FILM ANALYSIS: “AMERICAN BEAUTY”

1. The title of the movie says a great deal about the obsession with perfection that dominates American social structure. Based on its continual presentation of characters seeking perfection, which theoretical perspective can best be used to explain/understand the choice of this particular title?

   a. Conflict Theory

   b. Functionalism

   c. Symbolic Interactionism

2. Acts of Deviance are depicted throughout the film. The social motivations behind some of the acts of deviance are more easily understood than others. Which theory provides the best insight into Lester’s obsession with the “toys” that make him feel young, and reconnected with life?

   a. Functionalism

   b. Symbolic Interactionism

   c. Conflict Theory

3. The “toys” described in question 2 are examples of what George Herbert Mead described as significant ____________________________.

   a. evidence of consumerism

   b. shared symbols

   c. examples of corporate greed
4. American society is more and more driven by all the processes connected to mass consumption. There is a depiction of the power of this consumer based obsession in the sequence in which Lester and Carolyn fight, and a piece of furniture becomes central to the consumer identities around which Americans build their lives. While the furniture itself is symbolic, which Sociological Theory best explains the social forces behind the emergence of the importance of this expensive symbol?

a. Symbolic Interactionism
b. Conflict Theory
c. Functionalism

5. There are numerous representations of the negative impact of deviance on society. Which of the following is the best representation of people engaged in socially defined deviance that are attempting to have a positive impact on members of the social structure depicted in the film?

a. Ricky’s drug dealing operation?
b. Carolyn’s obsession with money and her willingness to do anything to become a financial success?
c. The relationship of the gay couple?

6. Question 5 implies that perception of deviance and its impact on social structure is _____________ in nature.

a. simple
b. subjective
c. improbable
7. As described in lecture, there are _________________ levels of deviance
   a. five
   b. three
   c. seven

8. Lester blackmails his boss to obtain a favorable severance package. Which sociological term best describes the level of deviance he is engaging in as he commits this act of blackmail?
   a. Primary level of deviance
   b. Secondary level of deviance
   c. Ultimate level of deviance

9. For deviance to reach the secondary level, it must be observed and labeled by others
   a. True
   b. False

10. Due to the subjective nature of labeling processes, it is possible that Lester’s decision to become a marijuana smoker might not be labeled deviant in some societies.
    a. True
    b. False
11. In the film Carolyn has sex with a senior realtor/associate in an effort to advance her career and economic position in the social structure. Considering her intent, and using sociological terminology you could describe this act as being clearly ______________ in nature.

a. symbolic  
b. functional  
c. lewd

12. Ricky Fitts, the next door neighbor who becomes Lester’s drug dealer, has become deviant for a specific purpose which is revealed at the end of the film: Escape from his present social structure. This deviance is ______________ in nature.

a. functional  
b. symbolic  
c. entirely economic

13. There is a powerful exchange between Ricky and Frank Fitts, when Frank, the “macho” Marine, confronts his son about the source of his money:

**Ricky Fitts:** You're right, I suck dick for money.  
**Colonel Frank Fitts:** Boy...  
**Ricky Fitts:** Two thousand dollars, I'm that good.  
**Colonel Frank Fitts:** Get out.  
**Ricky Fitts:** And you should see me fuck. I'm the best piece of ass in three states.  
**Colonel Frank Fitts:** Get out! I don't ever want to see you again.  
**Ricky Fitts:** What a sad old man you are.

Almost every word in the dialogue is sociologically powerful. The words are ______________ representations which reinforce the need to conform to the norms and which also depict how the power of norms dominate both our public lives and even our most private social interactions.

a. functional  
b. symbolic  
c. economic
14. Acts that might be considered deviant if observed by members of the social group are frequently performed in total secrecy to avoid the attachment of _____________ to the deviant.
   a. stigma
   b. embarrassment
   c. publicity

15. According to symbolic interactionists, the act of deviance may not be nearly so great a problem for the social structure as the social response to the act of deviance.
   a. True
   b. False

16. Overt social responses to acts of deviance are known as ________________.
   a. reprisals
   b. pay back
   c. sanctions

17. Avoidance of being labeled as deviant can play a powerful role in life. The film ends with an extreme act of deviance. Using the sociological knowledge you have acquired about social responses to deviance, and the ways in which deviants may respond to perception and stigmatization of their deviance, this act can be viewed as an act aimed at ________________ perception and labeling of deviance.
   a. neutralizing
   b. encouraging
   c. guaranteeing
18. In the United States, murder is a violation of a social _____________.

a. more
b. custom
c. folkway

19. Frank’s murder of Lester is clearly identifiable as an act of social deviance. Is ALL killing of human beings viewed as being socially deviant?

a. Yes
b. No

20. The power of the social response to deviance may, in some cases, be affected by the economic class of the deviant.

a. True
b. False