

Audible Originals presents:

Say You're Sorry

Hosted by Lux Alptraum

Episode 6: To All the Fans I've Let Down

[intro music; electronic, thoughtful crescendo with guitar notes]

Lux Alptraum:

It sometimes feels like apologies have their own style guide; a set of conventions everyone knows they're supposed to follow when communicating regret. On Twitter, apologies are most often delivered as a screenshot of an Apple Notes message. On Instagram, they're white text on a black background.

Siona Peterous:

And if there's one place that's known for its apology formula, it's YouTube.

[clip from YouTube]

Mike Rugnetta:

Those videos are... just in prep for this, I watched probably like 40 - on 2x speed - and most of them were in the top 15 viewed of each person's library.

Lux Alptraum:

This is Mike Rugnetta, a writer, host, and producer who used to make a YouTube show called *Idea Channel*.

Franchesca Ramsey:

When it comes to YouTube, and knowing the person edited this, and knowing that after they filmed this, they sat down, and they watched it, and they picked what specific moments to include... They then opened up Photoshop, and made a thumbnail, and added sad face emojis... It's like, "What are you doing?"

Lux Alptraum:

And that's Franchesca Ramsey, a writer, producer, actress who got her start through her YouTube channel Chescaleigh. And together, Mike and Franchesca could easily rattle off the signatures of a YT apology.

[clips from YouTube]

Franchesca Ramsey:

The deep sigh before you even talk

Mike Rugnetta:

"Hey, sorry I look so tired."

Franchesca Ramsey:

Usually you have, like, minimal makeup on.

Mike Rugnetta:

"I've been trying to make this video for four hours. I shot this video a hundred times. This is going to be the hardest video that I ever make."

Franchesca Ramsey:

You might have, like, a chunky sweater; something that looks cozy and approachable.

Mike Rugnetta:

"There's going to be no edits. I didn't put ads on it."

Franchesca Ramsey:

You need to look like you've been crying.

Mike Rugnetta:

"I want this to be you and me," and already, you've, like, announced all of the artifice that you have taken away from your library of videos that are ostensibly artifice free.

Franchesca Ramsey:

"I made this video six months ago and I was a different person. I was so young six months ago!" It's like, "What?" [laughs]

Lux Alptraum:

YouTube apologies are so formulaic that they've become a running joke. At a conference called VidCon, someone actually showed up dressed as a YouTube apology. It was like one of those carnival attractions where you stick your head through a small cutout to become part of the picture, except instead of putting your head into the body of a strongman or a mermaid, this inserted you into a YouTube video called "My Apology." As a final touch, the conference attendee carried a box of tissues.

Siona Peterous:

Even YouTubers themselves are in on the joke. When makeup artist James Charles hosted a reality TV show called *Instant Influencer*, he gave contestants an apology challenge. Another popular YouTuber, Andrew Lowe, recently created a Guess Who game of famous YouTube apologies and auctioned it off to charity.

Lux Alptraum:

It's easy to poke fun at YouTube apologies. After all, when you see stars like Shane Dawson or PewDiePie giving the same apology for the same behavior over and over

again, with no evidence of real change, it's hard not to feel like all of this is just a cynical PR exercise.

Which is why it's so surprising that a YouTube apology managed to win over one of the biggest apology skeptics I know. Somehow, amidst all of the awful apologies on YouTube, Siona found a diamond in the rough that made her think a little differently about the power of apology.

Siona Peterous:

It shocked me as much as it surprised Lux, because as much as I hate to admit it, I have a bit of bias when it comes to YouTube's beauty world. And it's not like I'm someone who isn't interested in makeup; honestly, I'm kind of obsessed with it. But I've always felt the majority of the beauty YouTubers were way too high drama. So in what world could a good apology come out of it?

Lux Alptraum:

And then we talked to Gabriel Zamora.

[fun, upbeat dance music plays in background]

[clip from YouTube]

***Gabriel Zamora:** Hi, everyone, I'm Gabriel Zamora, and thank you for watching. This video is definitely something I didn't think I was going to upload, if I'm being quite honest. It's something that I feel like I need to upload now because there's certain apologies that I have to give, especially on video. And there are certain things I want to further explain.*

Lux Alptraum:

I'm Lux Alptraum.

Siona Peterous:

And I'm Siona Peterous.

Lux Alptraum:

And this is *Say You're Sorry*, a show about public apologies.

[Gabriel Zamora](#): Hi everyone. I'm Gabriel Zamora and thank you so much for watching. For today's video, we are doing brows.

Lux Alptraum:

Gabriel Zamora is a beauty influencer, and his channel is a mix of personal blogs, opinions, and of course, makeup tutorials.

***Gabriel Zamora:** Today, we're basically doing my brows. It's going to be cute and short and sweet because I didn't upload this past Tuesday. This past Tuesday was my birthday. So, March 10, I'm a Pisces. That's why I'm so emotional.*

Lux Alptraum:

Today, Gabriel has nearly 800,000 subscribers on YouTube. And he kind of has to pinch himself sometimes to believe that his rise to beauty influencer fame actually happened. He's the son of two Mexican immigrants, and when he was growing up, his family didn't have a lot of money. They got their first computer when he was a teenager and it was incredibly exciting for Gabriel, especially since he managed to convince his parents to put it in his room.

Gabriel Zamora:

I was like, "The connection is in here, you guys. Let's do it in here."

Siona Peterous:

Gabriel's family didn't have cable, so TV was pretty limited at his house, and he couldn't really afford to go to the movies. But once he had the internet? A whole new world opened up to him. One that was full of beautiful people with exciting names like Dulce Candy and Gigi Gorgeous.

Gabriel Zamora:

And I just was like, "Wow. People are truly living themselves online and not scared of it." And that fascinated me because I grew up as someone very shy and timid.

Siona Peterous:

Watching these videos, Gabriel was blown away. And suddenly he realized that he didn't just want to watch these videos. He wanted to make them.

Gabriel Zamora:

I did one where I was like, "Who is Gabriel Zamora?" and I asked my classmates. It was, like, my senior year, and I was like, "Who's Gabriel? Whatever comes to mind, just say who I am." I'm doing, like, an intro for this video that I wanted to live on my MySpace page. Like, that's what I wanted it for. And I was like, "Okay, I want it to be on my MySpace. I don't want to write a bio. I want people to *see* me." Whatever. I was so annoying.

Siona Peterous:

It took a couple of years, but eventually Gabriel did make it. He moved out to LA, he started making connections, and by the summer of 2018, he was a full-fledged influencer. His most-watched videos have been played over a million times. And if you can make it in this world of beauty, there's a lot of money on the table.

Gabriel Zamora:

Makeup is a multi-billion if not trillion-dollar industry that... our sponsorships, in comparison to other influencers, are much higher. So that I'm very grateful for, and I will always stay in makeup, and I will always wear makeup. Because it's like, "Ooh! Those motherfuckers pay!"

Lux Alptraum:

It's hard to say exactly how much money Gabriel is talking about. But estimates range from \$10,000 a month for medium-sized influencers to one million dollars a month for the biggest names. And Siona's right, these people are drama queens. Really rich drama queens.

Gabriel Zamora:

In high school, there was that set of, like, pretty mean girls. So imagine that on steroids. You may not like those popular bitches at school. You keep up with everything that they do.

Lux Alptraum:

So it was a big deal when Gabriel pissed off the beauty world's prom queen: Jeffree Star. Jeffree Star has almost 17 million YouTube subscribers. He has his own cosmetics line that's sold around the world. He's so popular that he can't go to the mall without getting swarmed by fans.

So if you cross Jeffree, you piss off a lot of people; his fans, his friends, his business associates. It's a bad scene. You don't wanna do it. And in 2018, Gabriel and his friends did — and kicked off so much drama that the YouTube community literally refers to this story as Dramageddon.

Christian Hull:

It was huge. This was the biggest thing happening on YouTube at the time.

Lux Alptraum:

This is Christian Hull, an Australian comedian who got so sucked into the drama he even made his own video about it.

[Christian Hull](#): We saw their jealousy of Jeffree's success and we didn't like it.

Christian Hull:

It was like a schoolyard fight breaking out. You know, everyone's doing their own thing, and then suddenly, in the corner, everyone's crowding and you're like, "Let's just go and crowd as well. Let's pick a side. What's happening over here?" And it became 'the thing'.

Lux Alptraum:

And it all started in Ibiza. Obviously.

In August 2018, Gabriel was on a glamorous trip to the Spanish island sponsored by the makeup company NARS. And with him on this all-expenses-paid jaunt were three of his influencer friends: Laura Lee, Nikita Dragun, and Manny MUA — the MUA stands for “makeup artist,” by the way. Eventually, the conversation turned to a familiar topic: Jeffree Star.

Siona Peterous:

For months, Gabriel had been hearing his friends talk about Jeffree being shady, saying that they were tired of his petty attacks. And Gabriel thought, “You know what? I’m tired of hearing everybody talk privately about this very public person. Someone should say something.”

Gabriel Zamora:

I did tweet a tweet that said, “Bitch is bitter because without him we’re doing better.” And it was all of us flicking off the camera.

Lux Alptraum:

That might sound cryptic to you and me, but if you’re following these beauty influencers, if you know their ins and outs, this tweet was very clearly about Jeffree Star. Before Gabriel befriended Manny, Laura, and Nikita, the three of them had been close with Jeffree. And the fact that Jeffree *wasn’t* in this group anymore was a big source of gossip.

And Gabriel didn’t stop with one nasty dig. He amped things up with a second tweet writing, “Imagine stanning a racist? I could never.” And the reaction online was immediate. Within less than an hour, Gabriel’s Twitter mentions started filling up with Jeffree’s fans — and we’ve talked before about how intense online fans can be.

Gabriel Zamora:

We got dragged through the mud by his followers. But at the time, it felt like it was the internet. That’s when I really felt someone’s... I don’t mean this word to feel offensive anyways, but like cult-like following. Oh, my god. Like, it was like hundreds of people coming at us.

Siona Peterous:

Those hundreds of people weren’t just slinging nasty tweets at Gabriel and his friends. They were also digging through the internet archives to find dirt on the four beauty influencers in that photo. In Gabriel’s case, that wound up being a years-old tweet.

Gabriel Zamora:

I had used the n-word with my friend thinking like, “Oh, I can call my friend this because he’s black and he’s letting me do this.” And I was educated. “No, no, no. That’s not how it works. That’s not your word; you can’t say that word.” And I was like, “Oh, Okay.”

Lux Alptraum:

You know that line about how if you come for the king, you’d best not miss? Well, Gabriel had taken a shot, and he’d missed by about a mile. And now he had to deal with the fallout. And he realized that if he didn’t fix this, his entire career could be over.

Gabriel Zamora:

“Oh, my god. Like, everybody’s basically jumping ship. It’s about to all just crumble. It’s just all going to crumble and you’re just going to let it happen.”

Siona Peterous:

The week of the incident, Gabriel lost over 8,000 followers on YouTube. But he wasn’t about to give up on his dream career just yet.

Gabriel Zamora:

And I was like, “No, absolutely not.”

Siona Peterous:

Gabriel knew that if he wanted to save his career, he’d have to apologize. But he didn’t fire up his camera and take to YouTube immediately. In fact, the YouTube apology was actually the end, not the beginning, of his redemption tour.

[poppy electronic notes play in background]

Lux Alptraum:

The first apology came right after all this internet drama went down. Gabriel and his friends were still in Ibiza on this influencer trip and there was a pool party to attend. And they *had* to attend it; because that’s part of the deal of being an influencer on a brand-sponsored trip. They put together a luxurious, out-of-this-world experience for you, and your job is to document it on social media with plenty of shout-outs to the brand.

So Gabriel was at this gorgeous pool at the bottom of a mountain. There were servers passing out hors d’oeuvres and drinks and everybody looked *amazing*.

Gabriel Zamora:

It’s beautifully sunny. Everybody’s laying out and people have so much makeup on.

And then they had dancers who were also, like, swimmers. And they were in the pool... they made us all get out of the pool. They were putting on a show.

Lux Alptraum:

Yes, there were synchronized swimmers performing for a group of internet-famous beauty people.

Gabriel Zamora:

It felt like an adult field trip with alcohol.

Lux Alptraum:

But despite the gorgeous surroundings, and festive atmosphere, and water acrobatics, Gabriel still had this pit in his stomach about his tweet and all the hate he and his friends were getting. He'd popped off that snarky message because he wanted to *defend* his friends, but instead he'd thrown them under the influencer bus.

Gabriel Zamora:

I was like, "You know what? My friends are upset right now. They want me to apologize. I would gladly apologize and be like, 'Hey, I'm so sorry.'"

[thoughtful electronic notes play in background]

Siona Peterous:

And that apology — given privately to his three friends — seemed to go down pretty well. They forgave him and they all left the party a united front, determined to come up with a collective strategy that would put all this to bed and save everyone's career.

Gabriel's next step was apologizing for his own past. He started by addressing his use of the n-word, and he did so with a classic online apology technique, tweeting a screenshot from the iOS Notes app.

And honestly, I wasn't impressed. It was the type of apology that made me roll my eyes. He says things like "I'm sorry to anyone offended by an old tweet of mine." and "There's no excuse for me to use it *but* I can say no one had ever explained the use of that word until that day to me." Look, an apology shouldn't use words like "but" in self-defense.

And on top of all that, apologizing for the n-word... on the Notes app? It's not a good way to go about it. To me, it honestly felt like Gabriel was only worried about how this would impact his brand. But this was just Gabriel's first apology.

[music picks up with beats]

Gabriel Zamora:

The next day, we're all going to the airport. It's very weird. We're at the airport; it's still very weird. Luckily, thank God, the brand had flown first class. So we all had our little cubicles.

Siona Peterous:

Gabriel was taking a nap in his little cubicle when his friends came over and announced that, actually, they had a new plan.

Gabriel Zamora:

"We've been talking to our teams and we have come to the conclusion that the best approach is a series of apologies. And we're going to go one by one. Gabriel, you're going to go first."

[ambient airplane cabin sounds]

Siona Peterous:

The idea was that once Gabriel had issued his big, official apology the rest of the group would assess how *his* had done, and they'd all modify *their* apologies to avoid any mistakes he'd made. The whole idea of them being a unified front went totally out the window.

Gabriel Zamora:

I was a sacrificial lamb, just to be like, "Go out there. You figure it out."

Siona Peterous:

At the time, Gabriel was the least established of the group. His friends had publicists. They had managers. They had entire teams of people paid to deal with their problems and keep them out of trouble — or, in this case, get them out of trouble. Gabriel didn't have any of that.

Gabriel Zamora:

So for me, I was like, "Fuck. How do I write this? Oh, my god." So, I started to write something, and by the time we get to the States and we're getting our bags, we're going through customs, I get an Uber. I'm still not fully done with it.

Lux Alptraum:

Gabriel knew the points he wanted to hit and he had a pretty good idea of how to communicate them and what to avoid.

Gabriel Zamora:

People were like, "Oh, not another Notes apology." And I was like, "Well then I'll put it on Pages! I'll change up the text a little."

The Notes one, I wanted to do because I wanted to apologize for the tweet. I created the apology and I even asked some of my Black friends. I was like, “Hey, is this still insensitive?” And they were like “No. Thank you for reaching out. This is a great apology.”

Siona Peterous:

Gabriel also issued two more apologies behind the scenes; one to the PR reps who’d recommended him for the Ibiza trip, and one to NARS, the brand that had sponsored his trip. They’d sent him out to Ibiza to get people talking about NARS — and instead, he’d gotten people talking about Jeffree Star. And he wanted to own that mistake.

And these personal apologies seemed to go over pretty well. But online, things were chaotic.

[poppy electronic music]

Gabriel Zamora:

I was still getting such an overwhelming amount of hate.

[computer beeps and buzzes]

Lux Alptraum:

Gabriel knew there was only one real way out of the mess he’d created. And it required getting in touch with the beauty powerhouse he had taken his failed swing at. Maybe all the stuff he’d said about Jeffree had been true. But it had still been nasty gossip he’d heard from other people, not firsthand experiences he’d had with Jeffree himself.

Gabriel Zamora:

I texted Jeffree and I was like, “Hey, I’m sure I’m the last person you ever wanted to hear about. I apologize to you because I should have never come at you like that because we don’t have an issue.” I shouldn’t come at somebody who I don’t have an issue with, it’s so unnecessary; because I wouldn’t want somebody to come at me who I don’t have an issue with. So I was like, “I’m sorry for that.”

Lux Alptraum:

But Jeffree wasn’t ready to forgive and forget just yet. He wanted Gabriel to apologize to his face, not just by text message. So, he fired up FaceTime, and over the course of a three-hour phone call, they hashed it out.

And it worked. Jeffree forgave Gabriel. But that man-to-man moment of amends still wasn’t enough to stop Gabriel’s career from crumbling.

As someone who'd survived his own fair share of drama, Jeffree understood Gabriel's next steps. And he told him explicitly that this whole thing wouldn't end until Gabriel jumped through one last hoop: that dreaded YouTube apology. And he didn't just have to make one, he had to make a *good* one. Here's how Jeffree described the stakes to Gabriel:

Gabriel Zamora:

You have to make sure that when this video hits, it has to hit. You only have one shot. And if you don't get it right, you will fall.

Siona Peterous:

To be fair, this is really ironic advice coming from Jeffree Star, who has issued a lot of his own apologies for everything from racism to his involvement in other YouTube drama. And many of those videos have *not* been well-received.

There's even a hugely popular subgenre of YouTube videos that are just parodies of Jeffree's YouTube apologies. Here's one by YouTuber Khom Queen:

[clip from YouTube]

Khom Queen: So what you want to do is wait, like, a month. Just tell people you're in a dark place or something. So, like, wait in a dark place for a month or so, and while you're there your PR team will write you an apology for you.

Siona Peterous:

But Jeffree's immunity comes from success.

Gabriel Zamora:

He is, to me, at a much higher caliber of audience, and a die-hard audience to where... I mean, if he lost, like, three million followers, he would still be so fine. Who can say that? I don't even have a million followers. And at that time, I think I had like 3-400,000. So I was like, "Oh my God. I just started this career. Did I fuck it up already?"

[music fades down]

Lux Alptraum:

So the stakes were high, and Gabriel wanted to take his time and figure out the best way to really capture what was going on in his head; to communicate his remorse to the millions of people in this community.

Siona Peterous:

He and Jeffree even talked about having Jeffree make a surprise cameo in Gabriel's apology video. What's more convincing than the person you're apologizing to

endorsing your video? But ultimately, Gabriel decided to go it alone. He was the one apologizing and it should just be him on camera.

Lux Alptraum:

So, step one: pick a name for the video. Gabriel went short and sweet: My Truth. And to prepare to record, Gabriel made a list of things he wanted to make sure he included:

Gabriel Zamora:

I have my Notes thing. Let me see. I think you can search it. My truth. Oh yeah, here it is. So, it was called My Truth, apologize. So the first thing that I wanted to hit was I wanted to apologize to my audience. And one of the things I wanted to do was 'don't be negative about it'. Like, be sincere about it and be grateful. Be grateful that these people follow you, because that is the first apology you have to give. So the first, I think like, 15 minutes of the video is me really apologizing. And then the rest of the video was, like, what happened behind the scenes

Siona Peterous:

Now that Gabriel had an outline, it was time to finally hit record. Gabriel shot the video once, and then he watched it, and shot it again. And then again. The video that lives on YouTube today is actually the *third* video that Gabriel shot that day.

Gabriel Zamora:

The first one was two hours. The second one was an hour and a half. I was like, "This is so excessive." Like, "Gabriel, you just expect people to sit there?" No. So I brought it down the third time to, like, 48 minutes.

Siona Peterous:

He felt like he had one shot. And watching the first takes, he just didn't think they would land.

Gabriel Zamora:

I was like, "Oh, my god, I'm venting." And sometimes venting on camera is so liberating that you're like, "Oh, my god. I don't have to put that on the internet, but that felt so good to feel like I was almost telling somebody."

Lux Alptraum:

And as small as it seems, it matters that he understood that those rants weren't appropriate for a general audience, that an hour-and-a-half-long apology is self-indulgent. Because that's something a lot of people don't get. And being aware that your audience's needs trump your own desire to vent is a way of recognizing that someone else's point of view can be more important than your own — and well, that's just good apologizing.

[quiet, contemplative music]

And before he unleashed “My Truth” onto the internet, Gabriel shot one additional video — although this one has never been uploaded anywhere. It lives on his phone, and it’s a video directed at himself, a pep talk of sorts.

Gabriel Zamora:

“Gabriel, like, if this goes bad, you cannot punish yourself. Like, you can’t punish yourself because you have to be able to stand by this video. And if you can wholeheartedly say you can stand by this video and this is truly your truth, like you’re not omitting shit to, like, paint a certain narrative or you’re not lying on camera, then you will be fine, even if they hate you for it.”

Lux Alptraum:

Pep talk in hand, it was time. Nine days after the initial tweet that sparked Dramageddon, Gabriel pushed the upload button.

[clip from [“My Truth”](#)] There’s certain apologies that I have to give, especially on video, and there are certain things I want to further explain.

The first apology that I owe, that I definitely wanted to make sure was in this video at the very beginning, is to y’all, my audience, because I was the person that I didn’t want to be and it was being negative, being petty, and bringing negativity into a world that didn’t need it. And for that, I’m truly sorry. And I know I’ve let y’all down because I let myself down.

Gabriel Zamora:

I just remember hitting upload and, like, I couldn’t see the results for an hour because it was such a long video. So I was, like, panicking. I was panicking for a whole hour, like, “Oh my God, I put this on the Internet. I put this on the Internet.” And then it started to trickle. People are like, “Oh, wait.”

[music fades down]

Lux Alptraum:

There’s a reason we’re talking about Gabriel’s apology right now — and to be honest, it’s probably the same reason why Gabriel agreed to talk to us in the first place.

And that reason is that “My Truth” went over well. Like, *really* well. Jeffree officially accepted the apology in a Snapchat video. Jeffree’s fans applauded it as a class act. Gabriel’s subscribers nearly *doubled*. And in the media coverage that resulted, Gabriel was generally painted as a good guy.

Christian Hull:

An apology video is all about perception. You know, as long as you seem authentic, and you sell your stuff with conviction, and you're not, you know, sitting on the floor crying, we'll believe you.

Siona Peterous:

That's Christian Hull again. At the beginning of Dramageddon, Christian wasn't a Gabriel Zamora fan.

Christian Hull:

He was the youngest and he just seemed like the most insincere. Just from the outside, looking in, he just seemed really insincere.

Lux Alptraum:

But as Gabriel and his friends started rolling out their public apologies, Christian's opinion began to shift.

Christian Hull:

The reason why I really liked his video was he knew what he was going to say. He had planned it. It was natural. I'm pretty confident he didn't edit any of his video. There were no edits in it. So you didn't know he was reading from a script or he was, sort of, prompted from the back. He just went full pelt and he just explained the situation so well. And whether or not he was telling the truth, I believed him. He sounded authentic. And I think that was the difference in his apology to the other ones. He sounded genuinely authentic.

Lux Alptraum:

When Christian says 'the other ones', he means the apologies put out by Laura Lee and Manny MUA — Gabriel's influencer friends who'd been with him on the trip to Ibiza, the ones in that photo that set this whole thing off. First, there was Laura Lee's video, which is *notoriously* bad.

Christian Hull:

It was her crying, but no tears were coming out of her eyes. And she's been mocked relentlessly for it.

Lux Alptraum:

Laura's apology *still* makes almost every list of the worst YouTube apologies ever. But Manny's wasn't much better.

Christian Hull:

It's just that, sort of, downtrodden like, "Oh, poor me. I did things I'm not proud of." And they talk really softly, and then they do this, [talking through crying sounds] and they're really remorseful. And you're just like, "Oh, I'm not buying any of this."

Siona Peterous:

By comparison, Gabriel's video was calm, collected, straightforward, and maybe most importantly, sincere. Sure, Manny and Laura had whole teams of people to tell them how to express regret. But that was the problem, you *could tell*. And apology expert Nick Smith says that's a common problem when people rely on publicists to help them apologize.

Dr. Nick Smith:

There's this old phrase that art shouldn't smell of the workshop, and certainly with PR teams... just often reek of the workshop, right? They just smell like buzzwords, plus vacuousness, plus plausible deniability.

Christian Hull:

Their apologies were so PR. You could tick boxes as they were going through, and his wasn't. And that's why it was so authentic, because it just — you didn't have people scripting, and writing, and saying, "Well, this is how we as a public relations firm would handle this." And it's like, "Well, YouTube is so different from the rest of the world that it doesn't work like that."

Nick Smith:

People have some authenticity radar.

[quiet, contemplative music]

Lux Alptraum:

Gabriel has a couple of theories of his own as to why his apology video was widely accepted.

Gabriel Zamora:

When people say influencers leave crying in these parts in their video for manipulative reasons, it's 100% correct, because you can edit it right out. Why did you have to leave it in there? For what? Because I leave laughs in my videos because I think it's funny and I want my audience to laugh. So I know that if I leave a cry, I want my audience to feel sympathy for me.

Lux Alptraum:

But there are other YouTube apology tropes that he did adhere to.

Gabriel Zamora:

One of the original ones was, like, having a hoodie. You just have a hoodie on and you're like, "Oh my god, I'm so disheveled," and you have no makeup on.

There's reaching over to turn on the camera and starting with a sigh and being like, "Okay, let's get into this." The reason why I did it was because mine wasn't edited. So I left everything in there. Everything.

Siona Peterous:

Gabriel could have easily panicked and followed his assumption of what a good PR strategy looks like. He could have said yes to having Jeffree in the video, but he decided he didn't want it to look like he was avoiding accountability. He could have cried and whined, blaming every other person but him, but he didn't. And on top of that, he did go back and address his use of the n-word.

[clip from "My Truth"] The second apology that I owe is for an old tweet of mine that resurfaced from 2012. I don't want to give you excuses as to what my train of thought was. Just know that it was ignorant and it was stupid.

Unlike the Notes app, I didn't roll my eyes this time around. In the video, he drops his initial defensiveness and blaming. He instead slows down, explains how the tweet came to be, and includes links to videos on why non-Black people have no business using the word.

[clip from "My Truth"] I was educated back then and I know it's not my word. And I'm truly sorry that people still use that word and think that it doesn't have certain negative connotations. And I'm sorry that I fed into that. At one point in my life, I was ignorant and I was stupid, and I take full accountability. And just know that I'm sorry. I'm still sorry, and I will keep saying I'm sorry for that, and I truly am sorry.

Siona Peterous:

And on top of that, he tells people this isn't a one-time thing, he will continue to apologize for his use of the word. And it's not like I'm giving him a pass, there really isn't a way to make it okay. But Gabriel did take the route of accountability which many YouTubers don't.

Gabriel Zamora:

Do you understand what you did? Do you understand why it's wrong? Are you going to do this again? Because if you just say 'sorry'... For what? Everybody can say sorry, but for what?

[poppy electronic music]

Lux Alptraum:

On the plane ride home from Ibiza, watching his friends craft their perfect, media-savvy apologies with the help of their publicists, Gabriel felt like he was at a disadvantage. And yet it turned out that he was armed with something more

powerful than any publicity team; genuine remorse, a complete understanding of how he'd messed up, and a real commitment to doing better in the future.

Siona Peterous:

I do still feel that a lot of Dramageddon is... silly. So, chances are, despite my love for makeup, I'm still not going to keep up with YouTuber drama. But that's actually exactly why this story was so interesting to me. I've always felt that a remorseful apology has to be the result of some sort of extreme harm, and Gabriel's story showed me that isn't necessarily true. It taught me that, sometimes, just because something seems petty, doesn't mean there isn't room for a genuine and impactful apology.

Lux Alptraum:

There's a line towards the end of "My Truth" that people often reference when they're talking about what Gabriel did right.

[clip from "My Truth"] Don't forgive me because I'm asking you, but just look at me moving forward. And maybe you need a break from me and that's fine. But if in a month, in two, in six, in a year, you come back and check on me, I hope that my actions have proven that I've grown from this and I've learned from this. And that's all I can ask for.

Lux Alptraum:

It's such a small gesture, and yet it had an enormous impact. Because Gabriel wasn't trying to persuade his audience, or present himself as a moral authority, or dictate what they thought about him. He was throwing away the influencer rulebook and letting his audience decide for themselves whether he was worth forgiving. That's a terrifying thing to do. And yet if you don't do it, well, don't be surprised if someone turns your apology into next year's VidCon costume.

[outro music; uptempo electronic percussion with guitar]

Say You're Sorry was created by me, Lux Alptraum.

This episode was written and hosted by Lux Alptraum and Siona Peterous, and produced by Siona Peterous. Editing by Candace Manriquez Wrenn, who is sorry (not sorry) that she thinks the movie *Love Actually* still holds up, actually. Sound design and mixing by Ariana Martinez. Our intro music is by Michael Aquino. Episode art by Augusto Zambonato.

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