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## Film Review: Traffic by Steven Soderbergh

The movie "Traffic" by Steven Soderbergh is a film which deals with several aspects of drug trafficking and drug abuse. The movie has three different simultaneous plots that come together. One part is the national level which deals with drug trade between the United States of America and Mexico, another is a mid-ground focusing on a mid-level distributor who has just been arrested and the third is the individual level.

The first plot of the movie takes place in Mexico where two police officers arrest smugglers in a truck full of cocaine and end up impressing a high level official General Salazar. He later asks help of one of the officers, Javier to capture a hitman, Francisco Flores who works for the Tijuana drug cartel lead by the Obregon brothers whom he was trying to take down. Javier succeeds. He later hears Francisco being tortured for information about the key members of the Tijuana cartel. They are later arrested and Salazar is named the drug czar of Mexico. Later Javier learns that Salazar himself is working for a rival drug cartel, the Juarez cartel which is why he wanted to take the Tijuana cartel out of Mexico. Javier's partner Manolo is later murdered by drug lords for informing the U.S Drug Enforcement Administration. Javier then cuts a deal with the FBI and passes on insider information on the Juarez cartel in exchange for electricity in his neighbourhood for children to play at night instead of getting themselves into drugs.

Francisco is assassinated for selling out the Obregon brothers. Salazar is exposed, tortured and killed.

The second plot alternates between Washington DC and Cincinnati. An Ohio judge Wakefield is appointed drug czar of the US. However, his sixteen-year-old daughter Caroline is a drug addict. Wakefield is determined to win the war against drugs. She is arrested when along with others, she dumps an overdosed class mate outside a hospital. Her drug abuse spirals out of control leading her to stealing and prostitution. She runs away from a rehabilitation centre to end up with her drug dealer. Wakefield and his wife blame each other for the problem. Wakefield taunts his wife about her teenage drug abuse and she blames him for being over invested in his work. Wakefield later quits his job to support his family.

The third plot set in San Diego, where a mid level drug distributor is under federal investigation. Montel and Ray, DEA investigators are collecting evidence against Carlos Ayala, who distributes drugs for the Obregon brothers. They arrest Eduardo Ruiz who worked for Ayala and convince him to testify against Ayala. Helen, Ayala's wife who came from a poor background and married rich had no idea about her husband's work. When she learns where their money came from she hires Francisco Flores to murder Ruiz, the chief witness in the investigation. When Ruiz escapes from prison, she poisons Ruiz. She cuts a deal with the Obregon brothers to make her the sole distributor of their cocaine in the US. Ruiz is killed. Ayala is released and they go back to their life. The movie ends with Montel coming into their home and starting a fight as a cover to bug Carlos Ayala's work desk. This shows that there might be some hope for the government to win against the drug lords.

The main themes in the movie are drug culture, military corruption, police corruption, conformity, crime and deviance.

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The main question we need to ask is why do the above mentioned themes occur?

To break it down; people commit crimes for various reasons. It can either be for the survival of the self or out of greed and to make money. Survival of the self can also be broken down into a number of categories. It could either be physically or emotionally.

Briefly speaking about anomie developed by Emile Durkheim, he stated that it was the breakdown of social standards necessary for regulation of behaviour. When a social system is in a state of anomie, common pre conceived values are no longer existent and new values have not developed. In such a society, many members feel despair and lack purpose. For example, if an individual was forced to produce a particular entity but lacked means to do so, he or she would enter into a state of emotional frustration leading them to consider all options including crime. Caroline from the movie is an example of anomie. She, however does not lack any physical resources. She is given everything from money to a good home to a great education. She has good grades, is involved in multiple extra curricular activities and comes across as the model student. However, she lacks her parent's love and attention and feels cut off from society. She is lost. Her achievements to purposeless to her and thus, drugs to her seem like her only escape.

Another theory is the Strain theory, which in criminology and sociology states that social structures in society puts pressure on individuals to commit crime. As mentioned earlier, individuals seek to acquire power. However, those individuals who are not born into it and have no other means to acquire it, particularly members of lower classes end up resorting to crime to acquire it.

As part of the General Strain theory which states that a major motivation for crime is negative treatment by others. For example, revenge. Strain leads to frustration and anger which turns into revenge. An example of this would be Carlos Ayala who finds out that his friend had plans to take over his wife and business once he was imprisoned and has him killed. Not every mistreated person responds with crime but it is a factor.

Society puts pressure on individuals to achieve particular social goals which may lead to crime. An example of this can come from the movie "Simran" where a socially out of place girl coming from a poor Gujarati family background wishes to own her own home in Atlanta where she lives with her family. She works hard but gets rejected for a bank loan and gets addicted gambling when visiting Las Vegas with her cousin. She wins 2000 dollars in a stream of beginner's luck. She found a man attractive but was rejected due to her looks. She spends all the money to look nice in expensive clothes and gets a makeover. The man later pays attention to her.

Already experiencing financial problems, the gambling gives her a new sense of achievement as does the money. However, she ends up losing all her savings and is unable to buy her house. She goes back to try and win her money back and ends up taking a loan from a dangerous loan shark which she also loses. In a haste to be able to pay back the money she robs a number of banks and later with that income of cash makes bigger heists. However, the main reason she ends up in this lurch was because of her desire to live up to societal standards as well as to have enough money to take care of herself and her family. She also receives only discouraging words from her family and is also subjected to her parents' marital problems. All in all, she lacks emotional support and gets sucked into crime.

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Thus, it is society which puts a large amount of pressure on individuals to live up to particular standards and if they are unable to do so or find it difficult, resort to other means.

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