

# Justin Bieber

## Intentions (2020)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3AyMjyHu1bA>  
(short version)

### Subject content focus areas:

- **Media language**
- **Representation**
- **Contexts**
- **Media industries**
- **Audiences**

### Background context

- *Intentions* was released in February 2020 as the second single from Justin Bieber's fifth album, *Changes*.
- The music video premiered on Bieber's YouTube channel on the same day as the song and features guest vocals from American rapper Quavo.
- The video was directed by Michael D Ratner, who founded OBB Media, a company with divisions in film, television and online promotions.
- The video was shot on location at Alexandria House and at one of the libraries at California State University.
- Alexandria House is a non-profit organisation in Los Angeles that provides shelter and support for vulnerable women and children.
- The longer version of the video includes more documentary footage from Alexandria House and uses voiceovers taken from interviews with the three women featured. The founder of the shelter also talks about her intentions: 'to speak truth to power, to speak about the injustices and the need for equity'.
- Bieber set up an 'Intentions Fund' to help the women and children of Alexandria House, donating \$200,000.

### Part 1: Media language

- The video is largely concept based, following the narratives of three women from Alexandria House in LA who all have particular intentions to help others. Bieber and Quavo's visit to the shelter introduces the performance aspect of the video, but only parts of the song are performed by the artists, with most of it being used as a soundtrack to the women's stories. This focus on the people in the shelter highlights the purpose of the video – to raise awareness and funds for a charitable organisation.
- Dance is an important aspect of the video and is featured in many of the shots and settings. The dance scenes are primarily used to convey the happiness shared by the community at the shelter and the joy that Bieber and Quavo's visit brings, rather than showcase the music artists, who are seen dancing with the community. This more spontaneous dance, including a child dancing on a table and Bhari dancing in the street with her friends, reflects the documentary style of the video and challenges choreographed dancing, which is a typical convention in music videos.
- Gesture codes act as important signifiers in the video with hugs, smiles, high fives and hands on shoulders all chosen to signify the importance of emotional support. Hugs between women and children and between friends and family in the shelter are used to convey love and care and construct the strong sense of community in Alexandria House. Shots of Bieber and Quavo hugging the main characters also represent the artists positively, showing them as caring

and emotionally demonstrative. High fives are used by each of the three main ‘characters’ at particular moments; this motif conveys their confidence and achievements.

- The three main ‘characters’ in the video – Bahri, Marcy and Angela – are quickly established through choices of settings, gesture and props. The shot of Bahri studying with *An Introduction to Criminal Justice* book in the foreground clearly signifies her ‘intention’ to study and help others. Meanwhile, Bahri and Marcy are both shown in the library setting, which is used to highlight the importance of access to education as a means to overcome challenging life circumstances.
- Bahri’s narrative strand is developed through the shots of her waiting for the bus and studying on the long journey home at night, conveying the struggles and challenges she faces to succeed and achieve her goal.
- Bieber and Quavo act as ‘helpers’ to the three heroes of the narrative (Propp), gifting Bahri a car, Marcy and her friends backpacks of school supplies and Angela studio air-time, each chosen to help them on their journey towards fulfilling their ‘intentions’ to help others. The moments when the artists arrive on the scene to help each of them include tears and hugs to demand an emotional audience response and show that Bieber and Quavo also have good ‘intentions’.
- The graffiti-style font for the song title and the characters’ names has connotations to the rap or hip-hop genre and would be a recognisable signifier for fans of this genre; it also reinforces the urban setting for the video.
- The posed ‘family’ group shot at the end of the video, combined with the ‘Thank You’ message on screen, reminds the audience of the purpose of the video and represents the ethnically diverse community the charity is supporting in a positive way. The music artists are represented as part of this community, with Quavo hugging a child and Bieber in the centre of the group.
- place of safety, warmth and community through the multiple shots of women and children from different ethnic groups hugging, dancing and eating together. The *mise-en-scène* reinforces this with the selection of shots showing the ‘welcome’ banner and children’s art work on the walls.
- At the start of the video, the scenes in which Marcy is doing her hair and make-up looking in the mirror arguably reinforce stereotypes of young women being concerned with physical appearance. However, perhaps in this context, the scenes represent the insecurities and lack of confidence many young women feel when ‘representing’ themselves to the world.
- The wide shot of Bahri in the centre of a line of girls from the shelter represents women as stronger through their support of each other and as a diverse community. Women are not objectified or glamourised as is still conventional in music videos. Instead, the focus is on their empowerment through their educational / creative / artistic achievements. On top of this, they are represented as active rather than passive. This is shown through the activities they are shown engaging in such as studying, travelling independently and connecting with others.
- Many issues are represented in the video, especially education and the role it plays in people’s empowerment. The theme of community is key in the video’s message, constructed through multiple shots of Bahri, Marcy and Angela helping and educating others. Homelessness is also represented through the shots of Angela supporting homeless people on the streets of LA.
- The shelter featured is portrayed as a home to women and children, representing them as victims in need, who have been in crisis and need safety. This is arguably reinforcing stereotypes, but in the context of *Intentions*, the representation of this social group is empowering as they are on a journey towards stability and independence through group support.
- The shots of Bieber performing in direct mode

## Part 2: Representation

- Alexandria House is represented positively as a
- The shots of Bieber performing in direct mode

of address in his red hoodie in the centre of the frame and Quavo rapping in the centre of the group outside represent them as ‘stars’, whose presence and acts of kindness at the shelter cause huge excitement. The two artists also hug near the end of the video, further representing them as supportive and caring.

- Bieber’s lyrics ‘Don’t need a sponsor, nope, you the brand now’ and generous acts are arguably undermined by him wearing one of his own ‘Drew House’ brand hoodies in the dancing scene at the end of the video, in an act of self-promotion.

### Media contexts – social and cultural

- Bieber has spoken about the background of the video, explaining that he wanted to ‘shine a light on issues that people are often overlooking’ (MTV interview).
- Through its support of Alexandria House, the video reflects the social contexts of campaigning for racial and gender equality. Justin Bieber has used his social media accounts, especially Instagram, to post images in support of #BlackLivesMatter and International Women’s Day.
- Some audiences have drawn comparisons between *Intentions* and Drake’s *God’s Plan*, a video in which the Canadian rapper donates money to fans, and David Dobrik’s (YouTuber and friend of Bieber) car give-away videos on YouTube, reflecting cultural influences on the video.
- Bieber and Quavo performed an acoustic version of the song at an event organised by Global Citizen on 27<sup>th</sup> June, 2020, which was launched in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. ‘Global Goal: Unite for our Future’ was a virtual event hosted by Dwayne Johnson during which musicians performed to spread awareness of social justice and human rights, in particular the impact of COVID-19 on marginalised communities. It raised \$6.9 billion from 41 countries towards a covid vaccine.

### Part 3: Media industries

- Born in Canada, Bieber was discovered on

YouTube after his mother posted home videos of him, and after a chance meeting with Usher, Bieber was signed to Island Def Jam in 2008 at the age of 14.

- Bieber’s big mainstream break was his hit single *Baby* in 2010, which has become one of the most viewed videos on YouTube.
- By 2013, Bieber had achieved five number one albums on the Billboard 200 chart – the youngest artist to ever do so at the age of 19.
- The director of the video, Michael D Ratner, also directed the *Justin Bieber: Seasons* docuseries for YouTube, which broke the record for YouTube Originals as most viewed premiere ever, with 32 million views in its first week.
- The title of the song was revealed in an episode of the *Justin Bieber: Seasons* docuseries where *Intentions* was written on a note on a board listing potential tracks from *Changes*. This reflects the role digital convergence plays in contemporary music promotion.
- Bieber used social media to promote the song’s release, posting a tweet stating ‘Big announcement tomorrow’ on the 5<sup>th</sup> February, 2020, followed by a short teaser trailer from the video on the 6<sup>th</sup>, the day before its release.
- The video was promoted on MTV’s YouTube channel, which featured an interview with Bieber and Quavo where they discussed the meaning of the song.
- The song was Quavo’s third top ten single in the US, all of which have been from collaborations with Bieber.
- The Korean entertainment conglomerate Hybe, whose record label signed BTS, did a merger deal in 2021 with the US company Ithaca, who manage Justin Bieber, Ariana Grande and Demi Lovato.

### Part 4: Audiences

- Bieber has a huge following on YouTube with 64.1M subscribers (July 2021), making him the all-time most subscribed artist on YouTube music.

- Bieber appeals to a mass global audience of popular music fans. Earlier in his career, Bieber's music targeted the teenage girl demographic, but his primary audience is now older (18-30), as his fans have grown up with him.
- Bieber has also become a fashion influencer for men through his outfits and his own 'Drew House' brand of clothing.
- Bieber's fans are known as 'Beliebers', which was named as one of the best new words of 2010 and #Belieber is frequently used by fans on Twitter.
- Bieber is well-known for his collaborations with rap artists including Chance the Rapper, DJ Khaled and Quavo, all of which have widened his audience appeal to fans of the hip-hop genre.
- There was a positive critical response to the song and video. *Intentions* was named the 32<sup>nd</sup> best song of 2020 by Billboard and was nominated for 'Best Pop Video' at the 2020 MTV Music Awards.
- Another positive response to the video was the increase in donations to the women's shelter featured in the video. It helped to raise over \$10,000 for Alexandria House in the first three days after its release.
- In terms of uses and gratifications theory, audiences are likely to use the video for personal identity and catharsis due to its emotive nature. It could also fulfil the audience's need for entertainment through the feel-good scenes of dance and celebration. It provides information and education about social issues including homelessness and encourages social interaction through fans' comments and sharing on social media.
- The message at end of the video is a direct appeal to audiences to donate to the 'Intentions Fund' set up by Bieber.

## Useful links

### Long version of video

[Justin Bieber – Intentions ft. Quavo \(Official Video\) – YouTube](#)

### MTV interview

[Justin Bieber: First Interview After Dropping Intentions \[ Ft. Quavo \] | Talk About Intentions – YouTube](#)

### Article on Hybe/Ithaca merger from *The Guardian*

[BTS' Korean record label buys Justin Bieber management company | Music industry | The Guardian](#)