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### Rebellion and Constraint: Sociological Analysis of Lux Lisbon

From start to finish, Sophia Coppola's "The Virgin Suicides" features numerous complex characters and topics that are still discussed almost twenty-five years after the film's release in 2000. However, what truly draws audiences into this nostalgically haunting story is the character of Lux Lisbon. Originally a novel, "The Virgin Suicides" shares the story of a suburban family in 1970s Michigan. Within the family are five daughters, who are displayed as dreamy and secluded, that later succumb to their death which plague the minds of the local neighborhood boys. Lux, the second to youngest daughter, is shown as the most rebellious and confidence-driven character in Coppola's film. Correspondingly, her actions are one of the main factors that drive the plot forward. It is those actions and how she code-switches that make Lux so enticing in the meaning of the film. Arguably, she is the daughter that holds the most significance.

Sociological analysis hones greatly upon the aspect of displaying something, whether it be physical or intangible, publicly. "The Virgin Suicides" does this between the characters in the film as well as between the film and the audience. There is only so much of a performance that one is meant to understand, especially in this case where this is meant to be a story pertaining to the mystery within adolescence. Hence no one ever discovers why the Lisbon parents were so restrictive and why the girls ultimately end up committing suicide. The character of Lux Lisbon can be analyzed as a product of her home life, and restricted social life, which leads to her rebellious behavior and tragic death.

The largest aspect of Lux, when applied to sociological analysis, is dramaturgy. By and large with how she is not stable, she is the most difficult to predict because she is constantly re-staging herself. Throughout the movie, she pushes for freedom and self-expression in her actions and fashion choices. It appears almost performative since she is restrained from any stereotypical teenage pleasure. However, the importance of her identity comes from how the story of the Lisbon girls is told through an outsider's perspective, more specifically the neighborhood boys' desire. The audience, and the movie's team, only are exposed to Lux's desired impression of herself. Her behavior is defamatory as seen in her sexual escapades and experimenting with drugs.

It is easy to assume that her identity is formed through the inaccessible and dreamy assumptions her peers have made about her as well as her controlling parents. Yet, what appears to have the greatest effect is her social isolation. Symbolic interactionism plays an important role in how all the Lisbon girls display individuality to some degree, it just happens to be that Lux shows it more than the others. She uses the meaning and value her peers have placed on her, alongside her want for independence, to act out. It is understood, through her seeming dullness during sex and carelessness with smoking, that she has no prospects in how she wants to live her life. Rather, she is acting simply to act and to feel separate from the standards her overbearing mother places on her. Lux's parents prohibit her from several activities, but it ultimately ends up being Lux who distances herself from the rest of the world.

However, that is only the view that the audience has of Lux, we are only presented with so much context and insight into the Lisbon girls' lives. The only moment in the film where anyone understands Lux personally is when Cecilia's diary is shared, Cecilia being the first daughter to kill herself at the beginning of the film. While the entry is recited in the film, the

information is only about them spending time in the grass and enjoying each other's company. That gives more fuel to the idea of the mysteries of being a teenager and how all the meaning placed on the young Lisbon is composed of outsider perspectives.

The Lisbon girls' parents create this restrictive and emotionally hostile environment where the girls are practically forced to give up any form of self-expression. One of the more notable scenes in the film is when Mrs. Lisbon forces Lux to burn all of her rock vinyls in the fireplace. The pain and frustration Lux goes through is blatant in her facial expressions and how she practically must drag herself from the staircase to the fireplace. Something so simple as music becomes forbidden as well as the prospect of leaving the house. It is several of these instances that create a barrier between the Lisbon girls and society.

Especially with a story that makes the 1970s such a key feature of the setting, music and entertainment are one of the few ways to not only understand what the culture is like but also to be a part of that culture. Lux being forced to stop communicating with her peers was one thing that she was able to work around, yet not having any link to what the pop culture is was something that created a greater obstacle. That is why Lux becomes so interesting to analyze. Coppola never made it clear which event in Lux's life made her shut out her free spirit and rebellion.

What seems most probable is having all interactions with peers, and even neighbors, stop begins to result in Lux stopping her risky behaviors. This starts to break up the pattern that the audience sees at the start along with the typical optimistic appearance of Lux. Even to the neighborhood boys who watch the girls from across the street, that performative rebellion is gone, and it becomes questionable as to why. Typically, when people think of teenagers, another rule put in place is something new to defy. Thus, why Lux upping her actions would be more

likely when her parents came down harder on the girls, however, she just sat inside with her sisters all day long.

Using sociological analysis with Lux, by the end of the movie the setting has become restricted, the stage is practically nonexistent, the team has become smaller, and Lux's part has none of her personality. Lux went from someone with so much energy and drive to being empty. What encourages the mystery of the Lisbon girls even more is when they all commit suicide. It appears that they have lost everything except for the support of the neighborhood boys. Lux was the prime communicator with them, being the one to send postcards and play music through the telephone. Even when the boys plan to save the girls from the prison-like home, Lux is the one to greet the boys at the house.

Throughout all of these interactions, she almost holds that dreamy tone that her peers would gossip about. Which makes it even more confusing why she ends up committing suicide. Lux's desires are never stated or shown in the film, everyone is left to assume what her aspirations were. By her numerous encounters with men, it could be thought that she wanted to have people who cared about her in a sense that allowed her to act on her own behalf. However, at the end of the film, that's what she ends up getting from the neighborhood boys.

While it is clear that the nuance of "The Virgin Suicides" is meant to encourage the idea of the mysteries of youth, the character of Lux Lisbon stands alone as her own mystery. Being the character that is exposed to the audience the most, Lux ends up revealing the same amount of information as her sisters; practically nothing. Through social isolation caused by the girls' parents, all Lisbon girls end up dying by the end of the film. Even in the epilogue, the audience never learns what what going on in the girls' minds and why they created a lasting impact on the community.