

Silence and Communication Strategies within Sicilian Mafia Families
Surrounded by the Code of *Omertà*

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Introduction

The Mafia (Cosa Nostra) is an organized crime group that originates in Sicily, Italy and is known for its structure and code of conduct. The key point of their code of conduct is the code of *omertà*, which literally means “manhood” but refers to the vow of silence each Mafioso, “man of honor”, abides by. At first, the code simply asserted that it was not “manly” to seek support from authorities on matters of personal disputes, but it has increasingly been used to describe the general silence surrounding mafia activities.

Giuseppe Mannino defines the code of *omertà* as a synonym for a man of honor’s appropriate reliability; the failure to abide by the code of honor means rejection of the status of being a Mafioso and a man (155). His studies on the communication strategies of the Cosa Nostra refer to the silence of *omertà* as a linguistic choice; even what is not said reveals something. If silence is speech, this raises the question: how does an organized crime group communicate when bound to an oath that keeps them silent about anything pertaining to the business? This essay explains how the organization establishes a code of communication generated over the years of mafia prevalence filled with nonverbal signs, signals, and codes.

The mafia’s success directly correlates with their code of *omertà*. *Omertà* controls the behavior of a Mafioso and is the link to every aspect of mafia communication. A Mafioso is conscious of the code of *omertà* with every

interaction he makes. If anyone were to betray a mafia family member, the code of *omertà* requires vengeance against the assailant. The code is an oath of loyalty to the Mafia and the betrayal of that oath is punishable by death. Depending on the severity of the betrayal, an entire clan's lives may be at stake.

Omertà is rooted in the silence that gives the organization its power. That silence controls the communication strategies within the organization. It is the fundamental code that binds the hierarchical family structure as one loyal unit, communicating in nonverbal codes and behaviors distinct to a man of honor while also defining his masculinity.

Literature Review

In his book, *Codes of the Underworld*, Diego Gambetta's research focuses generally on how criminals communicate. Criminal communication studies addresses questions about criminal behavior and the use of violence in sending messages. Gambetta addresses the risks of emitting signs and the danger in failing to communicate. Gambetta specifically investigates how criminals communicate, identify each other, and advertise their goods while retaining their secrecy. At the start of criminal communication studies, scholars thought of criminals as having little to no communication skills and mainly using violence haphazardly. Gambetta argues the opposite: he claims that criminals have extensive communication skills and that even violence can send an explicit

message. Gambetta claims that the “decisiveness and brutality of many criminal actions do not numb the cognitive skills required for emitting and reading signs”(xi). He addresses the risks criminals take in their communication strategies, and since Mafioso cannot communicate openly, most of their exchanges are done nonverbally.

Dennis Kurzon’s research on the *Discourse of Silence*, helps identify these codes to give silence meaning through what it communicates and how. Kurzon’s work helps explain how to interpret silence as an act of communication instead of just a pause in conversation. I use Kurzon’s insights on intentional silence and what kind of message it can convey when used deliberately. Additionally, I use Kurzon’s ideas on silence and power in demonstrating how silence can be used as a tactic in acquiring power over authority. I talk about how silence is a weapon for mafia dominance and honor, while also stressing the importance of silent communication within the family’s nonverbal behaviors.

Unlikely words that are used to describe the mafia often include, honor, intelligence, family, and structure. Andrea Cerami’s thesis on *The Mafia’s System of Silence in Communication, Film, and Literature: Perversions of Society and Transgressions of Omertà* (pgs 10-14) highlight some of these distortions. By using Cerami’s research on the communication patterns within the mafia, the perversion of these notions of honor and family are made apparent through the structure of mafia families.

Pino Arlacchi's book, *Mafia Business, the Mafia Ethic & The Spirit of Capitalism*, (pgs 4-7,132-135) addresses how the mafia shapes life in Sicily, Italy. He studies the behavior of a Mafioso, and the power of a Mafioso. He examines the correlation of this behavior and the notion of honor then applies it to how these traits define Sicilian culture. I use Arlacchi's observations to stress the relationship between the code of *omertà* and 'manhood'. Further, I explore how this definition of manhood and behavior of a Mafioso influences family communication and family honor.

While there is a good deal of scholarship on both criminal communication and mafia communication more specifically, scholars rarely if ever apply insights about Family Communication. Given that the mafia is structured around families and more specifically traditional Italian families, my research aims to fill in that gap. I accomplish this by combining the communication theories on criminals, silence and nonverbal communication with theories in Koerner and Fitzpatrick's *Toward a Theory of Family Communication*.

Koerner and Fitzpatrick theorize the different types of family orientations based on communication patterns. They first introduce, *Conversation Orientation*, which refers to the amount families are encouraged to participate in conversation on various topics (85). Families can fall under high conversation orientation or low conversation orientation. Koerner and Fitzpatrick go on to define *Conformity*

Orientation, which is the amount families stress agreement of attitudes, values, and beliefs (85). Again, families are either high or low in conformity orientation. High conformity families insist on uniformity on their beliefs based on the elder's values. The research suggests that these orientations work together in creating four family structures – *consensual, pluralistic, protective, and laissez-faire*. Their research applies to the communication patterns within mafia families in that mafia fall under the *protective family structure* meaning, they tend to be low on conversation orientation and high on conformity orientation. Parents make all decisions and their children are expected to obey their rules without question. This creates a hierarchical structure where family members (Mafioso) cannot communicate freely.

By applying the theories on nonverbal communication and familial communication to the mafia, we can learn their unique style of exchange from the root of the organization – the family. The family is the core value for any Mafioso; by focusing on basic familial communication patterns first, the information can then be applied to how the mafia works as a whole in the Sicilian community.

History

In order to understand the Sicilian mafia, also known as Cosa Nostra (meaning “our thing”) it is important to first recognize its roots and origins. Sicily, an island located in the Mediterranean between North Africa and the Italian mainland, is a prime location for trade and business. Because of its opportune

location, it has been subject to a long history of violence. Over the years, foreign invaders - Romans, Arabs, Phoenicians, French, and Spanish - have all controlled Sicily. Oppressed by so many foreign forces, the Sicilians unofficially adopted the attitude of *omertà*, meaning they would not go to the ruling authority on any conflict, as the ruling authority could not be trusted. This lack of trust and representation resulted in Sicilians banding together to form groups to protect themselves and their loved ones against these forces. The groups were made up of families or clans, and the mafia clans grew with the rise of feudalism in medieval times when the government did not adequately represent the poor.

The Sicilian-Arabic word “mafia” initially had no criminal connotation; it simply meant someone who was critical of central authority or more literally meant “manly.” The Cosa Nostra did not start as an organized crime group but a group of men standing up for their community. Circumstances that led to the need of the mafia include: 1) the State’s inability to protect its people and their property 2) land reform, leading to the demand for more landlords in need of protection, and 3) an uneducated lower class that often resorted to violence to solve its problems. At the end of the nineteenth century, G. Pitré gave a definition of the mafia of the time:

The mafia is neither a sect nor an association, and has neither rules nor statutes. The *Mafioso* is not a robber or a brigand...The *Mafioso* is simply a brave man, someone who will put up with no provocation; and in that sense, every man needs to be, indeed has to be, a *Mafioso*. The mafia is a certain consciousness of one’s own being, an exaggerated notion of individual force and strength as ‘the one and only means of settling any

conflict, any clash of interests or ideas'; which means that it is impossible to tolerate the superiority or (worse still) the dominance of others.

(Arlacchi, 6)

At this time, Pitré argued in support of the mafia; he even went as far to say that any man could be Mafioso. He described mafia, as the only way to seek justice against foreign powers and that it is brave for a man to identify himself with the notions of force, strength, and dominance. Pitré's statement provides insight to what the mafia used to be and how society felt about mafia presence in Sicily at the time.

Mafia families were originally uneducated lower-to-bourgeois class, with strong men who began to take advantage of the unstructured, chaotic conditions surrounding Sicily. Mafioso began extorting these conditions by collecting protection money "*pizzo*" from landowners and organizations - even the Catholic Church offered its *pizzo* to the mafia. In exchange for money, the mafia protected these organizations from the threat of foreign authority. There have even been times that the Italian government has asked the Cosa Nostra for help in handling independent criminal bands and in exchange, the government agreed to look the other way as the mafia conducted their business; what the government did not realize is that the Cosa Nostra did not consider this as a temporary engagement. As time went on, Mafia continued to rise as an autonomous class essential to the functioning community of Sicily. They integrated themselves into Sicilian culture

so much that mafia presence is now embedded into Sicilian ideology. Sicily was built upon mafia influence and protection and now there is no Sicily without mafia.

Saying there was a need for the mafia may sound ridiculous now that the mafia is associated with brutal crimes, corruption, and greed; however, in the beginning they were viewed as a respected groups of families who protected their own. Violence has always been involved but with what was considered as “just cause.” It was not until the 1920s that the mafia transformed from a group of honorable Sicilian men to an organized crime group shifting focus on money and power. At this time the code of *omertà* was introduced as an oath that every Mafioso must take.

Analysis

The code of *omertà*, literally meaning “manhood”, is a code of silence about any criminal activity pertaining to the organization and a denial of any information to the authorities. Only after taking this oath can a person become a “man of honor” or Mafioso. Informing on the mafia is the worst possible offense for a Mafioso; it permanently damages one’s manhood and usually results in assassination of the informant. Accompanied with this notion of honor is an unofficial code of behavior Mafioso must follow. This behavior is a type of public self-image that represents mafia families as whole. Pino Arlacchi links this behavior to a man’s masculinity in his quote: “In a mafia area, ‘to be a man’ meant to display one’s pride and self-assurance, and to show oneself ready and

able to respond quickly to threats that life constantly posed to one's own honour and that of one's family" (Arlacchi, 6). This unofficial code of honor requires a man to come off as respectable, but also willing to take any necessary action when needed. It is a representation of not only himself but a representation of his family. The code of *omertà* and the behavior that characterizes it is a learned behavior for mafia families. The code of *omertà* is passed down from generation to generation; most mafia children learn to abide by it before they even swear an oath to the mafia. Even those in Sicily who do not swear an oath to the mafia unknowingly abide by the code just by being surrounded by mafia activity.

In Sicily, every café, restaurant, or establishment is "mobbed up". These establishments essentially mark mafia territory and are used to conduct business. In Sicily, everything runs smoothly so long as residents remain silent about the organization. People are much more inclined to serve jail time than to inform on the mafia and risk injury or death. "So, in a way the Sicilian population is unknowingly coerced into taking the oath of *omertà*, a code of silence and loyalty to Cosa Nostra" (Cerami, 1). The mafia has permeated a social code of conduct for Sicily that residents subconsciously abide by.

The mafia is successful for two main reasons: its code of *omertà* and hierarchical structure. Each "family" or "clan" has a command structure. Many of us are familiar with this structure from movies like *The Godfather*, or *Goodfellas*, but the Sicilian mafia is actually much smaller than the large structures we have

seen in these American films. A boss leads each clan; underneath the boss is the underboss. Both the boss and underboss are supervised by one or more *consigliere* that supervise financial decisions and mediate any internal disputes. Under the *consigliere's* command are soldiers. Clans can have anywhere from 5-30 soldiers who carry out tasks for the group. A head soldier, who is called the capodecina, leads the soldiers. Aside from the direct members, the mafia makes use of outside help called associates. Associates are not considered members but are used as tools for the mafia. These associates are typically made up of corrupt politicians, police, and businessmen.

If an organized crime group, like the mafia, has to keep silent about many aspects of the business, how is it that they communicate? Gambetta explains that though secrecy protects criminals from the law, it hinders them in opportunities to conduct business. For that reason all criminals must make exchanges in codes and signals. These codes and signals are also a way of identifying other criminals. They must be absolutely sure that whoever they are conducting business with are trustworthy criminals not “mimics” like undercover policemen. This forces criminals to be hyperaware of their surroundings and the behavior of others; they must always question another criminal's signs. (Gambetta, xv-xviii).

In order to earn the trust of others, most criminals have to establish a certain credibility by either committing a crime and going to jail intentionally,

committing a crime in front of others without getting caught, or by undergoing an initiation process for organized crime groups. These actions rule out any doubt of the other party's affiliations. Gambetta defines true criminal credibility as, "A convincing signal of a criminal type is that which only a true criminal can afford to produce and to send" (Gambetta, 9). For example, in order to be initiated into the Cosa Nostra, a man must murder another man (a man that was already intended to be killed by the mafia). By committing the murder, the initiate is less inclined to inform on the mafia for if he does, he too will go to jail. The murder acts as a signal of warning to the initiate while also proving to the mafia that he is a legitimate criminal.

Even violent actions, like the murder example, have a communicative purpose. "A primary goal of communication, namely to modify people's beliefs about a situation or person, is often better achieved by deeds than by words. Actions send signals and are often meant to" (Gambetta, 1). Every action a criminal takes is highly calculated in order to not make a mistake. They must think carefully on every communicative decision they make both verbal and nonverbal. Communication strategies are more than just language and words. A raise of the eyebrows, shrug of the shoulders, or squinting of the eyes can all send different messages. In order to be successful, these criminals must be skilled in both emitting and receiving these signals; any mistake can be

detrimental to their criminal career. Criminal messages are emitted through gestures, signals, codes, and even silence.

Silence is often seen as the absence of communication, the absence of activity. I argue that silence can be very active in its transmission. “Intentional silence – is very much an activity, in which case it has to be considered dynamic in meaning” (Kurzon, 2). When used intentionally, silence is a linguistic choice that contains meaning. Silence paired with body language can say more than words ever could. The absence of words forces a person to listen to what the silence is saying. Silence has a way of making people think deeper. Kurzon draws the conclusion that: “Interactive silence, occurring as intentional pauses in conversation, allows the addressee(s) to draw inferences concerning the meaning of the conversation” (Kurzon 19). The addressee focuses more on the conversation while filling the silent gaps with meaning. A very simplified example of this would be if two Mafioso are speaking with one another about the local fish they bought this weekend, they pause briefly after naming the location in which they bought it and pause again after the name of who they bought it from. The recipient can read and understand the meaning behind the silent pauses to determine the importance of the location and person named as meaning more than just the vendor of fish. Pauses in speech are a crucial way of communication between Mafioso. It lets them communicate about business without being caught by police or rival crime groups.

Silence can additionally hold a significant amount of power. Kurzon gives an example of an interrogation setting where the interrogator usually has power over the addressee. The addressor holds the power by the way in which he/she ask the questions. However, the situation can be reversed if the addressee is silent. An example of this exertion of power is, “If the questioner exercises power over the addressee by initiating the exchanges, refusal by the addressee to answer is an attempt to break the addressor’s power and take over” (Kurzon, 32). This kind of silence is exactly what the mafia does with their code of *omertà*. The silence and secrecy can be used as a defense mechanism. Silence is power. Silence can be used as a way of parading their dominance, thus their honor. It is a weapon against the authority used to demoralize them and take away their power.

If silence is power, what it communicates is also powerful. Because the exchange of messages is essential to the very existence of the mafia, communication cannot be avoided. In an organization where a ‘look’ can determine the assassination of another, communication is key. Cerami presents an interesting example of this kind of ‘look’ from the notable Judge Falcone in Sicily,

One day I saw an interesting scene on a street. A man was shouting and gesticulating at another man who had parked his car side-on across the street, stopping traffic. The first man was upset, shouting. The other man looked at him with complete indifference and then carried on talking to his friend as though nothing had happened. The first man suddenly clammed up and walked away quietly. He had understood, seeing the confident

manner of the other, that if he had insisted things would have taken an ugly turn and he would have emerged the loser from the confrontation. This is Sicily, island of power and of the pathology of power.

(Falcone/Cerami, 11)

The codes used allow communication that only men of honor can understand, granting them access to a whole other world where they feel immortal to the rest of us. The codes grant them invincibility against the law allowing them to break any rules they please; with the proper codes and silence of *omertà*, the mafia has power, and with that power, they are protected.

Though communication within the Cosa Nostra is coded, these codes are not *rigidly* coded in advance. Gestures and signs do not have explicit meanings because if they did, police and other nonmembers would be able to decode them easily. Instead, there are general rules that are accompanied by some verbal expressions that can be understood by mafia only. Common words or phrases can change in context with the mafia. An example of this kind of indirect communication is an exchange between Judge Falcone, and Tommaso Buscetta, a former Mafioso prominent in Palermo, Sicily, who decided to inform when the majority of his immediate family and *cosca* were killed by the rival Corleone family:

“I was talking to Buscetta about a murder; he was convinced it was a Mafia assassination, I was less sure. Buscetta said, ‘I want to tell you a little story.’ I understood at once that he wanted to tell me something indirectly.

'A guy has an infection in an unfortunate place, on his buttocks. He goes to the doctor and says to him, 'Doctor, I was stepping over some barbed wire, I got scratched, and now the wound is infected.' The doctor examines him and declares, 'As far as I can tell, it doesn't seem to have been caused by barbed wire.' The other replies, 'Doctor, I swear the infection occurred as I said, but you cure it as if it was what you think...'

Buscetta's message: 'You don't believe this is a Mafia crime, but I am sure it is. Investigate it just as if it were a Mafia crime.'

(Jones, The Sound of Silence)

Buscetta indirectly helps Judge Falcone by telling him that the crime was indeed done by the mafia. He communicates his message in a way that does not promptly present Falcone with the answer but instead, tells him discreetly through code, the mafia way.

After collaborating with police, Buscetta once said: "Mafia is criminality, plus *omertà*, plus intelligence, which is indeed something very different" (Mannino, 165). Amongst many Sicilians the Cosa Nostra is a desirable group to be in. Buscetta continues: "You should ask me how many people in Sicily are not members of Mafia, and not the opposite" (Mannino, 165). The mafia is something kids grew up wanting to be in like many of their fathers and grandfathers. In some families, it is seen as an honorable profession – a family business. They view themselves as a unified group based on their values, traditions and honor. Any

action or crime committed is never done by an individual person but by the “us” that is all of mafia. They have a certain mafia ideology in that they have shared values, beliefs, and responsibilities. Even their linguistic choices are a tool used to build the social image to feel that they belong in the “us” that is mafia (Mannino, 169).

The mafia was a form of behavior and a kind of power, not a formal organization. To behave as a *Mafioso* was to behave honourably (*onorevole*). It was to conform, in other words, to certain rules of cunning, courage, and ferocity, of robbery and fraud, that even as late as the ‘forties of the present century continued to play a crucial role in the culture of many areas of western Sicily and Southern Calabria.

(Arlacchi, 4)

Arlacchi calls attention to the importance of conformity in mafia families; they conform in behavior and rules distinct to a man of honor. The behavior and rules are unique to Sicilian culture.

The “us,” mentioned above, are the distinct mafia families in Sicily. Buscetta defines the family as “a group in which can vary from three hundred to fifty, there is no stability” (Mannino, 165). These families contain perverted notions of honor and courage. Acts that they see as courageous include keeping silent on family activities, personal events, anything concerning the mafia, and performing any task assigned from the mafia. These “values” must be upheld from initiation through becoming a man of honor. Even murder must be done “honorably”. Buscetta admits that he waited years to kill a subject condemned to death by the mafia because whenever the subject left his home, he took his children with him. “I couldn’t scare the kids, it wouldn’t be fair for me, and other

people, too, wouldn't consider it right, or courageous." Though mafia families may have a shared notion of values, attitudes, and beliefs, these beliefs are often distorted in order to benefit the organization's uniformity.

Familial Theories

Scholars often define family as, "a group of intimates who generate a sense of home and group identity and who experience a shared history and shared future" (Koerner/Fitzpatrick, 71). They define communication as "including any instance of the creation of symbols in some medium in such a fashion that other people can notice the symbols and make sense of them" (Koerner/Fitzpatrick, 71). Thus, scholars can define the interaction between family and communication as, "the way in which a family maintains its own structure through patterns of the family members' responses to each other's communicative acts" (Koerner/Fitzpatrick, 73).

These definitions become important when it comes to defining different types of family orientations. There is the conversation orientation that Koerner and Fitzpatrick define as the degree to which families are encouraged to participate. Families on the high end of the spectrum communicate frequently on various topics. Contrastingly, on the low end of the spectrum, families communicate less frequently on minimal topics. These families do not share their feelings or private thoughts and the activities that families engage in are not

discussed in detail. Additionally, in a family of low conversation orientation, everyone's input is not needed for family decisions.

The conformity orientation is the degree in which families stress a climate of homogeneity of attitudes, values and beliefs. High orientation represents a uniformity of beliefs, attitudes, and value seeking harmony, conflict avoidance, and interdependence of family members. High conformity families are obedient to their parents or authority figure. Families with high conformity can also be compared to what is known as the "traditional family structure". Traditional families are known to be cohesive and hierarchical. They favor family relationships over any outside relationships and expect members to put aside any other interests to those of the family. These families typically expect all resources to be shared with the family. Low conformity families can be compared to a modern type of family. They stress an individuality of beliefs and ideas and seek equality of all family members often discussing decisions for the family.

The interaction of conversation and conformity orientations form four different family types: *consensual* – meaning both high conversation and conformity orientation, *pluralistic* – meaning high in conversation orientation but low in conformity orientation, *laissez-faire* – meaning both low in conversation orientation and conformity orientation, and lastly *protective* – meaning low on conversation orientation but high in conformity.

Mafia families fall under the *protective* family orientation emphasizing obedience to their authorities and showing little concern for open communication. Their beliefs are uniform and stress the absence of internal conflict. Families are hierarchical in that parents make all decisions for the family and do not feel obliged to explain their reasoning to the children. Connecting a traditional mafia structure to Koerner and Fitzpatrick's protective family orientation is quite simple. The Mob Boss is equivalent to the dominant parent, (the parent who typically has the last say in decisions and carries out the disciplines of the family). The underboss and/or *Consigliere* fits with the other parent, and the soldiers, associates, and all other lower positions, fit the children in the model. Like the *protective* family structure, the boss makes all decisions for the family with the help of the underboss. The *consigliere* oversees the decisions while also making sure there are no internal conflicts within the family. The soldiers and associates are expected to carry out any tasks for the mafia without question or prior explanation of reasoning.

When looking at the protective family structure, a key attribute to this type of family is that, "family members favor their family relationships over relationships that are external to the family" (Fitzpatrick/Koerner, 86). Similarly, an old mafia saying shares this idea, "Friends are not as important as family. Do not confuse the loyalty of friendship with the bond of blood." Family always comes first but sometimes, in big families, a Mafioso cannot be sure if they are

family or not. In situations like this, there are codes in place to identify fellow Mafioso.

For example, these codes are commonly used in introductions. When introducing a made man to another, the phrase “a friend of ours” is used, meaning business can be openly discussed. When introducing a non-member or associate, “a friend of mine” is used meaning business should not be discussed openly. Often, the introducer is a member of a higher authority and can be trusted. This language is distinct to mafia families. In a country known for its beautiful language, mafia language is the opposite. Mafioso use the least amount of words possible, heavy dialects, and grammar mistakes just to communicate their messages. Mafia hierarchy often limits the communication between members of different ranks, meaning messages have to be clear and all ranks must be uniform in their beliefs in order to work efficiently.

The mafia structure is very hierarchical with a unique set of unified beliefs, as distorted as they may be. In fact, the word the mafia uses for clan “*cosca*” can be defined as a group of families closely bound or fused together. In order to have a successful *cosca*, member’s qualities must be uniform. “The internal hierarchy of mafia groups is not determined by the chief’s transmitting or bequeathing his power, but by the extent to which members possess certain qualities needed to govern the *cosca*” (Arlacchi, 132). By acting as one unified

group, all ideas have to match and when all ideas match, the family will run smoothly.

Because families see themselves as one productive unit, *protective* families expect all resources to be shared. Any profits made by an individual member are shared with the rest of the family. Plain of Gioia Tauro, an important mafia leader once told the *carabinieri* (police) that, “ with the other brothers, we are actually partners in everything we do – managing our property, running the petrol station, an owning various trucks, ...We three brothers run things in common without distinction between us, and we draw all the profits...” (Arlacchi, 135). By sharing everything equally, ideally internal conflicts can be avoided in families. The mafia is run under common ownership and control – it is what makes them so successful.

Another attribute that assists their success is the mafia’s skewed perception of affection within the family. Koerner and Fitzpatrick outline familial relationships as including trust, respect, love, and affection (84). They are attentive to each other’s needs and communicate their feelings to each other. In a *protective* or traditional family this kind of open communication is lacking. In mafia families, this kind of communication is nonexistent. Cerami addresses the perversion of affection within mafia families with the quote: “The familial structure, which was once centered on love, is detached and positioned around a distortion of love: fear” (Cerami, 11). Instead of love, families run on fear. If a member

doesn't follow the rules of the family, they risk being killed. Arlacchi weighs in on the distortion of family relationships with the quote: "Relations within the family obeyed the rule, not of *intimacy* or *solidarity*, but of *subordination*, which involved a mass of obligations and values emphasizing the prerogatives attached to each position within the reigning domestic hierarchy." (10). There are strict protocols mafia members must abide by that prevent them from open communication or affection. Without open communication, the family structure requires a different code of communication in order to run properly. Instead the family is bound together with the oath of *omertà*.

Being a Mafioso is to follow the code of *omertà* *because* it means you have the ability to be a man. As noted before, *omertà* is associated with honor. Thus possessing the ability to remain silent is manly and honorable. Silence as a communicative strategy is powerful, thus qualifying *omertà* as a unique mafia power over authority.

Families of the Cosa Nostra are centered on the common idea of what it means to be a "man" and there are codes of conduct, behavior and communication strategies surrounding this notion. Expected behavior of a Mafioso is to have class and honor. It is to make oneself respected, truly respected not just feared. It should be quite obvious to people that a man is Mafioso because of the distinct behavior he possesses and how he treats others.

In mafia families, an honorable woman can symbolize an honorable family. To possess a virtuous woman makes a man superior to other men. The relationship between man and wife is typically a power relationship with very little affection. When honor is broken between man and wife in the circumstances of an affair, rape by a rival family etc., revenge is required to regain the honor lost. Any breach of a woman's honor is a breach of the family's honor. In Sicily, to take back this honor, the husband must first kill his unfaithful wife, and then her violator or lover. If he fails to do so, the man is excommunicated by the local community and loses all social standing. Many men immigrate elsewhere to avoid this (Arlacchi, 7).

Conclusion

Mafia families are unique in their orientations. With communication, the use of violence is applauded in sending messages, silence is encouraged, and uniformity of ideas is a positive thing. The mafia is still prevalent in Sicily; however, scholars argue that it is no longer at its peak of success. Whether it is in a period of transition or on the decline is unknown but it is possible that the increase of Law Enforcement strategies contribute to the breaking down of the Cosa Nostra. In order to get rid of the mafia, law enforcement must break down the means of communication within the organization and its families. Without their code of *omertà*, notions of honor, and strong family orientations, the mafia is nothing.

Efforts to take down organized crime have worked before with the American Mafia. In the 1970s, many Mafioso had given in to authorities when faced with a long prison sentence. When offered the opportunity to break *omertà* in exchange for being placed in the witness protection program or a shorter sentence, they took it. This allowed American authorities to gain intelligence on the mafia and break down the organization even further. Once they knew what they were dealing with by gaining information from these informers, it was much easier for the government to stop them.

Authorities now had enough information to impersonate mafia behavior, and go undercover as a convincing criminal. All they needed was a handful of prominent Mafioso to breach their code of *omertà* and they were able to start winning the war on mafia. Authorities began breaking down small mafia clans and families one by one and weakening the larger ones. Though mafia is still active in America, it is not nearly as severe an issue as it used to be.

If Italian authorities would follow the same strategies of enforcing punishment and breaking down communication, they too would have a chance at reducing mafia numbers. However, they face the challenge in that the Sicilian mafia has a bigger hold on the Italian state because of how embedded it is into their culture and politics. As long as the mafia remains strong in upholding their codes and family ties, they will be prominent. Mafia 'success' lies with the family,

unified by the code of *omertà*, and the codes of behavior in which they communicate.

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