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Always on Display: An Interpretive Exploration of the Essence of the African American Male Experience at a Predominantly White University

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"It is important to emphasize that this is not a study of Black masculinity, but instead a focus on the lived experiences of 27 African American men at a specific, predominantly White, mid-west university."

The purpose of this session is to present information gathered from an interpretive study of experiences of African American men at a predominantly White university. The study provides a historical context for Black male participation in academia, and then focuses on the lived experiences of Black men currently associated with a predominantly White university. It is important to emphasize that this is not a study of Black masculinity, but instead a focus on the lived experiences of 27 African American men at a specific, predominantly White, mid-west university.

The methodology is interpretive in nature employing two specific methods, participant observation and in-depth interviews. The African American male participants spanned the entire university population, representing four functional areas, faculty, administrative, graduate and undergraduate students. The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 65. Twenty-seven face to face interviews were conducted, which yielded over 170 pages of transcribed descriptions of lived experiences.

Adhering to Norman Denzin's (1989) approach to interpretive inquiry, the descriptions were categorized into themes and explicated for deeper meaning. The process produced ten initial themes (experiential descriptions, learning to cope, fear as a catalyst to survival and success, relationships with non-black colleagues and friends, relationships with other Black men in the community, the African American male voice, assimilation as a strategy, contextualizing racism, self sacrifice and cultural representation in the community, classroom and curriculum). These ten themes were then reduced to three essential and recurring themes (learning to cope, managing relationships and contextualizing racism). Finally, the three essential and recurring themes were further reduced to one theme (always on display) that seemed to reflect the essence of all the essential and recurring themes.

The study successfully employed Denzin's interpretive methodology to give voice to a representative sample of cultural participants that has received minimal scholarly attention in the field of communication.

PRESENTER:

Rex L. Crawley is a product of Ohio University in Athens, Ohio where he earned his BA in political science, his MA in public administration and most recently his Ph.D. in cross-cultural communication. Dr. Crawley has en extensive background in student affairs where he worked as an administrator for six years. He is the founder and coordinator of

Ohio University's Black Man Think, a one-day conference that centers on the African American male experience. Likewise, he is the founder and coordinator of ONYX, a support group for African American students living in residence halls, and the founder and coordinator of the Black Male Training Program (BMT), a rites of passage program for African American men at predominantly white universities. Dr. Crawley's research interests include Black masculinity, diversity issues and organizational communication.