

Good As Hell

By Lizzo

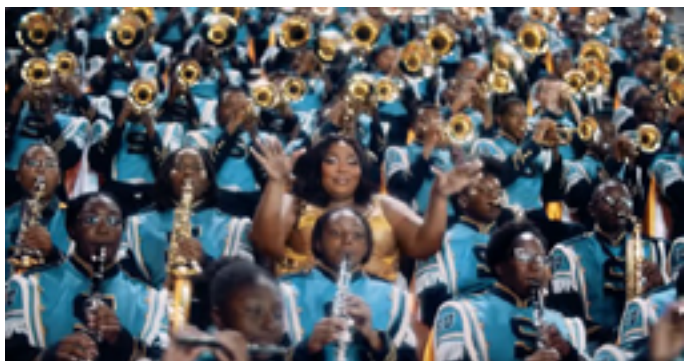


Image screenshot from Lizzo – Good As Hell (Official Music Video) / Youtube.com



Image screenshot from Lizzo – Good As Hell (Official Music Video) / Youtube.com

GCSE Component 2: Understanding media forms and products

Focus areas:

- **Media language**
- **Representation**
- **Media industries**
- **Audiences**
- **Media contexts**

The Product

- *Good as Hell* was released in 2016 on Lizzo's *Coconut Oil* EP.

- The first video produced to promote the song was released in May 2016 and shows Lizzo and a group of women having fun whilst getting their nails and hair done. This video ties into the film *Barbershop: The Next Cut*, which features the song on its soundtrack.
- The set product video premiered on YouTube on 9th December 2019 and was the second 'official' music video for the track.
- The video was directed by Alan Ferguson and is set in Southern University in Baton Rouge, a city in Louisiana.
- Lizzo's performances in the video reflect her background of playing the piccolo and flute in a marching band.
- In 2020, the video was nominated for 'Best Editing' in the MTV Music Awards and 'Video of the Year' in the Soul Train Music Awards. The song was nominated for 'Top R&B Song' at the 2020 Billboard Music Awards.

PART 1: STARTING POINTS – Media Language

Consider how the combination of elements of media language influences meaning.

- The **setting** for the video is Southern University and Lizzo performs in various locations including the practice room, the field and the custom 'Lizzo' school bus.
- The **colour palette** for *Good as Hell* becomes richer as the narrative progresses from the students practising in regulation navy tracksuit tops to them performing in the bright blue and gold costumes at the homecoming football game. Lizzo's gold costume reflects her star persona, but gold is also used on the costumes

for the dancers and marching band, connoting glamour and success.

- The **iconography** is associated with music rather than sport, with the rows of students playing brass instruments adding to the triumphant, celebratory mood of the video.
- The **costumes** largely reflect the marching band context of the video and its setting in a university. Lizzo wears a sports kit when in the role of conductor then appears in her own version of the marching band uniform on the bus. Later, she wears a dance costume in a scene with the ‘Dancing Dolls’. These costumes represent her as part of the group of students, connoting her support for them and signifying unity and teamwork.

Consider the codes and conventions of media language and how elements of media language influence meaning.

- Following music video conventions, *Good as Hell* is largely **performance**-based, featuring the artist singing and dancing and the large cast of university students performing in the marching band and dance groups.
- It does however, blend performance with an element of **narrative**, by following three female students who are each faced with personal problems or conflicts that they have to overcome before they can feel ‘Good as Hell’. The first student, Nicole, gets told off in chemistry class because she is more focused on playing music, the second has had a romantic break-up and the third feels isolated from the camaraderie amongst the percussion section of the band.
- All of these students could be seen as **Proppian heroes**, who receive help from other female students (and Lizzo) on their journey towards the confidence and self-love promoted in the lyrics.
- The **direct address** from Lizzo builds intimacy with the female audience who may relate to the lyrics and video through personal identity.
- **Technical codes** also create meaning in the video. The theme of teamwork is represented throughout the video through frequent wide shots of students playing together in the hall and marching in formation on the football pitch.
- **Diegetic sound** is used during the last shot of the video, an ‘out-take’ style panning shot capturing the sound of the students cheering and dancing after band practice. This follows the on-screen thank you and adds a sense of inclusion and realism.

PART 2: STARTING POINTS – Representation

Consider the choices made around representing particular social groups.

Representations of gender:

- Women are represented as emotionally supportive of each other, a stereotypical but positive representation of women and girls. A montage of close-up shots near the end shows each of the female ‘characters’ smiling, reflecting the feel-good lyrics and connoting the happiness they feel after receiving the support of their friends and gaining confidence from performing in the band.
- It could be argued, from a feminist perspective, that the costumes of the ‘Dancing Dolls’ dance group and Lizzo’s references to hair and nails in the lyrics are upholding beauty ideals for females. However, a post-feminist perspective would argue that these references construct female empowerment through body confidence, since they are tools for feeling ‘Good as Hell’, not for appealing to the male gaze.
- Men are represented negatively through some individual ‘characters’ such as the young male depicted near the start on the mobile phone screen then later in the crowd at the football game. He fulfils the role of the villain whom we assume has cheated on or neglected his girlfriend. The male teacher shaking his head in despair at the female saxophonist who is making mistakes is another negative representation. It is her female teammate who eventually provides her with the support she needs.

- However, the group shots of men and women together in the band practice and marching band represent harmony through a shared goal and interest.

Representations of ethnicity and race:

- Lizzo is represented as a successful Black woman who is confident and proud of her body. She acts as a role model for a female audience who may have experienced body shaming or lack of confidence with body image. Young women may gain a sense of personal identity from watching the video.
- The most empowering representation is perhaps that of young Black Americans who are represented positively as educated, talented and supportive of each other. The entirely Black cast and setting in a historically Black college and university (HBCU) send a message to the audience of Black empowerment, confidence and success. The students who feel they are failing are seen to be lifted up and helped by others, representing the university community as positive and supportive.

Part 3: STARTING POINTS – Audiences

Consider the role of media technologies in reaching and identifying audiences, and in audience consumption and usage.

- Lizzo's audience is largely female, and she is most popular with the 18–24-year-old demographic. This has been achieved through Lizzo's Instagram and TikTok posts which have been a huge factor in increasing her popularity.
- Many of Lizzo's songs have been used in film soundtracks and adverts which also target the young female audience. For example, her song *Truth Hurts* was used in the Netflix film, *Someone Great*. The film is a rom-com so attracted young females to watch it, aligning with Lizzo's demographic.
- Lizzo's music is promoted to audiences through her website (www.lizzomusic.com) and its convergence with her social media accounts. In 2022, her fourth album *Special* was featured cross-platform on her website, YouTube channel and Twitter account.

Consider the ways in which people's media practices are connected to their identity, including their sense of actual and desired self.

- Lizzo's Instagram and TikTok accounts take a more personal approach to connect with her fans. Lizzo has expressed her views through social media on issues such as body shaming, racism, LGBTQ+ Pride and the 2020 US election.
- Lizzo's following on TikTok is huge at 25.3 million, with 1 billion likes. She used this platform to represent herself and connect with fans during the 2020 lockdown and has posted very personal videos showing her vulnerability and relatability.
- Lizzo dedicated the Emmy she won in September 2022 to 'the big grrrls', a reference to both the girls featured in her Amazon reality television series and audiences who identify with Lizzo's songs and persona.
- According to the Uses and Gratifications Theory, the video could offer escapism, entertainment and personal identification with the characters in the narrative.

Audience responses:

- According to the Reception Theory (Stuart Hall), the preferred reading of the video would be for the female audience to embrace the positive message in the song and feel empowered by the song and the feel-good nature of the video.
- A more oppositional viewpoint might come from a male audience who may feel that the negative representations of some of the male characters are misrepresenting them as a social group.

PART 4: STARTING POINTS – Media industries

- *Good as Hell* was written by Lizzo and Ricky Reed and was released in 2016 by Atlantic Records. It was produced by Ricky Reed's record company, Nice Life Recording Company, as the lead single from the *Coconut Oil* EP. Lizzo's 2017 'Good as Hell Tour' was named after the song.

- *Good as Hell* was re-released in 2019 and it became a ‘sleeper hit’ like her first release, *Truth Hurts*. A ‘sleeper hit’ refers to a song that has low or average initial sales but goes on to become a major hit.
- The song entered the Billboard Hot 100 after Lizzo performed it at the 2019 MTV Music Awards and reached number 3 in the US and the top 10 in several other countries including the UK.
- The single has received a 4x platinum certification by the Recording Industry Association of America.
- The re-release of *Good as Hell* in 2019 also coincided with the release of Lizzo’s third studio album, *Cuz I Love You*, which saw the artist achieving mainstream success.

Consider the impact of the increasingly convergent nature of media industries across different platforms.

- Lizzo’s star persona has been constructed cross-platform through live performances at the 2019 MTV Awards and BBC’s Live Lounge as well as frequent appearances on TV shows such as ‘Good Morning America’ and magazine covers such as Vogue and Essence.
- Lizzo has also become successful in television, winning an Emmy in September 2022 for her *Lizzo’s Watch out for the Big Grrrls* Amazon reality television series about her search for backup dancers.
- In 2022, Lizzo launched her shapewear brand, Yitty, which sells sizes XS to 6X and which she promotes through her social media accounts, with her website also selling official Lizzo merchandise.

and historical context has influenced the representation of people, places and themes in the video, especially the representation of ethnicity.

- A ‘homecoming’ event in the US is a special football game where ex-pupils return to the university campus to watch the game and show a sense of school pride. This cultural context has influenced the video, although Lizzo has chosen to focus not on the football game or male footballers but on the marching band and the female dance group who perform at the game.
- Lizzo was in a marching band herself, and plays flute and piccolo, so the artist’s cultural background and the tradition of marching bands in HBCUs has influenced the choice of settings, costumes and performances in the video.
- ‘Human Jukebox’ are Southern University’s marching band and the ‘Fabulous Dancing Dolls’ are Southern University’s dance group. They both feature in the video, so the video has been influenced by cultural practices in US universities.
- Lizzo’s lyrics have also been influenced by the rise of female empowerment in society and the increasing focus on female body image and body shaming in the age of online media.

Suggested reading/viewing

[Lizzo’s “Good as Hell” Music Video Is an Ode to Her Marching Band Roots | Teen Vogue](#)

[Lizzo Stars In British Vogue | British Vogue](#)

Lizzo on body image. Video compilation from *Washington Post*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1eOcmQiFACI>

PART 5: Starting points – Media contexts

Social and historical context:

- Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, is the flagship university of the only historically Black college and university (HBCU) system in the US, founded in 1880. This social