origins of intersectionality and also thoughtful about ways in which it can be expanded to capture the experiences of diverse populations, particularly men. Some scholars are beginning to embrace intersectionality in more nuanced ways that reveal its value for understanding college men. For example, Harper, Wardell, and McGuire (2011) recently published scholarship that examines how masculinity intersects with other dimensions of identity to highlight the complexity of individual college students’ lives and to bring greater attention to how men in college experience their intersectional identities.

This analysis also has implications for future research on HBCU environments. While the emphasis was on the MCAAP, future research should employ CDA as a frame to understand the unique cultures of these institutions. In doing so, it will be important to remember that each institution has its own set of values, norms, ideas, policies, and rituals that set it apart from other institutions.

Finally, this study adds to the limited higher education literature that uses CDA. CDA was a very valuable framework and method for uncovering how the MCAAP reflected power embedded in hegemonic systems of oppression. CDA should be used to ask additional questions regarding policy (e.g. affirmative action, student funding, departmental), and marginalized students’ experiences (undocumented students, first generation students, and low income students), as well as other areas within higher education where issues of power and oppression exist, yet have not been deconstructed.
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