PREVENTING SEXUAL VIOLENCE ON CAMPUS
KEY FINDINGS OF BREAKTHROUGH’S FORMATIVE RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION
Starting in 2013, Breakthrough undertook a year of formative research to shape our program aimed at transforming the cultural norms, attitudes, and behaviors that drive sexual violence on college campuses around the United States. Breakthrough seeks to make campuses safe, promote healthy relationships, and enable all students to access their human right to education—reaching their highest aspirations and fullest potential.

PROBLEM: Limiting and damaging cultural norms
We need to do more than improve responses to campus sexual violence. To reduce its prevalence, we must challenge and transform belief systems and norms that create an enabling environment for sexual assault. This means challenging impunity, victim-blaming, entitlement, and practices that encourage discrimination and violence; and increasing accountability and celebrating role models—individuals and institutions—who stand for dignity and equality for all.

SOLUTION: Unleashing untapped potential to drive broad culture change
Ending campus sexual violence requires equipping and inspiring everyone, on and off campus, to be part of the solution. This ecosystem includes Greek system members/alums, survivor groups, other alumni/ae, coaches, parents, incoming first-years, student groups, administration and faculty, local communities, among others. Interventions must be tailored to a range of stakeholders, with strategies that (a) help them see their stake in solving the problem and (b) provide motivation and capacity to drive change in concert with others.

I. COMPONENTS OF FORMATIVE RESEARCH & METHODOLOGY

Breakthrough conducted due diligence to understand: the drivers of sexual violence on campus, current efforts to address or prevent sexual violence, and effective solutions to motivate and equip a broader range of actors to create campus environments in which all students can thrive. Note: Much, though not all, of the research reviewed did not state that it engaged historically black, tribal, Latino/a-serving colleges and universities or culturally/racially-specific Greek organizations. Our next phase of research and programming will include targeted focus on these historically marginalized groups and institutions to help fill gaps. Breakthrough undertook:

- Desk review of existing research on drivers of and attitudes and behaviors around campus rape by Clifford S. Leek, program director at the Center for Men and Masculinities at Stony Brook University (SUNY) and a research fellow at Catalyst Inc.
- Contextual research in collaboration with leadership of largest fraternity, Kappa Sigma
- Interviews with national fraternity leaders, athletic coaches, and student athletes
- Brain trusts with fraternity men and sorority women in college or 1-2 years post
- Landscape analysis of stakeholders working to address campus sexual violence
- Facebook poll targeting college youth in the United States
II. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

We have identified the following trends among: a) current efforts to address sexual violence, b) the drivers of sexual violence, and c) the most effective strategies for diverse stakeholders to build motivation, increase capacity, and drive lasting change.

A. Landscape analysis

- **Silos.** A growing number of groups are working to address campus sexual violence, but they are often siloed by target group or approach and lack sustained national focus or discussion.
- **Focus on response.** Most organizations and efforts are focused on survivor services or administrative responses to sexual assault. Prevention programs that look at broader campus and U.S. culture that enable gender-based violence are rare.
- **Risk reduction vs. prevention.** Prevention programs tend to focus on one population (first-years, athletes, etc.) or on bystander intervention, risk reduction (which tends to focus on avoiding being raped, rather than preventing rape), or perpetrator accountability. While some of these approaches are helpful, none constitutes primary prevention. Holistic programs engaging the campus ecosystem in primary prevention are nearly non-existent.
- **Mixed bag of strategies.**
  - *Empathy-based prevention strategies,* while popular in the 1990s, have been shown largely ineffective (Anderson & Whiston, 2005).
  - *Programs targeting rape-supportive myths and beliefs* have been shown effective (Anderson & Whiston, 2005; Paul & Gray, 2011), especially when they address cultures and norms around culture of masculinity (Paul & Gray, 2011).
  - *Bystander intervention* is common and has a strong evidence base. Yet social barriers to intervening persist, especially for men (Koelsch, Brown, & Boisen, 2012). Also, bystanders trained not just to interrupt coercion but to call out rape-supportive attitudes and behaviors are those with most potential to drive culture change.
- **Unsustained.** Many organizations offer one-off presentations. Many students say that no services or sustained programs exist that help address day-to-day questions and realities.

**Poor resourcing.** In the words of one White House Task Force representative, “the number one complaint we receive from students and administrators alike is that sexual violence prevention is the area least likely to be resourced or exist at all on campus.”
B. **Drivers of sexual violence** (existing research/Breakthrough Facebook poll)

- **Gender norms.** Student beliefs play a major role in creating environments that can facilitate or prevent sexual violence (Cowley, 2013). Women accept sexual assault or “unwanted sex” as a normal part of relationships with men (Bay-Cheng & Eliseo-Arras, 2008; Gavey, 2005; Phillips, 2000; Tolman, 2009). Men are more likely to coerce sexual activity if they believe their peers do or accept the same (Strang & Peterson, 2013). Sexual violence is perpetrated by campus men who adhere to gender norms that devalue women (Locke & Mahalia, 2005).
- **Alcohol.** Undergraduate men see binge drinking as a key display of masculinity (Peralta, 2007). Men use alcohol to facilitate and excuse sexual assault (Locke & Mahalik, 2005).
- **Rape myth acceptance.** Students are more likely to accept rather than reject rape myths that excuse men’s behavior or accuse women of lying (McMahon, 2010). 41% of first- and second-year students believe a woman raped while drunk is partly at fault (Aronowitz, Lambert, & Davidoff, 2012). Many male and female students believe a woman can provoke sexual assault by dressing “provocatively” or drinking too much (Breakthrough, 2013). Acceptance of rape myths is associated with increased likelihood of perpetrating sexual assault within the next year (Thompson, Koss, Kingree, Goree, & Rice, 2011).
- **Greek culture.** Men in fraternities are more likely than their male peers to agree with rape-supportive beliefs and to self-report sexually aggressive behaviors (Murnen, Kohlman, 2007); they and male athletes may require longer-term prevention programming than the general student population for attitude and behavior change (Moynihan & Banyard, 2008). Sorority members are at higher risk of sexual assault (Krebs et al., 2007) including on historically black colleges and universities (Krebs, Lindquist, & Barrick, 2010).
- **Athletic culture.** In a 2014 literature review on sports and sexual aggression, 10 of 11 studies found a statistically significant relationship among sports participation, alcohol use, and sexual violence. Men in revenue-producing sports (such as football, baseball, and basketball) have more hostile attitudes toward women and report higher rates of sexual aggression than their peers in other sports (Messner, 2002; Gage, 2008).
- **Homosociality.** Higher rates of rape myth acceptance and self-reported sexual aggression among fraternity men and athletes may be partially explained by homosociality—the socialization among men that shapes their relationships with women. Relationships with women are perceived as feminizing, even threatening (Flood, 2008).

C. **Strategies for engaging campus stakeholders** (focus groups, pilot trainings, etc.)

Fraternity men

- **Untapped potential.** Many fraternity men—who take pride in the fact that most U.S. presidents, senators, and Fortune 500 execs are among their ranks—resent being blamed wholesale for campus sexual assault, which in turn alienates those who would drive or lead change. While they alone are not the problem, they can have critical impact on peer culture. What works: inviting them to be part of the solution, invoking fraternal values, and offering appropriate social recognition for sustained positive actions.
- **Shared values.** Key fraternity values—honor, leadership, community service, and “gentlemanly” behavior—position these men to take a greater role in sexual violence
prevention efforts. Fraternity men want others to see them as part of the solution and desire clarity on what they can do. Solution-focused conversations with chapter leaders can help identify opportunities for creative, lasting change in their houses and on campus.

- **Brotherhood.** Among the top reasons men enter fraternities: brotherhood. Downside: protection of a brother or brotherhood—even from accountability for violence—is often paramount. Opportunity: shift the concept to protecting the brotherhood from committing violence in the first place, rather than covering up or staying silent.

- **Empathy.** “She could be your sister” and similar work as emotional hooks; sustained action requires deeper consideration of people’s essential humanity beyond a relationship to men.

- **Consent.** Students need clarity around consent, especially when alcohol is in play. Many believe a woman will “cry rape” simply when she regrets a sexual encounter.

- **Beyond bystanders.** Preventing sexual violence, which is often planned and predatory, is not just about stopping an isolated incident. Intervention must start long before the party does. Fraternity men need the tools and skills to shift the norms and practices on campus that enable rape.

- **Diversity.** While fraternities are seen as bastions of heterosexual white male privilege, they are not always homogenous at campus or national levels; many fraternities (and sororities) are also culturally or racially-focused. More must be done to address gender, race, class, and other privilege while engaging Greeks in preventing sexual violence—and to challenge assumptions about who is part of Greek life in the first place.

- **Male-positive vs. male privilege.** Engaging men in the prevention of violence against women can perpetuate paternalistic models of “protecting women” or sounding over-the-top (like, “oh, he’s so great for not committing rape”), or over-reward for minimum effort. Messaging should be positive and inspiring, without reinforcing destructive norms.

- **Celebrity versus peer influence.** Fraternity men, while they stand by their role models, say they are more influenced to take a stand on this issue by their peers—who they say “know the realities of campus life”—over celebrities who they perceive to be paid for showing up in a PSA or who are too-far removed from their college experience.

### Sorority women

- **Untapped potential #2.** Engagement of sororities often mainly focus on risk reduction, which can support victim blaming and misses a key opportunity for primary prevention and culture change. Sorority women are at higher risk of sexual violence than their peers (Krebs et al., 2007), correlated to attending fraternity parties; every sorority woman with whom Breakthrough spoke had direct or indirect experience with assault. They bring deep understanding of social context and power to influence fraternity peers. As both subject to and drivers of victim-blaming, they offer major potential for action and change.

### Athletic teams

- **Untapped potential #3.** Many male athletes and teams are under scrutiny for sexual violence. Engaging them as part of the solution and creating pathways for positive stands and actions can inspire engagement and contribute to a climate of accountability.

- **Coaches.** Coaches set the tone on the team for what is acceptable and not—in the locker room, on the field, and beyond. Mobilizing teams to challenge sexual violence often starts with support from the coach (and team captains, although to a lesser degree).
● **Values.** Team sports emphasize group responsibility, camaraderie, reputation, and accountability to the whole. These values can drive engagement strategies and messaging to athletic teams to increase accountability to their peers and campuses.

Parents/Alumni

● **Untapped potential #4.** Parents are deeply concerned about their children’s safety on campus. Their voices—and wallets—matter to administrations. Parents need more resources on the reality of campus sexual violence and ways to address it—not just to protect their own children but to demand accountability and safety nationwide.

● **Alums, too.** Some alumni groups have begun to organize to highlight problems and call for solutions. Their voices, and power to withhold money—or direct it to sexual violence prevention—also have potentially significant impact on the actions of campus leadership.

Campus administration

● **Campus leadership.** Political will at the highest levels is needed to truly and comprehensively create and sustain holistic, ambitiously resourced prevention programming. When the college president and board of directors are behind this transformation, in concert with key partners and diverse student groups, coaches, parents, alumni, and so on, we will begin to see real change.

Broader ecosystem

● In light of this analysis, Breakthrough’s work to prevent sexual violence on campus starts on campus but ripples far beyond. Since campus sexual violence and the attitudes that promote it are often passed down from one year to the next, our national campaigns and resources will engage students from high school seniors to college alums in an intergenerational approach to prevention. We also partner with community stakeholders including rape crisis centers and domestic violence agencies in order to create stronger networks, enhance sustainability and long-term investment in prevention, and foster a deeper understanding of how true culture change requires everyone to take part.

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**Breakthrough (www.breakthrough.tv) is a global human rights organization working to make violence and discrimination against women unacceptable. Our cutting-edge multimedia campaigns, community mobilization, agenda-setting, and leadership training equip men and women worldwide to challenge the status quo and take bold action for the dignity, equality, and justice of all.**

**Our program to prevent sexual violence on campus includes:**

● Pilot campus-based fraternity men’s engagement program, soon to include sorority women

● National online forum on campus sexual violence for Greeks and non-Greeks engaged in prevention

● Twitter chat series on campus sexual violence driving engagement of broad ecosystem

● National and local multimedia action campaigns

**For more information about Breakthrough’s work to prevent sexual violence on campus, contact Joe Samalin: joe@breakthrough.tv.**