Mean Girls - viewing guide Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_



Part 1: Motivation Theory

Biological Motives: primary motives important to survival; hunger, thirst, sex, reduction of pain, increasing arousal

(attention/energy), aggression

Social Motives: secondary motives that are learned; achievement, affiliation, autonomy (independence), curiosity, play

**A. Instinct/Evolutionary Theory**

According to Darwin’s theory of Natural Selection, individuals who are best adapted to the environment are more likely to survive and reproduce, passing on these favorable traits to future generations. As a result, future generations will show an increase in these adaptive traits. Darwin, James, and Freud each stressed the role of instincts (curiosity, aggression, and sociability, for instance) on motivation. Instincts are complex, inherited patterns of behavior that are characteristic of a species (for instance, migration patterns in birds and salmon). In order for a behavior to be considered an instinct, the behavior must be a) stereotypical and b) performed automatically by all members of a species in response to a specific stimulus, but not as a reflexive behavior (for instance, blinking in the presence of a bright light). Psychologists debate whether humans display instinctive behaviors.

1. Identify a human behavior in the film that might be considered instinctual. *Support your idea by relating the behavior to the criteria above.*

**B. Drive Reduction Theory**

Clark Hull described Drive Reduction theory, noting that human behavior is motivated by the need to reduce drives (ex. hunger, thirst, sex). In this context, a need is described as a motivated state (thirsty) caused by a physiological deficit (dehydration). Accordingly, the need activates a drive, motivating the organism into action (finding water). In general, it is observed that the greater the need, the stronger the drive. Proponents of this theory emphasize its ability to explain primary needs, but opponents stress its weakness for explaining social motives.

2. Identify TWO examples from the film that confirm Hull’s Drive Reduction theory. *Explain how they demonstrate the theory.*

**C. Incentive Theory:**

According to incentive theory, primary motives push is to satisfy biological needs, but we are also pulled by environmental factors (secondary motives). An incentive is a positive or negative environmental stimulus that motivates behavior (ex. an A on a test, social approval, ice cream sundae).

3. Describe an example from the film where a character refuses a biological (survival) need in order to gain an incentive. (i.e. fulfills a secondary motive at the expense of a primary motive)

**D. Arousal Theory:**

Arousal refers to the level of alertness, wakefulness, and activation that is caused by activity in the CNS. The optimal level or arousal varies by person and activity, but according to the Yerkes-Dodson Law, most people perform best at moderate levels of arousal, with performance declining at both the high and low extremes.

4. Identify an example of diminished performance (in the film) as a result of a character’s high or low arousal. Be sure to identify the character and fully explain how their level of arousal impacted their performance.

Part II: Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

Humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow categorized human needs and arranged them in order of priority (see hierarchy of needs, Outline page 2). Maslow believed that in order to achieve higher level needs (esteem or belonging) you must first meet lower-level needs (hunger, shelter, etc), with very few people reaching the ultimate level, self-actualization. However, humans often demonstrate a willingness to forgo lower-level needs (hunger strikes, for instance) and Maslow’s theory is not well supported by scientific evidence.

5. Choose a main character from the film and analyze their position on Maslow’s hierarchy. Which needs are they primarily motivated by? Provide specific examples to support your conclusion.

Part III: Physiological Motives - Hunger

Hunger is determined by biological, cultural, and social factors. Biological factors include stomach contractions and low blood sugar. Social and cultural factors include typical meal times, the presence of others who are eating, the availability of a desired food, and other food related cues. Accordingly, food habits are determined by inborn preferences (foods that are sweet, salty, or fatty) and through observation and classical conditioning (the pairing of a specific food with positive or negative social interactions). In the United States, models and actors are regarded as physical ideals and some people who are highly motivated to achieve these ideals develop eating disorders, like anorexia or bulimia.

6. Describe a social factor that influences the eating habits of one of the characters in the film. Be sure to identify the character.

Part IV: Social Motivations

**A. Groupthink**

Groupthink is the mode of thinking that happens when the desire for harmony in a decision-making group overrides a realistic appraisal of alternatives. Group members try to minimize conflict and reach a consensus decision without critical evaluation of alternative ideas or viewpoints.

7. Give two examples of the Plastics illustrating the behavior of groupthink.

a.

b.



**B. Conformity**

Conformity is the act of matching attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors to group norms.

8. What does Cady to conform to the norms of the plastics- list four things.

a.

b.

c.

d.

**C. Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation**

Intrinsic motivation refers to the desire to perform a task for its own sake, rather than an external award. Activities performed for their enjoyment, to gain skills, for the desire to gain knowledge, or for sheer curiosity relate to intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation refers to a desire to perform a task for external reward, including money or other material goods, applause, or attention.

9. Identify one behavior in the film that is intrinsically motivated and one behavior in the film that is extrinsically motivated. ***Be sure to support your answer with knowledge from the class.***

Intrinsically motivated:

Extrinsically motivated:

**D. In-group/Out-group/In-group bias**

One’s in-group refers to the group of people that one identifies with and feels a part of. Out-groups are any groups that are not part of one’s in-group. An in-group bias evolves when one considers his or her group superior to all others, and may try to belittle or degrade members of the out-group.

10. Identify two behaviors in the film that you feel clearly demonstrates the existence of an in-group bias. Each example must address a *different in-group showing bias toward a different out-group*. (For example: don’t pick two examples of the Plastics demonstrating in-group bias against another group.)

a.

b.

**E. Stereotyping**

Stereotypes are standardized and simplified conceptions of people based on some prior assumptions.

11. List four examples of stereotyping that occur in the movie. Describe the incidence of stereotyping, and why it qualifies as stereotyping.

a.

b.

c.

d.

Part V: Conflict Situations

Conflict arises when opposing motives block us from attaining a goal, causing frustration and stress. *Approach-approach* conflicts result when you are forced to choose between two attractive options (ex. a vacation to Hawaii or a vacation to Europe). *Avoidance-avoidance* conflicts are situations involving two negative options (ex. mow the lawn or clean the house). *Approach-avoidance* conflicts are situations in which one option has both positive and negative consequences (ex. sneak out and have fun, but get in trouble). Finally, *double approach-avoidance* conflicts result when you have to choose from many options that involve both positive and negative consequences (ex. spend your summer working and save up to get a car, go on a mission trip but don’t make money and don’t get a car).

10. Identify and describe an example of each of the FOUR conflict situations above from the film.

Approach – approach:

Avoidance – avoidance:

Approach – avoidance:

Double Approach – avoidance:

Part VI: Personality Disorders

Personality Disorders are long-lasting,chronic patterns of interactions, not discreet episodes. They are characterized by inflexible and enduring behavior patterns that impair social functioning. (See your chart on personality disorders for a refresher about each.)

11. Regina George displays several narcissistic (egotistical, self-absorbed) characteristics throughout the movie. Name three scenes where this is evident and explain what makes it narcissistic.

a.

b.

c.

12. Choose one other character in the film, identify a pattern of behavior that may suggest a personality disorder. Identify the specific personality disorder, list actions that make you think that this person has the personality disorder and explain your rationale.

Character:

Disorder:

Actions:

Part VII: Personal connections

13. Is this movie an accurate representation of social lives in American high schools? Explain your answer.