



## Rants and Randomness with Luvvie Ajayi

(with Gabrielle Union) - Episode 42

Released: July 14, 2020

My PEOPLE! Welcome to Rants and Randomness. I'm Luvvie Ajayi Jones and this is my show where I'm talking about all the things that I'm loving, things that I'm side-eyeing, and having great conversations with really dope people.

I'm here at my office, at home, recording this episode while the good people at Chicago Recording Company will be working the magic they need to work to bring all y'all the radio voice, as always.

On this episode, I am having an amazing conversation with the brilliant Gabrielle Union. In our conversation, we talk about a lot of things. We talk about how she's been in this industry for over 25 years, we talk about what happened on America's Got Talent and why, even though there was somebody else on the show who's Black, she did not get that support she needed. We talked about how she is being a radically transparent, radically honest parent, we talk about a lot of things and I'm thankful to her for her transparency, for her honesty, for coming on this show – so, take a listen to this interview, and if you love what you hear, please show her love on her social media platforms so she knows the Rants fam is down. All right, y'all. Let's jump in.

### Interview with Gabrielle Union

[00:01:11]

LUVVIE           The first thing is, what did you want to be when you were growing up?

Gabrielle:       I wanted to be a lawyer. And I wanted to be a defense lawyer because my sister and my mother were obsessed with watching Perry Mason. Like, they watched it every day. So, I grew up watching Perry Mason, and then my sister got really into L.A. Law, and I really, really, really wanted to be an ADA on Law & Order. That obviously never happened because there's never been a Black ADA on Law & Order. But yeah, I've always been obsessed with the law and defending the underdog.

Luvvie:           So, when did law become acting? How did that happen?

Gabrielle:       So, somewhere around me studying for the LSATs and not doing well on practice tests. Not looking great for me-

Luvvie:           Really?!

Gabrielle: ... to go from UCLA to not a prestigious law school. And just figured if I'm struggling with the LSATs, I don't know if a career in law is for me. But around that same time, I was studying for the LSATs, I got an internship at a modeling agency as office help for four units. I paid for college myself so I was taking 20 units, I was trying to jam pack my second to last quarter at UCLA, because I wanted an easy last quarter. It all made sense at the time.

Luvvie: Right.

Gabrielle: But I started taking 20 units, I wanted four more, and I was like, "I don't have, literally ... I have no time left in the schedule to add an actual class." And somebody was like, "Yo, you can get an internship at the EXPO Center, just pick an easy internship." So, I picked what I thought was the easiest internship, I'm like, "Working with models, how hard could this be?" So, I got that internship for four credits. And when my internship ended, the guy I had been interning for, who's been my manager for 20 years, was like, "Would you ever be interested in modeling? You know, we've had some clients come in here and they saw you and they wondered if you were one of our girls."

20 some odd years ago, I was ... Shit, probably like 15 pounds thinner, I looked like a cricket. Definitely not the kind of working model that they had on the adult side. So they were like, "Let's take a couple of Polaroids, we'll send you to Teen Magazine, Sassy, and All About You." They were these three teen magazines that were under one roof. And without a book or anything, I was booked. And I was like, "Oh, I'm Naomi Campbell now!" You know, "This is it!" But I was like ... You know like in those teen magazines it's like, "How to survive a breakup"?

Luvvie: Yeah.

Gabrielle: It would be my picture, like ... I would do that kind of modeling. I had a big gig at Montgomery Ward's.

Luvvie: Yes!

Gabrielle: But I was making 120 dollars a day, you know, while I was studying-

Luvvie: Wow!

Gabrielle: ... to try to improve my LSAT scores ... I got this opportunity. And they were like, "Well, let's just send you on an audition and see what happens. We'll make up a fake resume." You know, I had taken Oral Interpretation of Literature class. Never took any drama, you know, nothing like that. But I have a photographic memory.

Luvvie: Really?!

Gabrielle: Yeah. It comes in handy-

Luvvie: [crosstalk 00:08:28].

Gabrielle: It comes in handy but not in the ways that you think.

Luvvie: No, that's actually fascinating to me because ... So when you read a book, you know what words were on a certain page?

Gabrielle: Yes.

Luvvie: That is hell-

Gabrielle: It's like my brain takes a picture of how the words appear. Now, if somebody were to ask me like a multiple choice question, that's like ideal because I can tell you where the words are and how the answer is framed and the words, whatever. But if somebody were to say, "Explain to me the concept of ... " and I'm like, "Ah!"

Luvvie: That's where I can't help you out there.

Gabrielle: Yeah. I may not understand a concept. I could regurgitate the words, but that doesn't mean I understand the words, if that makes sense?

Luvvie: Yes, it does. Also, I'm a nerd because I'm like, "Oh, okay. Actor-model, that's cool. Now, tell me about this photographic memory." I'm like, "That's fascinating to me!"

Gabrielle: Well, it's made me lazy as an actor ... over time. Because I'm not doing Hamlet, you know? I'm not doing the most challenging things at all times. So when I have been challenged, I'm not as prepared as I probably should have been, because I'm like, "Oh, I'll just look at it during hair and makeup, and memorize." And people are like, "Okay. Well, that was one interpretation, but what the fuck are you doing?" Like, I'm absolutely not understanding the text.

Luvvie: And you're just repeating it?

Gabrielle: Yes! But I'm word perfect but it's [crosstalk 00:10:02].

Luvvie: I have it, but not to that level. I remember taking tests where I'm like, "I remember the answer because I remember the page where I read it. Could not tell you what the concept and what the actual explanation was, but I can also picture some of the words. Like, "Okay, that was in the middle of the page that I studied the last hour," so I have something similar so I fully understand what you're saying here. So you end up going to ... You become the accidental model. So what was your first role?

Gabrielle: My first role was Saved by the Bell: The New Class. So it wasn't the OGs, but Screech and Mr. Belding were still on the show, with different kids.

Luvvie: I've seen a few episodes of those. I did not know that you were on there.

Luvvie: How many years ago was that? Because I don't think ... People don't understand how long you've been in the game because you still look 20, which is wild.

Gabrielle: Thank you. That was '95.

Luvvie: Okay, carry the one ... That was about 25 years ago!

Gabrielle: 25 years ago. And then that same ... They all happened like back to back to back. So it was like Saved by the Bell: The New Class and then I booked a 1-800-Dentist commercial, maybe you saw it, "1-800-Dentist." And then I did an AT ... Remember the AT&T commercial with the Black girl? They had this whole series of commercials; her name was Tamara Taylor. But I was supposed to be the next Black AT&T girl and Forrest Whitaker directed the piece, and then they said it looked a little too sexual. Because I was supposed to be 15 going on a date, and they did this like slow-mo of my lipstick, like turning up, and ... Anyway, the commercial got scrapped. And then I got *Moesha*!

Luvvie: Oh!

Gabrielle: I got *Moesha*. And I booked a guest spot on the first episode of the first season after the pilot, and I was the snobby cheerleader.

Luvvie: "Mo to the ... E to ... "

Gabrielle: "E to the-"

Luvvie: And then, the most iconic ... *Bring It On*! You weren't even supposed to be somebody who people really honed in on, and you ended up stealing the show. What year was that?

Gabrielle: That would have been like 2000? Yeah, because this year is the 20th anniversary. So we shot it in '99 but it came out in 2000.

Luvvie: How did your life change after *Bring It On*?

Gabrielle: It didn't.

Luvvie: Wow!

Gabrielle: Yeah, I every time I had one of those big ... you know, those big moments where they're like, "Now," and you get on all those lists ... And I talk about it all the time, you go from It Girl to shit girl, because it doesn't ... There was never any strategic plan for some of us Black girls, which is why you see some of us have these stops and starts and stops and starts. Everyone I came up with had a really meandering career trajectory. So you might have been in these huge hits, but it didn't translate into this-

Luvvie: Opportunities.

Gabrielle: ... the career that your peers, your white peers who had similar success, how that translated for them. It was always just very different. [crosstalk 00:15:17] after *Bad Boys*.

Luvvie: Yeah! That is actually true. There's a lot of like 90s Black actors who came up in the 90s together, who a lot of them we don't see now, who we definitely have not seen in a long time.

Coming up in Hollywood as a Black woman, what has ... I know there's a lot, but what is the thing that you wish people had known this whole time?

Gabrielle: That we've always had it, that we've always had the ability to do more, we just never got it. Because there's this idea that everyone in Hollywood gets to choose their roles and it's like those books where you pick your adventure, or you pick your ending, and they think that's really how it works for Black talent and it does not. They think everyone is super rich. That is not the case. Because you hear about ... Like, if you hear about a Will Smith salary, that's not what Michael Ealy is making ... or has made. You hear about ... I don't know, Julia Roberts, but that's not what Viola is making, you know what I mean? Or Taraji or Sanaa or Regina .... Any of the Reginas, King or Hall.

Luvvie: Right.

Gabrielle: And the other thing is, for most of us, it's not ... just like for any Black person that, quote unquote, makes it, we have so much family that you have to provide housing, insurance, schooling, any kind of educational opportunity, any anytime anything goes wrong, that's you. It's not just, "Oh, I lost a gig," or, "My show got canceled," or, "My movie didn't open and I didn't hit my back-end bonuses." It's like, "Whah, whah, rich person." The pay scale has never been the same! Like what we make, and they will flat out tell you to your face, "Yeah, that's a good number for her."

Luvvie: "For her."

Gabrielle: "For her," yeah. "And be grateful. You better be the happy Negro about this too."

Luvvie: How do you move through that space without wanting to cuss everybody out every day?

Gabrielle: Well, I cuss everybody out every day ... now. I mean, I didn't. I wasn't doing that before because I was afraid. And that fear is real, you will get put out. They will get you up out the paint and literally no one will ever hear from you again and they will create a whole narrative around you that you were a diva, you're difficult, you had a problem, and that'll be like ... that could cover anything. They say it sort of ominously, "Well, you know she had problems."

Luvvie: You're like, "Wait, what?"

Gabrielle: Now I'm like ... You want to go back and you're like, "What happened to this person, this person, this person? Where did they go? Where did they go?" But what you find out later, they complained, they reported something, they asked for equity, God forbid ... they spoke up for themselves. And it comes at a price and it's come at a price for many, many, many, many people.

Luvvie: You were at ESSENCE Black Women in Hollywood ... What was that, five years ago? When you won the award and you gave this amazing speech about how you used to see the system and how you've seen it now, because of how they basically pit Black people against each other ... It's weird to call you a veteran because again, you look 20.

Gabrielle: No, I'm-

Luvvie: [crosstalk 00:19:00].

Gabrielle: I'm an OG.

Luvvie: You an OG in this game. Right now, in this Black Lives Matter, Black Girl Magic moment, how's it landing for you?

Gabrielle: Well, Black Lives Matter, it's been for ... years. When did it originate in? In 20 ...

Luvvie: Trayvon Martin-

Gabrielle: '14?

Luvvie: 2014? Yeah.

Gabrielle: 2014, so 6 years. So for all of us who've ... Yeah, I believe it was like around Ferguson, like 2014.

Luvvie: Trayvon? Yeah.

Gabrielle: But it's been ... For all of us who've been about that life this whole time ... it just feels like the cavalry has arrived and that we aren't crazy, we're not ungrateful assholes, we're not divas. We've been people who've been trying to do the work of creating a more fair and equitable experience for across all industries. So it just feels like ... you know, most times being wrapped in the hug of a family and you feel buoyed when you are weary, and encouraged when you want to give up, and you feel seen and heard and understood in a way that we've never really been as Black women. And I think it's been slower for some of us, in Hollywood, Black women, because there's real fear and the fear is legit.

Everyone's line in the sand is different of how much you're willing to take and how shit you're willing to put up with, but I think that line in the sand is ... That the gig, as they say, is up. Even the most ... "I will always center the white gaze" Black talent folks are like ... "I mean, come on! Damn! Like, damn!"

Luvvie: Yeah, it's a time of reckoning. So speaking of, you recently ended up in the news because you decided to speak truth to power about what you experienced at your old gig at America's Got Talent.

Gabrielle: Yeah.

Luvvie: And it was an example of the real consequences that come when we decide to be bold and courageous ... and speak the truth. So give the rundown, what happened with America's Got Talent? What happened when you decided to say something publicly?

Gabrielle: I mean, literally from day one ... I mean, there's 1000 things that happened so I'll try to give you some more of the highlights, but literally, from day one, I walk in what I thought was just an

easy job. I had a new baby, I wanted to have a job that allowed her to be around. And I was assured it's ... "This is a family friendly space. It's safe," blah, blah, blah. And I walk in, and in the first hour, Simon Cowell is smoking cigarettes. And it's not a thing because people don't do that anywhere, at any place of business.

Luvvie: Exactly!

Gabrielle: It's just not a thing. And I'm like, "In the first few minutes, in the first hour, I got to complain about the man who owns AGT, the whole thing, the executive producer and the lead judge, I got a complaint about? And who do I complain to ... for something that's like, It's illegal, do I tell the police?" Like, who am I talking to?" But I knew from day one, in the first hour, I was about to be othered for complaining about the boss. And you know that moment when something happens, you kind of look around, and you're like, "Did any of y'all see that?"

Luvvie: Yeah.

Gabrielle: And I'm looking around and everyone's like, "Yeah, he smokes inside, and he's been doing it." And it's like, "Are you going to say anything?" Because, for a long time, clearly, none of the other talent gave a shit. Like, he didn't just start smoking in season 14.

Luvvie: Right!

Gabrielle: They just didn't care. They felt like he made the company enough money that he didn't have to follow the rules and the law. He was above the law. He was exempt and poisoning your co-workers is totally fine. But I locked eyes with one of the security guys and he was like ... He was Samoan, and he was like ... And at that moment, it was like, "If not me, then-

Luvvie: Then who?

Gabrielle: ... who? Then who?" I was like, "So, I'm allergic to cigarette smoke. I've never had this issue because it's against the law." You know, you have to figure out that voice to use, hoping that they won't ... You have to scrunch up your face it so it doesn't seem like so ... you know, whatever. And he didn't, he didn't stop for days. He didn't stop for days.

Luvvie: Wow.

Gabrielle: And I got terribly sick. And once my respiratory system became impacted ... I couldn't escape the allergen. You know, if you have hay fever you can take a Benadryl or whatever ... an antihistamine, but if I cannot escape what is triggering my allergies ... I just got crazy, crazy sick. That lasted for two months. It was insane. And that was just in the first hour, you know, my boss is smoking, I got to ask him to stop, and if he doesn't stop, I have to report him?

Luvvie: There's no HR for you.

Gabrielle: Well, HR ain't for the employees anyway, it's to protect the corporations.

Luvvie: True.

Gabrielle: But at least it gives you like a bit of a paper trail of like you complained about something. But that was just day one. And I complained about blackface hands, this act that ... used blackface hands to denote that he was performing as a person of ... you know, a Black contestant. And I flagged it because, sitting next to me, is Julianne Hough who had done blackface for Halloween, and it was like right after the Megyn Kelly ... So I'm assuming NBC takes blackface very seriously, but then-

Luvvie: As they should!

Gabrielle: "Well, you fired Megyn Kelly over blackface, so blackface bad. You hired Julianne Hough who'd done blackface, so not that bad?" You have this act that comes on your stage, that you're warned is problematic by a different producer, they overrule it, the guy hits the stage, I hit X, and they're like, "Tell us why you don't want ... Tell us what the problem was." And I'm like ... "Do you want me to explain in front of 4000 people why blackface is bad and trigger their memory that ... Like, I don't know what to do here."

Luvvie: Right! That's a trap!

Gabrielle: It's a trap, what do I do? And when the producer came up to me, he ... and I was like, "What? You didn't notice the blackface hands?" And he goes, "Ah, you caught that, huh?"

Luvvie: Brah!

Gabrielle: And I was like, "So you knew ahead of time that the guy was going to use blackface hands?" And he was like, "Well, you know, he insisted on it." And I said, "He insisted on racism?"

Luvvie: On your show?

Gabrielle: Yeah. Later, after I blew the whistle and there was an investigation, that same producer said to the investigator that when I confronted him about the blackface hands, that he found me intimidating and scary and that's why he lied.

Luvvie: Which is the dog-whistle that Black women and Black people get everywhere by fragile white people. As if you were going to punch him in the face or something.

Gabrielle: I'm like, "I confronted you with the truth and you lied to me, and then your excuse for lying to me about the truth, and that you just exposed 4000 people in the audience to racism on purpose, was to lie, and then later your excuse is that you found me intimidating?"

Luvvie: You can't get on any set that Simon Cowell is on, where he is screaming at the top of his lungs because he doesn't like how somebody's tone or key, as they're singing a song, is. That's wild to me.

Gabrielle: When your whole brand is based off of negativity and delivering those hard truths that you think that people don't want to hear or just it's too rude to say, if that is your whole brand, then this should have been the perfect opportunity and the perfect place to point out every single thing, which I did. Every day, I would be like, "This, this, this, this, this, this and this. You didn't ask for



preferred pronouns, you seem to be having an issue with an act singing in Spanish. You're changing the goalposts for this 10-year-old Black rapper versus some of the younger white contestants," I called out every single thing. But, at the same time, I was wildly successful at my job.

So I thought, as I'm going to stay true to myself and make sure that we are pointing out all the problematic things on this set and in the program, including but not limited to Jay Leno, who told a wildly racist joke about a picture of Simon Cowell and his dogs, saying that that picture looked like something on the menu at a Korean restaurant.

Luvvie: Brah!

Gabrielle: And one thing I hadn't shared with anyone, but ... Because it just felt like ... I didn't know what to do with it, was Simon's reaction to Jay Leno's joke was, "Well, Gab, you know I found that joke offensive too." I was like, "Okay." And he said, "Because you know how much I love dogs."

And I thought ... because he said, "Well, you're a dog lover," and I was like, "Yeah, I've got five dogs and I would never compare them to a human being and I would never put whole ass groups of people ahead of animals." What the fuck? And I thought, "Maybe I misunderstood, maybe he didn't mean exactly ... Maybe he just worded it wrong." A couple weeks ago, his attorney called my attorney and said, "Yeah, you know, because Simon is still ... I mean, he's really upset about that Jay Leno joke because you know what a dog lover he is." They double-down on that! So it's like ... I heard it exactly as they meant it.

And his reaction is so ... it's part of the violence that we are seeing against Asian Americans, it's being encouraged by our president and by his supporters, this anti-Asian sentiment that is leading to violence, that's leading to trauma, that's leading to harm. And I got to call a thing a thing, because when Jay Leno said that, you can never predict what somebody is going to do, right?

Luvvie: Right!

Gabrielle: But you can be very clear about your reaction to it as a corporation. And as a corporation, you did nothing. You didn't care about the racism that you exposed everyone to. And we know you didn't care because you had Jay Leno back later in the season. What message do you think the takeaway is? So when you're looking at the totality, when they decided to not renew my contract and-

Luvvie: Right.

Gabrielle: You know, we thought that there was a chance that that may happen, even though, through all of this, reporting everything ... I mean, there's so many incidents ... I still was the number one judge on the show, the number one talent on the show, the number one talent on NBC, as a whole ass network, and the number one talent on network television all summer. What I brought to the table is undeniable, but because I pointed out every single problematic thing, they said I didn't have chemistry.

So how do I have chemistry with the boss who refuses to follow the law? How do I have chemistry when you have a woman that did blackface? How do you have chemistry? I did the best I could, I still was friendly, but they believe that asking for accountability means that you can't have chemistry. So-

Luvvie: How do have chemistry with racists? Basically, they were asking you to have chemistry with racists and you did not do that job. That is the thing you failed at, not having chemistry with racists.

Gabrielle: And when you have the head of the network, during an open investigation into racial discrimination and all kinds of discrimination, during an open investigation that they asked for and they paid for, you have that same man calling my agent and threatening me, saying, "Gabrielle better watch who she calls a racist," in the middle of an open investigation into racism claims?

Luvvie: Oh, they're bold.

Gabrielle: Well, a hit dog will holler and you're hollering ...

Luvvie: They were yelping.

Gabrielle: Like, "I'm hearing you wail from down the street." And their answer to that wasn't that it never happened. It's, "Well, he didn't threaten you directly."

Luvvie: Yo!

Gabrielle: That was their actual response in the media, was that the head of their network didn't threaten me directly. Not that it didn't happen, it's that he didn't threaten me directly. So if everyone at NBC, Universal, Comcast is aware of this investigation and aware that the guy that is in charge of everything, and careers ... is tampering with, influencing, threatening during an open investigation and he is still protected, it shows you where your priorities are. And it shows you ... If you're willing to do this to me, me who ... I have the resources to fight, I have the platform to fight, I have the support of my community and my family, I have a husband who has an even bigger platform and is even more famous and has even more money, if you're so openly and callously ... and casually doing this to me, how many people have been railroaded? Who just didn't speak up? And this is after I'm speaking up about these things! You're still trying to do this stuff.

And it's not right. And if this is ... if this is how I go out, then ... Listen, I've had a great career, I have so much to be proud of, and if companies don't want to work with me because I'm trying to make your company better, and safer, and more equitable ... Because I definitely wanted to just come to the job, eat my fucking corn nuts, watch some jugglers, play with my baby, and call it a day! But no, because as Black folks in any job, we can't just have one job, we got to be racial Google, we got to be-

Luvvie: We got to chaperone!

Gabrielle: We got to chaperone, we got to watch ... And because I have the privilege that I have, when things would go wrong, they were like, "Gab, are you going to bring it up?" And I'm like, "Yes, I will."

Luvvie: But here's the thing, it's so not fair! And it's not fair because the truth tellers, who are often Black women, are always the ones people are looking at, "So, you're going to help fix it?" How about you?! How about you?! What about the day when you feel like being quiet? What about the day where you're like, "You know what, I'm going to sit this out. I'm going to let y'all have it today." On those days, who saves us? Because-

Gabrielle: When does the cavalry arrive-

Luvvie: For us.

Gabrielle: ... in those instances? On the days where I'm ... you know, I don't have it.

Luvvie: Because that's also what happens, that ... Gabby was not the only Black person on that set. Okay? When this whole thing came out, the question everybody was asking was, "Oh, wasn't Terry Crews also on that? Was it a problem?" And what did Terry say in the news? He was like, "I never noticed any of this stuff," basically throwing you under the bus, and now we're all seeing Terry Crews is a whole fool, like a whole entire fool. So the cavalry that should have been there to support you, which you would think would be the other Black person, did not support you. For you, how was that? How did you navigate that as it's going down?

Gabrielle: Well, as it was going down, he ... in fairness, is the host. So he is in a separate part of where we are on the stage and what not, his job is a little different. But there were plenty of times where I was like, "Yo, what the fuck?" And he was like, "Yeah, man ... " But never really like ...

Luvvie: He ain't saying nothing.

Gabrielle: No, he was never that guy where you could really commiserate with, or chop it up with, or really feel a sense of protection or care in that kind of way. And this is, mind you, after I was one of the first people of note to support him when he came out about his sexual assault, and I believed him then, I believe him now. And the work that I'm trying to do to make these spaces more fair and equitable and safe for everybody, will benefit him as someone who gets three checks from NBC, which I assume is what's part of his motivation is, I guess. Because, again, being fired is definitely on the table, it's not that you won't be fired because I was. And maybe after watching me be fired after having so much success was the lesson that they wanted everyone to learn. And he got that lesson loud and clear, and they were like, "But we'll give you a couple of more checks. You just say this, this, and this."

When they sent him out on that press tour to discredit me, he didn't have to do that ... during the investigation. You could have told the truth about the things that you saw ... that we were all sitting there for. I wish that Terry Crews was the only ... "all skinfolk ain't kinfolk" I've dealt with in my career, in my 25 years, but he's not. It's just, in this time of this reckoning, and with social media and ... You do have the option of just sitting there and eating your cereal and-

Luvvie: And eating your food!

Gabrielle: ... let the people ... Eat your food and mind your business and let people do the work that will benefit you. Because for a lot of productions, they bring on Black talent because they believe that Black talent will be able to bring in a Black audience, but if you do not bring in a Black audience or if you have sold the Black community down the river, you actually don't serve a purpose. So if you don't think that you will be replaced by the next ... you know, [crosstalk 00:40:17] negro ...

Luvvie: Oh man!

Gabrielle: You are so sadly mistaken if you think your checks and your spot are secure.

Luvvie: So, now how are you drawing your lines and .... what are you determining is your yes factor? What projects are you, in good faith, been able to say yes to? What are you looking out for, knowing that you've been in these types of fires?

Gabrielle: I don't want to work with anybody who is problematic. And you know, unfortunately I don't have access to a whole call sheet from ... You know who the directors are, the bigger producers, the bigger name talent. I can check out those people to make sure that I'm not working ... I'm not going into a project and working with problematic people and hoping for the best. If something disrupts my peace, my joy, and my grace, it is not for me.

I've never had a feeling of just darkness on a job and I've worked in some fucked up productions in my day. I've seen it all, I've experienced it all, but nothing felt like how me and the team that I brought on to AGT felt every day. You could feel it. You could see us ... There was a sense of defeat, because that's that insidious nature of racism.

Luvvie: Yep!

Gabrielle: A lot of folks really feel like racism, and I used this analogy earlier today, is like a mosquito bite. You know, yeah, you want to kind of avoid it but if it happens, it's like it's not that big of a deal. And even if it gets infected, it's not going to kill you. It's more of an annoyance. And all you have to do is just put bug spray on. And bug spray is respectability politics, "If you just do this, if you just sound like this, if you just pull your pants up, if you just live here, if you just go to this school, if you just have this resume," and it's fool's gold ... just like bug repellent. If a mosquito really wants to bite your ass, it will.

Luvvie: Yes.

Gabrielle: And just like if a racist really wants to be racist to you, they will.

Luvvie: Yes.

Gabrielle: And it's not going to be racially tinged, or all those weird words ... phrases that people come up [crosstalk 00:42:41].

Luvvie: Microaggressions. Microaggressions are big too.

Gabrielle: I mean like, "racially charged", "racially tinged." No, it's racism! It's racist. But they feel like ... They don't really understand the trauma and the harm caused. If they're not burning a cross on your lawn ... you know what I mean?

Luvvie: Right.

Gabrielle: Or you're wearing a sheet, or screaming nigger with the hard E-R, waving a confederate flag, people feel like, "Oh, no, I'm an ally!" And it's like, "Mm, you are still practicing anti-Black racism and you are benefiting from white supremacy. And you have not checked your privilege, you have actually let it run amok." At least those overt ass racist you can see a mile away, but the insidious nature of racism that's practiced and performed by so-called allies, where they will literally make you think you're going crazy, and it's those microaggressions that feel like death by a thousand cuts. Because it's slow and every one is painful but they add up to a gushing wound that you can't put a bandaid on.

Luvvie: Facts. Facts.

Gabrielle: Yeah. I just don't think white folks really have a real understanding of the harm and the trauma that racism causes.

Luvvie: Yeah. It's deep. It is layers deep and we're in this moment of reckoning that's really fascinating because it also feels like some are finally starting to understand, like, "Yeah, I've been a shit show, I got to fix this shit." And hopefully the industry is like ... Hopefully, we are in a moment that's not just a moment, it's like beyond now, in the quarantine of it all.

Let's talk about the stuff that does bring you some peace. Kaavia James is a star for being the most ... Shady Baby is everything, okay? And you just came out with a book. [Welcome to the Party](#). [crosstalk 00:44:47].

Gabrielle: Yes, [Welcome to the Party](#) about us waiting with bated breath for her arrival, and wanting to create some literature for our young kids, to show that babies don't always arrive in the same way. But they can all be celebrated in the same way and we can all look forward to them in the same kind of way without creating images of a pregnant mother or a trip to the hospital. Because Kaav was born via a gestational carrier, a surrogate, and we have ... In our family, my mom adopted three children as infants who are now teens and preteens, but there's not literature that showcases her family and that families are formed in all different kinds of ways. So kind of create these books and these images just to give people an opening to have different kinds of conversations, whether you have a family like that, or whether your kids go to school with children whose families were created a little differently than theirs.

Luvvie: You have a beautiful blended family and you've shown what motherhood looks like in a lot of different forms. As a step mom, as a mom, talking through your experience with pregnancy and all the things that came with that for you, and it's deeply important work. You also are now, as a step-mom to Zaya, having to be a voice for Zaya who's trans.

Gabrielle: Yes.

Luvvie: How have you been navigating these new spaces? You are in such an intersection of many different things as a mom, how are you being deeply protective of ... of the head?

Gabrielle: Well, first I had to humble myself and admit that I don't know shit. And I had to reach out to everyone that I could to educate myself, fast in a hurry. I thought I was very educated. Not so much. I had to learn a lot. I had to unlearn a lot. I had to check my own biases and views. I had to challenge anyone that was going to come in contact with Zaya. We were not giving access to anyone that would threaten the safety and the sanctity of our home. Either you got with the program, you humbled yourself, you educated yourself, and you are ready to embrace our whole family, or you don't have access to any of our family.

My husband's mother, who's a pastor, when Zaya ... she says she's come out a number of times, but as Zaya has come out, she said ... Mama Wade, Pastor Wade, was like, "I had members of my own church want me to speak ill of my grandchild. And I refused. God didn't put me on this earth," I'm speaking as Mama Wade, "God didn't put me on this earth to preach the word to cast anyone out. We are all created in God's image, all of us. And I'm not going to pick and choose parts of the Bible to cast out one of my own."

And so she, as an older person, as a member of the clergy, humbled herself and educated herself. And she said, "You know, I'm sure I lost members, but I also gained some. But, in that process, gained the peace that comes with truly loving someone with your whole heart and unconditionally." We were all talking over the weekend, and we were saying like, "What do people really want us to do with our child, but love her?" You know, like send her to a conversion therapy or whatever? What-

Luvvie: Some parents-

Gabrielle: Like, "Do you not want us to nurture her and love her and embrace all of her exactly as she is, and create access to her community and be real allies, and stand tall and take the arrows to protect not just our baby but a lot of babies."

Luvvie: Yeah.

Gabrielle: You know? And it's been a little uncomfortable for us, we're like, "What? We're just loving our baby the same way we love all the other kids." And people were like, "No. There's a lot of people who just don't." And we had to, again, humble ourselves and be like, "If you need to see us loving our child and how that looks, how loving your trans child or your queer child or your gay child looks, what that actually looks like, we will provide an example." And we've heard from parents who are like, "I didn't know what to do!" And we're like, "Love them?"

Luvvie: Just love them and ask them questions-

Gabrielle: And they were like, "Yeah, but I just feel like ... " And a lot of people what, when you see the things that people say about our family, they somehow think having a child in the LGBTQ+ community is somehow a knock on them. Like there's something wrong with you that you have

a child that is in the LGBTQ+ community, and it's like, "Nope, nope!" Like, "Nope!" That's just who she is, and that's just who they are, and it is our job to love and protect and guide and nurture all of our babies because they all deserve love. But our most marginalized ... family, and I'm saying family as our community, our babies are dying, they're being murdered at disproportionate rate, and we have to act radically to save them!

And we do, all of us, a disservice by eliminating people from our protection and from our love and from our collective embrace.

Luvvie: Zaya is blessed to be blessed by parents and the community of people who are like, "We love you unconditionally." Like, this is the verb of what love looks like. It's not just cute family photos, it's the fact that you guys are also publicly modeling this revolutionary love, and there are no other really prominent families who are Black, currently, who are showing this. There's only two families I can think of who show what it looks like to raise kids without trying to put our things on them, and I feel like it's you and Dwayne, and Will and Jada ... who's like, we're letting our kids be our kids, that means they're going to be fully themselves, whatever that comes with, and we will support them. And I think that's really important, because it allows us to break out of the mold, that a lot of us are dealing with trauma because our parents put themselves on us, on our backs, and we're carrying that.

So I am encouraged to ... whenever I see ... Because I've also met Zaya and Zaya is brilliant and dynamic and mature and still a child and full of imagination, which shows you that Zaya is free, right?

Gabrielle: Free.

Luvvie: Zaya is free! And that is, I think, the ultimate gift of what you can give to your kids, you've given Zaya freedom. And that's massive, and I'm thankful to watch it from afar and see the photos, and I'll be stanning between Kaav's side-eye, and Zaya, who is now a budding photographer, it's a joy to see and we need joy right now, more than-

Gabrielle: We need all the joy, we need all the joy. And I think part of that comes from us as parents believing that our children are our possessions.

Luvvie: There it is!

Gabrielle: That we own them.

Luvvie: Yeah!

Gabrielle: And while, yes, in a lot of instances, your children are a reflection of you ... but they're also their own people and you have to allow them to be their own people. Love them, guide them, but they are their own people, and they don't need to be mini-versions of you to be safe or loved or successful or okay. They can make decisions that you wouldn't make, they can want careers that you would never consider valid. They could ... be great students when you weren't a great student. They could be bad students when you were a great student. It could be any host of things. And the more you try to grab on, the more they want to get away from you.

And if you allow ... Our kids are all going to be mannerable and respectful, but they're going to be who they are. And people are like ... Somebody said today, "Why doesn't that baby ever have any bows in her hair?!" Or [inaudible 00:54:27].

Luvvie: What is wrong with these people?! What is wrong with people?

Gabrielle: I was like, "A. Look at the picture before. She had a big ass bow in the middle of her head." But this idea of like, "We have to constantly police the bodies of our children," and I'm not talking about like ... from predators, you know, keeping them off of ... you know, communicating with predators. We're talking about, "Girls need to act this way. Boys need to act this way. There is one way to perform femininity. There's one way to perform masculinity. And this is how it has to look. Everything has to be binary, everything has to be ... " And it's like "Ah!"

Kaavia James is going to look however Kaavia James feels like looking. Some days, she's like, "Where's my brush?" Some days, she has her drop-crotch joggers on, and some days she has a frilly dress that looks like a wedding gown. She chooses what she is going to put on and as long as it's right for the weather, I don't care! These are not the battles I'm fighting.

Luvvie: Exactly!

Gabrielle: Somebody was like, "What's your biggest challenge with Zaya?" And I was like, "Ugh! That she loves *Frasier*."

Luvvie: And you think *Frasier* is wildly boring!

Gabrielle: Well, I want her to watch more Black shows! And they were, "That's the biggest challenge?" I'm like-

Luvvie: Yes!

Gabrielle: "Yeah, that is ... " I mean, really just trying to insert more Black authors and creators into her constant stream of books and films and TV shows that she watches. Yeah, that's really it! Otherwise, she's a dream.

Luvvie: Zaya old enough to read I'm Judging You? Hmm, let me think ... Maybe. But the next book she'll be old enough to read because that one is actually ... It's called The Fear-Fighter Manual, so that one would be good for Zaya to read. Okay, [crosstalk 00:56:32], I cannot let you leave without asking the thing that everybody needs to know, because everybody's like, "Brah ... how is it that Gabby hasn't aged in 25 years?" What is the skincare routine? I need to know.

Gabrielle: This. This right here.

Luvvie: Water? Damn!

Gabrielle: I started doing this. I started drinking a gallon of water every day ... around the time I got divorced, so like mid-30s.



Luvvie: Okay.

Gabrielle: Just feeling like shit, just feeling unlovable, feeling unworthy. It just was like ... I wanted a dramatic change in my life and I had all these things that happened all at once. And the woman I was working with at the time, AJ Johnson, got me started on a gallon of water a day. Part of it is just flushing you up, flooding you out, but it almost like created more space in my body for ... things that were better for my body.

Luvvie: Okay.

Gabrielle: So started changing my diet. I started changing my diet. So instead of just eating the things that kind of brought me joy from my childhood, I started eating food for my hormones and my body today, and how I wanted to feel and my energy levels. And then like in the last three years I started ... I went gluten-free and dairy-free, because I was having adult acne and I had hair loss, and I would wake up and I looked like I was like six months pregnant. I was like, "What the fuck?" And my hormones were all out of whack, so I went to a hormone specialist and was like, "Take out gluten, and dairy, alcohol, and caffeine from your diet, and see if it makes a difference."

Gabrielle: Three days in, I look like a different person. And I was like, "How about we add alcohol and caffeine back?" So I've stuck with the no-gluten and no-dairy, and that's eliminated most of my bloating and it stopped my hair loss. But yeah, it just started with reaching rock bottom. When I reached rock bottom I really changed my life, as one does. But I also have really oily skin and oily skin, while it sucks, is like embalming fluid.

Luvvie: Yes!

Gabrielle: You know what I mean? It kind of helps with like wrinkles and stuff. So, yes, you are more prone to other things, but you're going to look snatched and dewy and glowy for a long time.

Luvvie: I was hoping it was a serum you would say. Damn! Okay, so I guess drink water, eat well, which always seems like basic and but I'm like, "Yes, that'd be it." Because I'm like ... I want to stay looking ... I think I look 25 right now, who knows?

Gabrielle: You look very young. You're going to look the same for another 20 years.

Luvvie: Amen!

Gabrielle: I promise you. I promise you.

Luvvie: [crosstalk 00:59:31] when I'm 55, I'll look like this? Okay, cool, cool. So I need to drink more ... Keep drinking water.

Gabrielle: Keep drinking water. And when gluten goes south on you, as it will, [inaudible 00:59:41]-

Luvvie: But I need rice!

Gabrielle: [crosstalk 00:59:44] gluten and dairy.

Luvvie: Is rice gluten?

Gabrielle: Oh no.

Luvvie: Okay, amen. Okay, I'm African. Because being told to stop eating rice is like ... oppression. So I'm like ... as long as [crosstalk 00:59:58].

Gabrielle: No, it's a staple. It's a staple. No, like flour, like wheat, flour.

Luvvie: Okay. Okay, got it.

Gabrielle: But you would be surprised how many things ... So if you eat rice with like a sauce or like any kind of like stew type of ... meals, which I am familiar with ... of a number of different cultures, that the stew generally has some kind of gluten for thickening.

Luvvie: Ooh! Does Jollof rice have gluten in it because of the stew? I have to see this!

Gabrielle: Should I google it? You want me to google it right now?

Luvvie: Yes! Like, does Jollof rice gluten in it? Because ... listen, I'd be like, "Look, Jesus, can I just eat more rice until the end of time?" As long as I can do that-

Gabrielle: Oh my god, I think my phone ... My phone is like eavesdropping because it came right up. See?

Luvvie: [inaudible 01:00:52].

Gabrielle: Where is it? Okay. Well, there is plant-based and gluten-free recipes.

Luvvie: Okay.

Gabrielle: The easy gluten-free chicken Jollof rice is made with chicken, tomatoes, peppers and rice. But I think it's just ... I think normal ... what you're probably used to, probably has some gluten. Yeah.

Luvvie: You know what, I'm going to take that risk. You know like some people are like, "I'm going to have this one vice"? And I'll just-

Gabrielle: Oh, on the weekends, I don't care. I just eat whatever I want. I eat all the dairy and I have terrible gas. And D was like, "If you don't stop eating ice cream [crosstalk 01:01:29]!" He was like, "Your-

Luvvie: He's like, "[crosstalk 01:01:32]."

Gabrielle: ... lactose intolerant farts are going to kill me." Yeah, on the weekends, I don't care. I just eat whatever and then I go back, five ... So Monday through Friday, I try to be reasonable, but I love wine, I love tequila. I'm starting to love gin. I don't know where that came from, I don't know if

I'm turning into an old person ... because my mom likes gin. I was like, "Yeah, mom, let's have some gin."

Luvvie: And you're like, "I don't know who I am."

Gabrielle: I kind of like it! [crosstalk 01:01:59] drinking Crown, I was like, "You are becoming old Negro Jim, right before my eyes. When did you start drinking Crown?"

Luvvie: My husband-

Gabrielle: And he was like, "I started drinking ... " With my dad!

Luvvie: Oh!

Gabrielle: Bonding with my parents.

Luvvie: See, that's what happens. My husband drink Bourbon and Scotch, and he now plays golf. I was like, "You are old and washed, officially. You're officially old and washed." And he goes golfing like twice a week. He has a whole golf wardrobe. I don't understand.

Gabrielle: Oh yeah! No, if there was Fashion Nova Men Golf, he would be the spokesperson. Like two or three years ago, he got introduced to golf and is now obsessed. He's got five clubs, five bags ... club? I don't know [crosstalk 01:02:47], bags of clubs, whatever. I'm like, "Why do you need so many clubs?" And he was like, "Well, you know, like on vacation." I'm like, "Okay, that's two." I was like, "Sir, stop."

Gabrielle: But he gets these care packages of golf clothes, so he's out on the course, doing like ... like Thank You videos for the golf clothes.

Luvvie: D's become an influencer? A golf influencer?

Gabrielle: A golf influencer.

Luvvie: I think it's a rite of passage for Black men in like ... late-30s, to just become golf aficionados. He'd be taking golf lessons. I'm like, "Who are you? What is this? Tiger?"

Gabrielle: Oh yeah! He's out here, he puts a little cup, and he has his putter and ...

Luvvie: [inaudible 01:03:44].

Gabrielle: It's a whole thing, it's a whole thing.

Luvvie: It's a whole thing. I'm like, "Bless it. Good luck and Godspeed. The shorts look good on you. I like those." But ... yeah.

Gabrielle: He looks like if Steve Harvey had a golf line, like if Jalen Rose had a golf line, like the most bright ... He looks like a pack of Skittles on the golf course. Like it'll be an all-orange ... monochromatic golf ensemble, like a lime green ...

Luvvie: Oh my God!

Gabrielle: [crosstalk 01:04:14], "Way to go, baby. They're not going to miss you. They weren't going to miss you before, but [crosstalk 01:04:17] they're really not going to miss you now."

Luvvie: But especially not now!

Gabrielle: Especially [crosstalk 01:04:22].

Luvvie: What is your self-care routine in this dumpster fire world that we find ourselves in right now?

Gabrielle: What do I do? I read. I lock myself in the bathroom. I shouldn't say I lock myself in and I'm more lock them out. And I just commit to like a chapter every bathroom visit and that just kind of ... brings me ... kind of down, a little bit. I'm reading *Clap When You Land*.

Luvvie: I haven't read that yet.

Gabrielle: No? Yeah, I got *Vanishing Half*.

Luvvie: Ooh, I have that! [crosstalk 01:04:57].

Gabrielle: Yeah.

Luvvie: Have you read *Untamed* by Glennon Doyle?

Gabrielle: No. Wait! I feel like I did. Wait, hold on. Let me Google the cover.

Luvvie: Pull up the cover! *Untamed*.

Gabrielle: It feels-

Luvvie: That's another one, you [crosstalk 01:05:11].

Gabrielle: When did it come out, though? I feel like it's not-

Luvvie: It just came out in March.

Gabrielle: I think I bought it, but I haven't read it yet.

Luvvie: Oh man, there's some good books right now! There's some good books coming out right now.

Gabrielle: Yeah. I have it, but I haven't read it. Haven't read it yet. That was a good one?

Luvvie: Oh it's a good one!

Gabrielle: It's nonfiction or a fiction?

Luvvie: Nonfiction series of essays, because Glennon ... Basically, Glennon is a New York Times bestselling author, who ... the week after she dropped her book about her marriage ... basically said her marriage is over and she's now LGBT, she's now a lesbian, and how it basically transformed her life and how her making this massive shift to a very white evangelical audience of hers ... kind of like changed her life and just allowed her to just continue to be this untamed person. It's amazing.

Gabrielle: Oh, shit. Yeah, no, I have to read it. I mean, it's in my stack. I'm so behind and I realized ... when I just felt a bit of out of control in the sense of ... There's something about the quarantine and the daily onslaught of the torture and killing of Black bodies, that my PTSD was kind of running amok. It just sort of took over and I couldn't sleep. I was just eating for comfort, like non-stop, and prone to crying. But like extreme anxiety, didn't leave the house, didn't feel calm. I still have not felt super comfortable leaving the house. But I was just on 10 and when I was talking to my therapist, which I'm a big proponent of-

Luvvie: Amen!

Gabrielle: ... she was like, "Well, what has changed about what you normally do, aside from talking to me?" And I was like ... I kind of was going through my checklist, and I was like, "Damn, I stopped reading." It's like reading for me is my peace, my joy, and my grace. It allows me to breathe, it allows me to think, it allows me to slow my breathing down, and calm myself. Yeah, so I just kind of ... Just being on my phone non-stop, during this pandemic, because you feel like, "If I'm not on my phone at all times, there's going to be a bunch of more killings and I'm going to ... You never want to be uninformed and ... "

Luvvie: And then we find ourselves deeply overwhelmed, in a corner, rocking back and forth.

Gabrielle: Exactly.

Luvvie: So you unplug to read? Okay. I miss ... getting my eyebrows done and I need a manicure and pedicure. So, I'm-

Gabrielle: Oh, yeah! I don't ...

Luvvie: I'm like, at this point, it's the point of shame. No, like you are amazing! You've been in this industry for a long time, you've evolved, you've maintained your grounding even as you've gone through all of these crazy moments, a lot of them have been public, and you've handled it with so much grace. And I am such a huge fan and I have such a deep respect for who you are as a person as you show up as a proud Black woman who is always like, "I will be the troublemaker here, but it's for the greater good." So thank you for just being you.

Gabrielle: Thank you. Thank you for being nice! It's like when you meet ... When you're a fan of somebody and you meet them, and you're like, "Please be everything I made you in my head!" Like, "Please

be dope and amazing!" And you were beyond dope and amazing, and not just to me, to my whole family and I will never forget that. So, thank you.

Luvvie: It is my absolute pleasure and just ... you encouraged me to continue troublemaking. And just know we still support you, we stand for you, and we're side-eyeing some people ... who you've already told people to side-eye, but they didn't really believe before. But the truth is always going to come out, so we're going to stand on truth. Continue standing on truth.

Gabrielle: That's all we have.

Luvvie: That's all we got!

Gabrielle: That's all we have.

Luvvie: Thank you for taking time to join me on this podcast, on Rants. This is so dope! I'm like, "Oh my god!"

Gabrielle: [crosstalk 01:09:52]. Thank you for having me!

Luvvie: [crosstalk 01:09:52] so cool, this is-

Gabrielle: Finally, we did it!

Luvvie: ... so cool! Thank you for having me.

Shout out to Gabrielle Union for joining me on this episode of Rants and Randomness. She's so dope! She's so dope, y'all. Please follow her on social media. You definitely want to follow her on Instagram – she's @gabunion. And she's on Twitter at @itsgabrielleu.

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