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# How Paranoia is Represented in Goodfellas and Wise Guys

## Goodfellas and Wise Guys

Henry Hill, Tommy DeVito and Jimmy Conway are three men who are products of their environment. The mob fulfilled a central part to each of their personalities. For Tommy, it was a place he could feed his ego and masculinity complex. For Henry, a sense of purpose; a way for him to provide for both his family and his “family.” In the end though, the way they held the mob in such high regard began to deteriorate throughout the plot. Tommy violated the mob’s most important rule when he killed Billy Batts; Henry and Jimmy went behind the mob’s back to deal cocaine. Both Jimmy and Henry display gradually increasing amounts of paranoia throughout the film Goodfellas. In Jimmy, the paranoia existed after the heist; he slowly killed off every partner as a way to protect himself from their potential betrayals or mistakes. At one point Henry even suspects Jimmy of trying to kill him and Karen— two life long friends— because he feared Jimmy would rat him out to the police. However, given both of their professions there’s almost a sort of inevitability that the trio would end up dead or in jail.

Living “unjustly” means that one can never truly relax; you face existential threats from all sides. The feds were always harassing Karen and the rest of the mob’s wives with search warrants when they were looking for bribes. There was always the threat of ambitious subordinates and egotistical superiors that demand respect and tributes. Therefore, one must always be vigilant so as to never slip up. Ironically, Henry laments to Karen that he “isn’t as stupid as some of the other mobsters” and won’t ever get caught. However, throughout the film we see two important things happen to Henry. Firstly, his ego only inflates; he thinks he’s big enough to deal cocaine on the side without the mob knowing and without their protection, which is ultimately what lead to his getting caught. He, Tommy and Jimmy began to carry themselves with this “I’m invincible” mentality now that they’re high up in the mob; they believe that no matter what happens they’re too important for the mob to off them like they’ve did to so many others. That mentality lead them to become careless and ultimately make mistakes; Tommy killed a mob boss and a young kid, Jimmy and Henry felt themselves above the rules of the mob and got caught for it.

The other thing that started to happen for Henry is that those mistakes started to lead to paranoia. You can see this after Tommy killed Billy Batts; Henry is unable to focus on the conversation while Tommy and Jimmy casually eat a late dinner with Tommy’s mother as if there wasn’t a dying man in the trunk of their car. This paranoia is only furthered when Henry starts to use the cocaine he had been dealing. And it’s this behavior of paranoia brought on by

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an inflated ego that ultimately costs Henry his life in the mob. He gets caught, kicked out of the mob, and is forced to rat on his family for protection. The psychological pressure was what caused him to crack, pressure caused by disregarding the “ground rules” of the mob and finally realizing he was in too deep and there was no mob to protect him from his own mistakes.

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