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An Analysis of American Beauty

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1. Introduction

Movies can often be seen as a method of shaping the viewers perspective on society, morals and culture. It contains the possibility of shaping the viewers actions, and thereby changing society itself. Indeed American films have had a huge part in moulding political, social and cultural sentiments in the States in the past decades. Using film as a form of making socio-political and cultural identity is unique to American socio-cultural heritage. Europe used philosophy, literature and theatres, while the Third World used grass-root activity. Later, the rest of the world has adopted the American way of creating a common feeling and identity through the movie screen. Movies are the currency of culture, and they can also be seen as a mirror of society and culture in which it portrays specific social and / or cultural areas of a society. The movie that I have chosen for this paper is no exception. The Oscar-winning movie *American Beauty* from 1999 is a fascinating depiction of the everyday life of an ordinary American family against the backdrop of average modern American suburbia, and of some of the problems the American society faces today.

2. Problem formulation

Assess which parts of the American society are featured in Sam Mendes' movie *American Beauty*. I will analyse this by discussing the following topics, which to me seem the most important.

3. Review

This bittersweet comedy begins with the self-narration of the main character in a voice-over: "My name is Lester Burnham. This is my neighbourhood. This is my street. This is my life. I'm 42-years old. In less than a year I'll be dead (...) in a way I'm dead already". It soon becomes clear why. The individual members of his dysfunctional, joyless family struggle to find happiness and to connect with others. Lester (Spacey) is a self-proclaimed loser and disillusionized advertising executive, his wife Carolyn (Bening) is an ambitious and superficial realtor. They live in a loveless marriage in a white suburb in Connecticut with their daughter Jane, who thinks her father is an old pathetic horn dog. The turning point, and Lester's impetus for self-liberalization and redeeming himself as a winner, comes during a cheerleader show when he spots Jane's friend; the nymphet Angela. In an