

The Everyday Aesthetic of Lizzo's album "Cuz I Love You"

Lizzo's nude album cover signifies a deviation from society's ideals and the formation of a new aesthetic. Released April 19, 2019, this Best Urban Contemporary Album Grammy recipient featured tracks such as *Like A Girl*, *Exactly How I Feel*, *Better in Color*, and *Lingerie* that promotes body positivity and acceptance of all races, sexualities, and genders. The lyrics of the album address the social hegemony of black plus women and confidently speak to the power her body and the bodies of her fans possess. What makes this image so striking is how unbothered and confident Lizzo is posing for this photo, knowing that her body is not "conventional" to society's standards. Appealing to the five senses and possessing the five key elements of an everyday aesthetic was the bare minimum that Lizzo planned to achieve with this album. Being a plus-size black woman, historically and socially, the naked body of someone like Lizzo's was shamed and scrutinized.

As a woman, you are told to cover up. As a black woman, you are told white is the standard. As a plus-sized woman, you are told that being skinny or "healthy" is correct. Adhering to the everyday aesthetic, at least in America, would have been to pose a white, thin woman on the cover. What Lizzo did instead was reconstruct a narrative to include bodies outside of the very small sector of the population seen as "beautiful." This image will forever be iconic not only because it challenged unhealthy notions of beauty, but also because the music she created in this album so lovingly supported these ideals. The lyrics and visuals of this album create an experience that appeals to all five senses.

The vision of a plus-size black woman being represented in a way that doesn't distract from anything other than her nude body is something that hasn't really been done before. The dark and rich tones of the photo represent the redirection of beauty in the fashion industry.

Berger noted in his work that "The social presence of a woman is different in kind from that of a man. A man's presence is dependent upon the promise of power which he embodies,"(Berger, 45). The album cover and her music demand a reallocation of power to bodies of all types. Her lyrics scream a message of body positivity and self-worth. Her nude body commands attention and the right to be heard and validated. The album tastes like victory for bodies previously deemed not good enough.

Although this album defied current beauty standards to be more inclusive, the album still has elements of the aesthetic of everyday life. Kant ties "beauty" with the aesthetic pleasure we get from an appreciation of good design and pleasing form. The composition of this album cover displays thoughtful design and visually pleasing form. It's obvious here that the different shades of black and brown in this image represent the cultural significance of Lizzo's body. As Berger described, the naked female body can be seen as a display to derive pleasure from (Berger, 48). I believe the same can be said about this photo, but the pleasure isn't intended for men. Lizzo has said countless times that the use of her body is to make her viewers proud of their own bodies instead of hers. She wants her fans to find pleasure in their own body and not just glorify hers. I feel this image continues that message. The nude style selected helps to really add a shock value

to the statements that Lizzo stands for. Society has trained us to turn our faces away from and shy away from drawing attention to bodies like Lizzo's.

Lizzo, being a public figure, accepting herself sets a new precedent for what is tasteful in society. Taste in society has changed to allow bodies of all different shapes and sizes to be seen as legitimate. Leddy describes taste as “culturally emergent and constantly changing. Related to the quality of the tasteful are such qualities as 'artistic,' 'creative,' 'poetic,' 'imaginative,' and 'expressive.'” Representation is at an all-time high right now and Lizzo's body represents many identities that haven't been previously celebrated. Society still puts pressure on women to “cover up” despite women breaking those boundaries every day. Berger comments that "Women are there to feed an appetite, not to have any of their own." and Lizzo disputes this by stating just how hungry she is. She preaches values of self-love and confidence and from that, she preaches the value of women's sexuality and autonomy.

In an interview with *Variety*, Lizzo said “Big black girls are beautiful, we deserve to be heard and seen. That's what the fuck I'm doing.” The aesthetic of what it means to be a black woman has been falsified and exploited for centuries. Subjected to stereotypes of the Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire, black women are demeaned and dehumanized to perpetuate racist and sexist ideologies. Marquita M. Gammage in her book *Challenging Misrepresentations of Black Womanhood: Media, Literature and Theory*, describe how “the need for black women to define themselves and their realities has resulted in the birth of several social and theoretical movements designed to address the pressing issues

affecting Black women and their communities,”(Gammage, 2). Although Lizzo’s work has promoted the new aesthetic of accepting black and plus-size bodies as legitimate and powerful, the aesthetic of the everyday life of a black plus-size woman has always existed. I believe this distinction and recognition of Lizzo’s promotion, but not the creation of the aesthetic of everyday life as a black plus-size woman is important.

The album cover of Lizzo’s nude body is extremely powerful, but so is her voice. Bull says that "Listening frees up the eyes to observe and imagine,” and the lyrics of “Cuz I Love You” provide the audience an experience of just that (Bull, 40). Her track, *Better in Color* features lyrics that say “Black, white, ebony all sound good to me, Two tone recipe, got good chemistry,” that promote racial equality. In her song *Like a Girl*, she sings Woke up feelin' like I just might run for president, Even if there ain't no precedent, switchin' up the messaging, I'm about to add a little estrogen, Buy my whip by myself, pay my rent by myself,” that speaks to the capability of women and defying the perceived notion that a woman needs a man. Her single *Soulmate* promotes self-love and self-fulfillment through the lyrics “Cause I'm my own soulmate, I know how to love me, I know that I'm always gonna hold me down, Yeah, I'm my own soulmate, No, I'm never lonely, I know I'm a queen but I don't need no crown, Look up in the mirror like damn she the one.” Each song continues the message that her song titles, album cover, and personal lifestyle promotes. There is an authenticity to this album and Lizzo that earn her credibility.

Overall, this album in its entirety works to establish a new everyday aesthetic of inclusion and representation of previously shamed and ridiculed bodies. *Rolling Stone* described Lizzo's work as "free and uninhibited" and the charts will testify to the importance and popularity of these qualities. Black female artists who create music promoting values of sexual expression, body positivity, and cultural pride are at an all-time high. Lizzo has become an icon and role model for young women who are growing up in a world more vocal about the aesthetic of self-worth and acceptance of all body types.

Outside Work Cited:

- Spanos, Brittany. "How Lizzo Conquered Her Fears and Found Her Best Self."

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- Gammage, Marquita M, & Alameen-Shavers, Antwanisha. (2019). Challenging Misrepresentations of Black Womanhood (Vol. 1, Anthem Africana studies). London: Anthem Press.
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