

That is How We Do It around Here: Levels of Identification, Masculine Honor, and  
Social Activism against Organized Crime in the South of Italy

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**Abstract**

Masculine honor is an important cultural code in the south of Italy. Italian criminal organizations (COs) manipulate and exploit this code to maintain legitimacy among local populations and exert social control in the territory where they operate. This research tested the hypothesis that different levels of identification – the region and the nation – would have opposite associations with male honor-related values and, indirectly, with intentions to oppose COs collectively. Results from a sample of young southern Italians ( $N = 170$ ) showed that regional identification positively predicted endorsement of male honor-related values, which in turn were associated with lowered intentions to oppose COs. In contrast, national identification negatively predicted male honor-related values, associated in turn with stronger intentions to oppose COs. These results also held when perceived risk and social dominance orientation were taken into account. Directions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: omertà; masculine honor; regional identification; national identification; organized crime

*As you see, I am a Mafioso in our way, in the Sicilian way, giving what I can to those in need, respecting and making myself respected, not tolerating bullying against the weak, respecting the honor of others, and ensuring my own is respected.*

*Vizzini (translated in Paoli, 2003, p. 184).*

Honor is an important cultural code in Mediterranean countries (Peristiany, 1966), particularly in Southern Italian regions (Di Bella, 1992; J. Schneider, 1971). Honor is also a feature of Italian criminal organizations (COs). These groups legitimize their presence among local populations by presenting themselves as embodying the ideal of honor (Paoli, 2003; Schneider & Schneider, 2003).

The *mafioso* Vizzini's words are a vivid example of this form of strategic self-presentation. Vizzini merges mafiosi' identity with the regional Sicilian identity by referring to a common set of values rooted in notions of reciprocity, respect, and reputation. These are important components of honor, particularly concerning men (Barnes, Brown, & Osterman, 2012).

Previous research has revealed a negative relationship between male honor-related values and intentions to oppose COs collectively (Travaglino, Abrams, & Randsley de Moura, 2014a; Travaglino, Abrams, Randsley de Moura, & Russo, 2014b). In this paper, this line of research is extended by addressing the new question of whether regional identity, vis-à-vis national identity, plays an important role in relation to endorsement of masculine honor, and whether this creates an indirect effect of identity on collective action intentions.

### **Cultures of Honor and Male Honor**

Cultures of honor have emerged in different geographical areas across the world, including Southern regions of the US, South America, and Mediterranean countries such as Italy (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996; Peristiany, 1966; Rodriguez-

Mosquera, 2013; J. [Schneider, 1971](#)). In these cultures, the worth of an individual is ascribed partially through social transactions (Pitt-Rivers, 1966; Rodriguez-Mosquera, Manstead, & Fisher, 2002; Rodriguez Mosquera, Fischer, Manstead, & Zaalberg, 2008). Individuals must thus carefully manage their social image and conform to a set of social expectations.

A central facet of honor concerns values that prescribe and commend male violence enacted in honor related domains (Barnes et al., 2012). Through (the credible threat of) violence, men establish their presence in the public sphere, and consolidate their claims to precedence ([Cohen & Nisbett, 1997](#)). Ideological conceptions about male behavior may impact a wide range of social and interpersonal phenomena (Barnes et al., 2012; Barnes, Brown, & Tamborski, 2012; Brown, Osterman, & Barnes, 2009; Brown, Imura & Mayeux, 2014; Rodriguez-Mosquera, 2013; Travaglino et al., 2014ab).

### **Criminal Organizations and Omertà**

Italian COs are highly structured groups characterized by secrecy. These groups pursue a variety of different goals related to the enhancement of their members' status ([Paoli, 2003](#)). An important aspect of COs pertains to their cultural dimension ([Blok, 1988](#); [Hess, 1998](#)). Specifically, COs mobilize and manipulate symbols and meanings related to the ideology of honor in order to sustain internal cohesion and social control ([Allum, 2006](#); [Paoli, 2003](#); J. Schneider & Schneider, 2003).

In spite of the enormous social and economic costs deriving from COs' presence in Southern Italian regions (Daniele & Marani, 2011; Lavezzi, 2014; Pinotti, 2012), local populations display a form of collective passivity toward these groups, a phenomenon known as *omertà* ([Travaglino et al., 2014a](#)). *Omertà* is a cultural code

that, in consonance with masculine ideals of self-reliance, requires individuals to display indifference regarding others' illegal activity, and to not report crime to law enforcement agencies (Paoli, 2003). In line with this conceptualization, Travaglino et al. (2014a) found that, among young male and female participants, endorsement of male honor-related values was associated with lower intentions to oppose COs collectively. This linkage was mediated by lower endorsement of the goal of collective mobilization against COs (i.e., collective motive; Klandermans, 1984), higher perceived threat in interacting with police, and more positive attitudes toward COs. In addition, male honor-related values were related to lower vicarious shame vis-à-vis COs' wrongdoings (Travaglino et al., 2014b).

Importantly, [Travaglino et al. \(2014a\)](#) found that among southern Italians, regional identification was associated with stronger endorsement of male honor-related values. In this paper, we investigate this relationship more closely to understand whether it is distinctively regional identification, rather than national identification or social dominance that contributes to affirmation of masculine honor.

### **The Present Study**

The principal aim of this study is to examine the articulation between psychological identification with two categories of group membership, the nation and the region, and endorsement of male honor-related values in a southern Italian context. Individuals may simultaneously belong to different, sometimes nested, groups (e.g., Tajfel, 1982; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). In turn these group memberships may have different associations with a given cluster of cultural values, norms, and attitudes (Halloran & Kashima, 2006).

Honor is a persistent concern in everyday life in the South of Italy (e.g., Allum, 2006). As noted by P. [Schneider \(1969\)](#), in a context where economic and

human resources are objectively scarce, or their possess perceived as fluctuant, claims of social standing are still strongly reliant on codes of reciprocity, and sometimes on the threat of violence. In these contexts, honor values may be propagated as group norms (Vandello, Cohen, & Ransom, 2008), sustained institutionally (Cohen & Nisbett, 1997), and thus become a defining aspect of the content of one's social identity (cf. Jetten, Postmes, & McAuliffe, 2002). Based on earlier findings from [Travaglino et al. \(2014ab\)](#), we expect to find evidence for a positive linkage between identification with a southern Italian region and endorsement of male honor-related values.

Intuitively, one might assume that because regional identity is nested within national identity they should have congruent relationships with other variables. However, identification with a national membership might entail detachment from regional values. Cultures of honor tend to emerge where state institutions are perceived as (or are objectively) unable to regulate conflicts and enforce contracts (Pitt-Rivers, 1968; see Leung & Cohen, 2011). In the southern Italian context, national identity might be associated with valuing the national administrative apparatus, stronger civic involvement, and more generalized trust in the nation (cf. Huddy & Khatib, 2007; Miller & Ali, 2014). Because individuals who identify with the nation might place more trust in the state's legal ability to solve disputes, they might simultaneously place less value in ideological codes prescribing male retaliatory violence and self-reliance (Barnes et al., 2012). If this reasoning is correct, we should observe a negative association between national identification and male honor-related values.

Another objective of this study is to examine the role played by social dominance orientation (SDO; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) in explaining perception of,

and collective intentions against COs. Social dominance theory postulates that inequality in society may be partially explained by individuals' acceptance of the appropriateness of hierarchies among groups. Individuals differ in their orientation toward inequality (i.e., SDO; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallwort, & Malle, 1994). Because COs have disproportionate access to economic, and social (e.g., status) resources within communities, their predatory and violent presence may be legitimized by a more favorable general attitude toward social inequality. Thus, SDO might represent an alternative construct that, at the individual rather than cultural level, explains individuals' disengagement from collective actions against COs.

Finally, in line with previous research ([Travaglino et al., 2014a](#)), we include measures of two known mediators of the relationship between male honor-related values and collective intentions. Specifically, we include measures of collective motive (an operationalization of indifference), and attitudes toward COs. In addition, because COs use threat and violence to dissuade opposition, we include a measure of perceived risk to control for this construct.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

One hundred seventy one high school students (81 females, 2 unreported) from a Southern Italian region (Campania) took part in this study ( $M_{\text{age}} = 16.46$ ,  $SD = .71$ ). Questionnaires were distributed in school classrooms by two researchers (a male and a female). The questionnaire was presented to the participants as examining perception of local issues and groups. Anonymity was emphasized and participants were encouraged to respond truthfully to the questions. Participants were reminded they could withdraw from participation at any time.

### **Material**

Questionnaires were in Italian. Items were measured on 7-point scales (1 = *Completely Disagree* and 7 = *Completely Agree*), unless differently noted below. COs were referred as 'Camorra' (Campania's criminal organization) throughout the questionnaire. For each construct, a mean score was computed by averaging the relevant items.

**Regional identification.** As in Travaglino, et al. (2014a), identification with the region was measured with three items, 'I am pleased to think of myself as Campano', 'I am proud I am Campano', 'I identify with other people who live in Campania' ( $\alpha = .77$ ).

**National identification.** Three items as above were used to measure identification with the nation (e.g. 'I am pleased to think of myself as Italian'), ( $\alpha = .85$ ).

**Honor ideology for manhood (HIM).** To measure participants' endorsement of masculine honour-related values, the HIM scale (Barnes et al., 2012) was translated and adapted to the Italian context (Travaglino, 2014ab). HIM consists of 16 items and includes 8 items tapping endorsement of qualities which define a 'real men' (e.g., 'A real man never backs up from a fight'), and 8 items tapping endorsement of males' physical aggression in honor-related domains (e.g., 'A male has the right to act with physical aggression against another man who flirts with his wife') ( $\alpha = .92$ ).

**Social dominance orientation (SDO).** SDO was measured using the following four items: 'Superior groups should dominate inferior groups', 'This country would be better off if we cared less about how equal all people were', 'This country would be better off if certain groups stayed in their place', 'It is not a problem if some groups have more of a chance in life than others' (Pratto et al., 1994; 2013; items were translated and adapted to the Italian context in Roccato, 2003) ( $\alpha = .74$ ).



Items were preceded by the following instructions (adapted from Pratto, et al., 2013), ‘There are many kinds of groups in the world: men and women, ethnic and religious groups, nationalities and political factions. Indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement with the following statements concerning groups in general’.

**Attitudes toward COs.** We used 5 items to assess participants’ attitudes toward COs, ‘Some aspects of Camorra’s activity are legitimate’, ‘Some actions of Camorra may have positive direct or indirect consequences for the area where you live’, ‘Actions of Camorra deserve respect’, ‘Actions of Camorra deserve admiration’ and ‘Actions of Camorra deserve esteem’ ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

**Collective motive.** To tap the code of collective passivity implied by code of omertà we used Klandermans’ (1984) construct of collective motive (Travaglino et al., 2014a). Collective motive is rooted in the value-expectancy model (Feather, 1982). It is conceptualised as the multiplicative function between the subjective value individuals pose in the goal of a mobilization, and their expectations about achieving this goal through collective mobilisation. Following previous research (e.g., Sturmer & Simon, 2009), the value and expectancy components were measured separately, and combined multiplicatively. Participants rated the value they attached to defeating Camorra (1 = *Not at All Important*, and 7 = *Completely Important*), and to what extent they expected this could be achieved through the joint action of the people living in the area (1 = *Under No Circumstances* and 7 = *Certainly*).

**Collective action intentions.** Participants were asked how likely they were to take part in each of the following actions: ‘Sign a petition against Camorra’, ‘Take part to a public demonstration against Camorra’, ‘Become part of an association against Camorra’, ‘Convince other people to take part in demonstrations against Camorra’ (1 = *Not at All Likely* and 7 = *Completely Likely*) ( $\alpha = .88$ ).

**Perceived risk.** We asked participants to rate to what extent engaging in each of the previous activities could represent a risk for them (e.g., ‘How risky would it be for you to sign a petition against Camorra?’) (1 = *Not at All Risky* and 7 = *Completely Risky*) (four items;  $\alpha = .89$ ).

## Results

### Preliminary Analyses

Means, standard deviations, and correlations among variables are reported in Table 1. Measures of regional identity (RI) and national identity (NI) were positively correlated. This suggests the existence of a common tendency among individuals to rate these group memberships as important for the self (see Huici, et al., 1997; Morse, 1977). These constructs were however differently related to HIM. Valuing a regional identity was associated with higher endorsement of male honor-related values. In contrast, valuing a national identification was linked to lower endorsement of these values. This is consistent with the idea that alternative group membership might promote different cluster of cultural values (Halloran & Kashima, 2006).

Interestingly, SDO was significantly and positively related to collective action intentions, and attitudes toward COs, but not to collective motive. In contrast, HIM was significantly associated with attitudes toward COs, collective motive and collective action intentions. This is consistent with the idea that SDO and HIM tap different processes related to individuals’ intentions to engage in collective actions against criminal organizations. Specifically, honor-related values seem to affect collective normative orientation toward COs, whereas SDO taps individuals’ differences in perception of criminal organizations. In subsequent analyses, to test their respective contribution in explaining collective action intentions toward COs, we

add SDO as a covariate of the relation between HIM and collective action intentions, and between HIM and attitudes toward COs.

Women ( $M = 3.71$ ,  $SD = .97$ ) were significantly less likely to endorse masculine honor ideology compared to men ( $M = 4.93$ ,  $SD = .96$ ),  $t(168) = 8.26$ ,  $p < .001$ . Women ( $M = 5.33$ ,  $SD = 1.43$ ) also reported higher intentions to engage in collective actions,  $t(167) = -4.38$ ,  $p < .001$  and more negative attitudes toward COs ( $M = 1.73$ ,  $SD = .77$ ),  $t(168) = 3.96$ ,  $p < .001$ , compared to men ( $M_s = 4.32$  and  $2.47$ ,  $SD_s = 1.54$  and  $1.52$ ). Multiple regressions showed that gender had no unique association with collective action intentions ( $\beta = .15$ ,  $p = .07$ ), or attitudes toward COs ( $\beta = .12$ ,  $p = .16$ ) once HIM was partialled out (Travaglino, et al., 2014a). The interaction between gender and HIM when predicting collective action intentions was not significant, ( $\beta = .15$ ,  $p = .60$ ). However, because the association between HIM and attitudes toward COs was larger among men, ( $\beta = .55$ ,  $p < .001$ ) than women ( $\beta = .07$ ,  $p = .59$ ), ( $\beta_{interaction} = -.87$ ,  $p = .002$ ), in the following analyses gender was covaried to ensure that the paths involving attitudes were not artefacts of gender.

### **Path Analysis**

Following previous research (Travaglino, et al., 2014a), we tested a path model where HIM predicts collective action intentions through collective motive and attitudes toward COs. NI and RI were added as predictors of HIM. We controlled for the effects of SDO and Perceived Risk on collective action intentions, as well as the effects of Gender on attitudes. As recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2008), the residuals of the mediators were allowed to covary. Co-variation among mediators is unlikely to be exhaustively explained by their mutual correlation with the predictor. Modelling covariance among mediators' residuals take into account the potential effect of omitted variables. To account for the non-normality of some of the variables

in the model, we applied the Satorra-Bentler correction (Satorra & Bentler, 1994) with robust standard errors (scaling factor 1.062). Indexes reported below are scaled. These analyses were run in *R* using the Lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012).

A simplified version of the model is presented in Fig. 1. Paths involving control variables are omitted as their effects were non-significant ( $\beta s < .13, p s > .08$ ). The model fitted the data well,  $\chi^2(20, N = 169) = 26.55, p = .15$ , comparative fit index (CFI) = .97, root-mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .04. HIM was significantly predicted by RI,  $\beta = .28, SE = .07, p = .001$ , and NI  $\beta = -.25, SE = .06, p < .001$ . HIM significantly predicted attitudes toward COs,  $\beta = .32, SE = .09, p < .001$ , and collective motive,  $\beta = -.18, SE = .09, p = .026$ . Collective action intentions were significantly predicted by attitudes toward COs,  $\beta = -.18, SE = .09, p = .02$ , collective motive,  $\beta = .30, SE = .008, p < .001$ , and HIM,  $\beta = -.23, SE = .11, p = .006$ .

We then proceeded to test the indirect effects in the path model, using 5,000 bootstraps. Consistent with Travaglino et al. (2014a), both the indirect effects of HIM on collective action intentions through attitudes toward COs,  $\beta = -.06, SE = .04, 95\% CI = -.15$  to  $-.001$ , and through collective motive,  $\beta = -.05, SE = .04, 95\% CI = -.15$  to  $-.006$ , were significant.

Of central concern to our hypotheses, RI had a negative and significant indirect effect on collective action intentions through HIM,  $\beta = -.06, SE = .03, 95\% CI = -.15$  to  $-.02$ . The indirect effect of NI on collective action intentions through HIM was significant and positive,  $\beta = .06, SE = .03, 95\% CI = .005$  to  $.12$ .

## Discussion

In this study we hypothesised and tested the idea that in a southern Italian context identifications with the region, and the nation might be differently related to the acceptability of honor-related values. Specifically, we predicted a positive

association between regional identification and male honor-related values, and a negative association between national identification and these values.

Evidence supported these hypotheses. In line with previous findings, male honor-related values negatively predicted intentions to oppose COs collectively (Travaglino et al., 2014ab). Notably, this association was consistent across genders. Although women endorse masculine honor-related values less than men, they still play a crucial role in the socialization of these values, and may endorse or reject ideological prescriptions that commend male violence in honor-related domains. Adherence to these values is in turn associated with lower intentions to oppose COs.

In keeping with the code of omertà, the association between HIM and collective action intentions was explained by lower levels of collective motive, and more positive attitudes toward COs. This pattern of results is consistent with the idea that cultural values pertaining to the sphere of honor may legitimise, and in turn lower opposition against some dominant groups. In this sample, preliminary analyses showed that gender interacted with HIM in predicting attitudes toward COs. Specifically, the association between HIM and attitudes toward COs was larger among male than female participants. To account for this, we added gender as covariate in the full model. This did not affect the fit of the model. However, it may be interesting for future studies to explore the extent and possible implications of gender differences using a larger sample size. .

Importantly, the model fitted the data when the role of SDO was taken into account. This suggests that – at least in the context of activism against COs – the impact of culture is independent from individuals' attitudes toward hierarchies and inequality. Interestingly, SDO was positively associated with attitudes toward COs, but not with collective motive. These results highlight the different role of the two

constructs. Specifically, while SDO may inform individuals' perception of the legitimacy of a dominant group, cultural values may influence shared norms related more directly to political action. Future research should examine the associations between SDO and perception of criminal groups in different cultural contexts (cf. Densley, Cai, & Hilal, 2014).

More central to the scope of this article is the nature of the articulation between national and regional levels of identification. Albeit conceptually nested, these two levels of identification had opposite relationships with male honor-related values. Higher identification with the region was associated with stronger endorsement of male honor-related values. Southern Italian regions have been historically characterised by (relatively) weaker administrative institutions (Allum, 2006; Hess, 1998). In this context, male honor-related values prescribing self-reliance and commending retaliation might have emerged as vehicle for regulating transactions among individuals, providing salient ideological content for the regional group membership. Stronger endorsement of male honor-related values then understandably inhibits intentions to engage in social activism against COs.

In contrast, identification with the nation was related to lower endorsement of male honor-related values. Stronger identification with the national group might reflect stronger trust in the nation, and by extension in its legal and civil institutions. Because individuals who identify more with the nation may be more trustful of its legal administrative apparatus they may also be more prone to reject values prescribing violence and retaliation. This is in turn related to higher intentions to oppose COs.

This pattern of results is consistent with the idea that identification at different levels of group membership might be distinctively related to a set of cultural norms

and values. Masculine honor may be a salient norm for southern Italian group membership, but counternormative for membership in to the nation. The ways in which this normative content is highlighted by these social identities may in turn have important political and social implications (Livingstone & Haslam, 2008).

Specifically, to the extent that honor-related values may be exploited ideologically to sustain power structures, they may affect intentions to act collectively to oppose dominant groups, including criminal organisations (omertà).

### **Future Directions**

In this paper, for the first time we presented evidence that national and regional group memberships have a different bearing on a cluster of values inherent to honor cultures in the south of Italy. To the extent that certain groups may exploit these values to ideologically legitimise their hegemony, the salience of a specific identity might have important consequences for individuals' cultural attitudes and action intentions. These results point to important avenues for future research.

Although our ability to draw causal inferences is limited by the correlational design of this study, the paths we tested and identified suggest potentially fruitful ways to test the causal links implied by our model. Specifically, future research may build on the evidence that male-honor related values are linked to national and regional identities in different manners, for instance by experimentally manipulating the salience of each level of identification in order to affect endorsement of honor. This in turn may impact on individuals' intentions to oppose COs.

A further important direction will be to examine the processes through which identification with the nation promotes social activism against COs. In this paper, we have focussed on differences in degree of endorsement of male honor-related values. However, national identification might also be associated with unique content, or

affect individuals' perception of national institutions such as law enforcement agencies. These factors may in turn affect perceived legitimacy of COs, and intentions to oppose these groups.

### **Implications and Conclusions**

These results have implications for antimafia activism, and educative programmes. As noted by J. Schneider & Schneider (1994; 2005; see also Paoli, 2003), recently there has been a tendency in the antimafia discourse to focus on economic and structural determinants of the emergence, and resistance of criminal organizations in the south of Italy at the expenses of culture (e.g., Gambetta, 1993). This is in part the outcome of concerns about the negative representation to which this area has often been subjected. Indeed, the notion of culture has sometimes been incautiously wielded to portray a very negative image of southern Italian populations (see Lombroso's [1876/2006] classification of Southern Italian population as violent criminals, or Banfield's [1956] characterization of southern Italian populations as *amoral familists*). Yet, this and other studies (Travaglino, et al., 2014ab) support the idea that culture matters at the collective level, and that culturally informed norms may affect group processes and political action.

It may be in the interests of dominant groups to reify categories and their content, as the Vizzini's quote above so eloquently illustrates (cf. Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). However, culture is not static but rather a dynamic process capable of contestation and change. Therefore a potential strategy for educative antimafia interventions may be to take the role of culture into account, for example by promoting different ways of being 'southern Italians', or devising methods to expose incompatibility between honor values and COs' actions.



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Table 1.

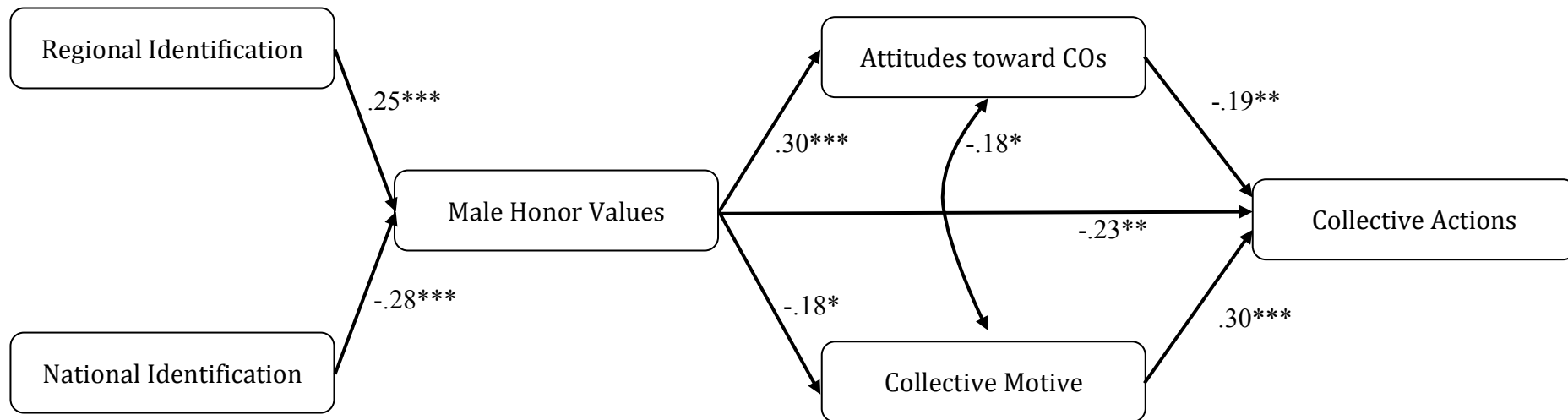
Correlations, means and standard deviations for the variables in the present study.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<i>Regional Identification (1)</i>	-									
<i>National Identification (2)</i>	.35***	-								
<i>HIM (3)</i>	.18*	-.15*	-							
<i>SDO (4)</i>	.11	.15*	.24***	-						
<i>Attitudes toward COs (5)</i>	.13	-.06	.39***	.42***	-					
<i>Collective Motive (6)</i>	.07	.17*	-.19**	-.08	-.25***	-				
<i>Collective Action Intentions (7)</i>	-.03	.18*	-.40***	-.27***	-.40***	.39***	-			
<i>Perceived Risk (8)</i>	-.05	.01	-.19*	.03	-.13	.04	.16*	-		
<i>Age (9)</i>	-.05	-.14	.08	.10	.14	-.06	-.09	.01	-	
<i>Sex (10)</i>	-.02	.20**	-.54***	-.14	-.29***	.08	.32***	.17*	-.14	-
<i>M</i>	5.14	5.00	4.34	3.03	2.16	25.88	4.80	4.71	16.19	-
<i>SD</i>	1.19	1.40	1.14	1.127	1.32	13.17	1.57	1.89	.66	-



Figure 1.

Path model showing coefficients for the antecedents and consequences of Male Honor-related Values, and its effect on Collective Action Intentions against Criminal Organizations.



Note: \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ . Paths from SDO, Sex and Perceived Risk (control variables) were non-significant and are omitted from the diagram.