Rus Funk
Consulting

Barriers to Engaging Men
Across the Social Ecology

Isolation, Lack of knowledge, values[2]

"Male Peer Support[3]"/Mentors

Organizational Culture/Social Environment[2]

Social Norms/ Community Values

Media Images & Messages, Laws

Individual

Relational

Organizational

Community

Social

PO Box 4878, Louisville, KY 40204   www.rusfunk.me   rus@rusfunk.me   (502)494-9044
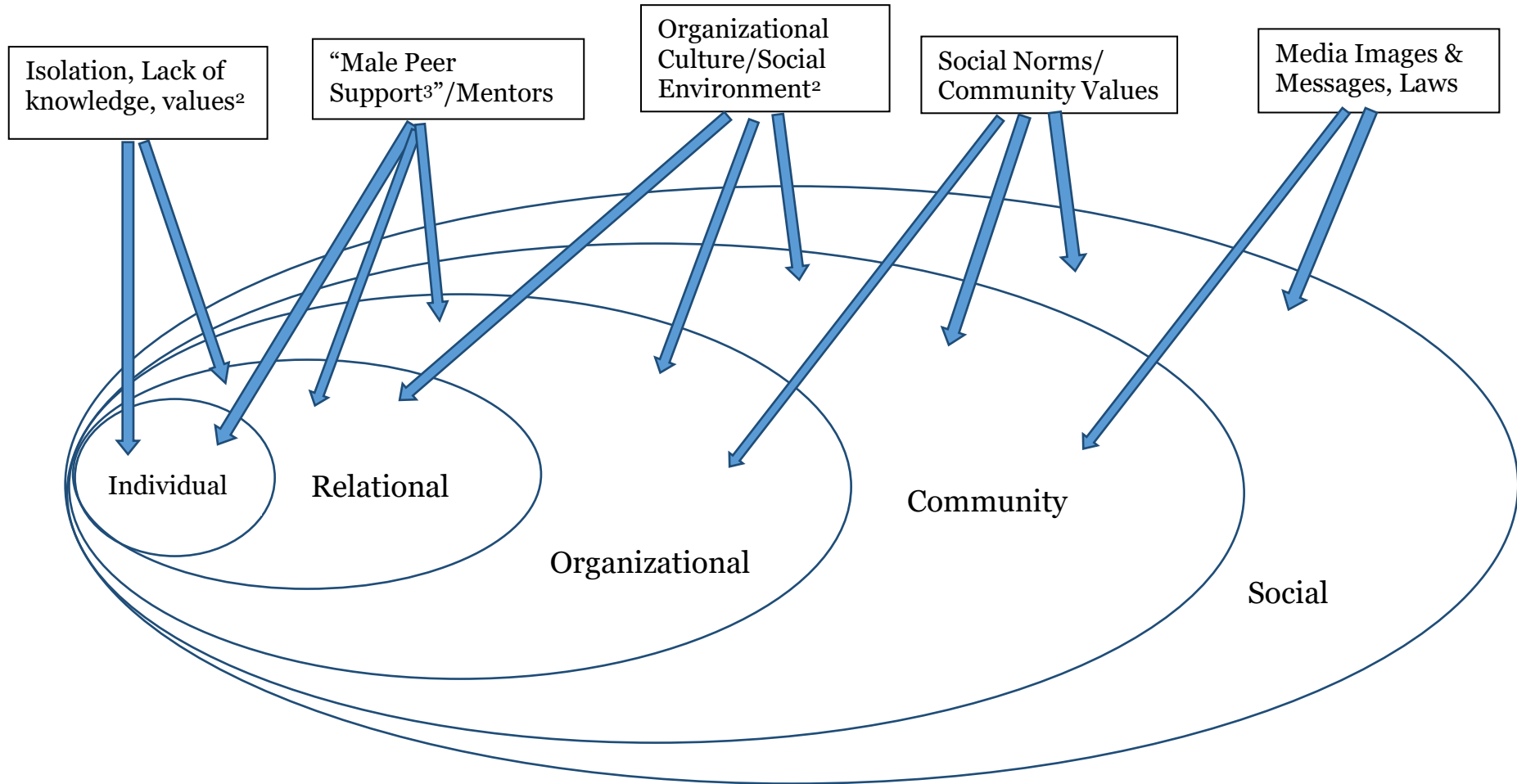
There are a variety of barriers to men's involvement and leadership to end gender based violence and promote gender equality or gender justice. Efforts to engage, mobilize and organize men are most effective if they reach across the social ecology strategically rather than working at only one or two levels.

Most men have limited knowledge as to how to effectively become engaged to prevent gender based violence. Those who do have some knowledge or are ready to become involved, often feel isolated. Without some basic knowledge and confidence, and without trusting that there are other men who support their efforts, men are not likely to become engaged.

"Male Peer Support" theory suggests that the reason men perpetrate gender based violence is due, in part, to the support they receive and perceive from their male peers. Although not fully verified yet, this theory also suggests why men may be hesitant to become engaged and active. If men perceive that their male peers are not engaged and do not support male involvement or leadership to prevent men's violence, they will unlikely be involved. Similarly, lacking mentors to provide support, guidance and modeling, means men are left to feel like they're cutting new ground. It takes a great deal of personal empowerment to feel confident and comfortable living on the cutting edge.

Most men spend a great deal of time in organizational settings (teams, clubs (both formal and informal), faith groups, etc.). Organizations and groups have their own culture; and if men are part of an organization which they perceive is hostile or neutral to men's involvement in preventing gender based violence, then the men who are part of these groups are unlikely to conceive of ways that they can be involved, and are not likely to buck the group norms (that in many other ways is a source of support) in order to become engaged.

Social Norms and community values exist all around us. If we are part of social groups or communities that maintain or promote an ethic of male involvement and leadership, then there is another layer of perceived lack of support to men's engagement and leadership.

Media images and messages are lacking in terms of showing men in active and accountable leadership to prevent gender based violence. What images and messages that do exist are rarely accessible to most men, and pale in comparison to the images and messages that promote sexism, male dominance, male bystander behavior and men's violence. The result being that for most me, the images that most resonate with them are *not* the images and messages promoting male involvement and leadership.

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[1] Adapted from Jewkes, Flood and Lang (2014) *From Work with Men and Boys to Changes in Social Norms to Reductions in Social Norms: A Conceptual Shift in Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls*.

[2] Funk, R.E. (2007) *Reaching Men: Strategies for Preventing Sexist Attitudes, Behaviors and Violence*. Jist Publications.

[3] DeKeserdey, W & Schwartz, M. (2013). *Male Peer Support and Violence Against Women: The History and Verification of a Theory*. Northeastern University Press

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