

The Dark Side of Shane Dawson

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A closer look at the rise and fall of
Youtube's "grandpa" and if he can rise again.

Who Is Shane Dawson?

On June 26, 2020, Shane Dawson posted a video on his Youtube channel announcing his necessary break from social media, but let's backtrack. Dawson began his channel on March 10th of 2008 titling his channel "ShaneDawsonTV" where he posted parodies of music videos and skits with his friends. Since then, Shane Dawson has created a variety of channels each dedicated to their own individual format. These channels include "ShaneDawsonTV", "ShaneDawsonTV2" (now called "Human Emoji"), "ShaneGlossin" (a beauty channel), and his primary channel as of 2010 titled "Shane". Dawson's primary channel is what he has seen the most success on and at its peak before his cancellation by the internet, it totaled at over 23 million subscribers. While his channel has lost subscribers, Shane's channel still has about 20 million subscribers post-internet downfall. Shane Dawson was among the first wave of content creators to find fame via the platform and was once deemed the king of Youtube. He started his career with skits that relied heavily on shock value and raunchy humor. Shane then began to create and publish a variety of videos including vlogs, conspiracy theories, funny food videos, and then transcended his content into the world of docu-series. Dawson's docu-series became a viral hit as he led cancelled influencers through their mistakes and helped redeem them online. It was because of his wise advice that piloted the redemption train for these influencers that moved Shane from being the king of Youtube to being called the grandpa of Youtube. But just as he was scaling the hearts of many, Shane Dawson fell fatally.

The First Crack

As previously mentioned, Shane Dawson's first Youtube channel began in 2008 where he posted skits around his original characters. These characters, however, were centered around racially insensitive and vastly inappropriate jokes. Most prominently, Shane Dawson often played characters like Nikki Minaj, Will Smith's character in Fresh Prince of Bel-Air, Wendy Williams, and made up his own characters that were black and communicated that by using blackface. Additionally, Shane had recorded and put out videos of him using the N-word in his skits. On top of oppressing the black community, Shane also made offensive and hateful jokes about the Asian and Mexican communities. Most if not all of these videos that contained incredibly harmful narratives were posted between the years 2008 and 2010. In 2014, the Youtube community pushed back on a separate creator's prank video that centered around sexual assault. While Shane was unaffiliated with this content, this advocacy for backlash on creators who have posted offensive content caused large creators to draw attention to Shane's videos from the past. This pushed Shane to post his first apology video on September 24th, 2014. In this video, Dawson says that while he had heard of the term blackface, he was unaware of the history behind it or what it truly meant. He tells his viewers that he cares too much about them to have taught them that blackface is an acceptable way to make a joke. Dawson continues to express his sincere apology throughout the video and ends it by directly apologizing to some Twitter users who were offended by his actions. After this apology video, Shane took down most of the videos that contained cruel and harmful jokes from his channel "ShaneDawsonTV" and the channel was pushed aside and rarely posted on again. Despite the backlash on Shane's past behavior, most people hadn't seen the videos he was referring to or had just become a fan of his and paid no mind to the accusations and follow-up apology. Because of this, Shane continued to rise to fame and his platform grew more and more.

Dawson's Second Offense

On the growing list of Shane Dawson's crude and unsettling behavior is his jokes about pedophilia. In a deleted 2010 video posted by Shane Dawson, he is seen acting out a pedophilic character who appears to be (fake) masturbating to a promotional poster of then 11-year-old Willow Smith and sexualizing the lyrics to her debut song, "Whip My Hair". While there is not much context to the clip that can be found today, Shane's inexcusable and uncomfortable attempt to sexualize a minor is one among many jokes surrounding pedophilia that Shane has made in the past. Another clip, this time from Dawson's podcast in 2013, surrounds the idea of pedophilia as well. In the snippet from the podcast, Shane discusses how he met a 6-year-old girl who had 125 thousand followers and describes her as "sexy." He then goes on to say how he doesn't understand how pedophilia, when not physical, isn't similar to any other fetish. Furthermore, he went on to say, "I went to Google and I didn't want to see child porn. I just wanted to see, let me pretend I'm a pedophile for a second. So I typed in naked baby. First of all, I don't understand why anybody would be turned on by that. But, they were sexy. I'm kidding." The failed joke made his show co-host say that she wouldn't comment or talk about that through hesitant laughter because she's afraid they'll go to jail. In 2018, Shane responded to the controversy by stating, "I am sorry that these offensive jokes are making people uncomfortable, but also it's very out of context. When you listen to the full thing, it's still creepy and bad jokes, but it is not me being a pedophile... I'm proud that I've grown up. I'm proud that I don't make crazy jokes anymore." Dawson also makes a note in the video that he had been molested as a child and his jokes surrounding the topic were his form of coping. The prior incidents have been the most prominent among Shane's horrifying take on pedophilia jokes, but there have been more incidents of them from his past.

Notable Rumours

Another notable moment from Shane Dawson's cancellation tour is the infamous "Shane had sex with his cat" rumor. The rumor resurfaced in 2020 nearly six years after the distasteful joke was made by Dawson on, you guessed it, his podcast. Dawson's joke that sparked this supposed rumor was, "One time I laid my cat down on her back. I moved her little chicken legs spread open or whatever. I came all over the cat. It was like my first sexual experience. I was also like 19." In the aftermath of the quote going viral on Twitter Dawson went on the platform to issue an apology. He began by clarifying that he never had any sexual contact with his cat in any form and that the story was "fake and based on a dumb awful sketch idea I had years ago that I never made (THANK GOD) and when the opportunity came up for a funny moment in the podcast I told it as if it was a real story which was DISGUSTING and VERY VERY DUMB." Dawson then went on to say that his goal with the podcast and his old videos was to tell shocking stories that would make people laugh and scream. He states that he is so embarrassed and hates himself for these awful jokes. Finally, Dawson notes in his series of tweets referring to the incident that he has learned his lesson over and over again and is now proud of his ability to be funny and entertaining on his own without the shock factor.

Dawson In Drama

Last but certainly not least is Shane Dawson's controversial involvement in the Youtube beauty community drama that fans dubbed as "Dramageddon 2.0." While this is not amidst the worst of Shane Dawson's internet crimes, his involvement in the situation did not do him any favors. To briefly summarize the situation, Shane Dawson released a mini docu-series with a friend, colleague, and one of the wealthiest and most famous celebrities to come out of the internet, Jeffree Star. The Youtube series documents Shane's endeavors into the beauty community and the result was two eyeshadow palettes and six lipsticks. Through Shane's friendship with Jeffree Star and recent involvement in the beauty industry, Shane was dragged into the most explosive drama to happen on the internet. People began to believe that Shane was the mastermind behind all of the drama and that he planned it to build hype around his palette. However, once again Dawson took to Twitter to address all of the drama with a lengthy notes app statement saying that he had nothing to do with the drama and that he no longer wants to be a part of the beauty community for the reason that it is full of narcissistic, power and money hungry, toxic people. He leaves it saying to his followers that they can "enjoy the gurus and the circus". The drama left Shane under the spotlight in a negative way, but it feels more pressing to address the previously mentioned behaviors.

Shane's Infamous



Apology Videos

An Analysis

Apology

#1

If you know anything about Youtube controversies, you would know that there is almost always an apology video that follows soon after. With all of Shane's horrible mistakes throughout the last thirteen years on the internet, Shane has posted three major apology videos that are still up today. His first apology video is his first video posted on his primary Youtube channel. Whether or not there were videos posted on the account beforehand is unclear. The apology was posted on September 24th, 2014, and began with Dawson stating that he didn't know how to approach the video so he didn't write or plan it out so that he could speak from the heart. Since I have already gone over the content of this apology video I will leave it with my final thoughts. I believe that the video doesn't reflect a sincere apology that shows Shane acknowledging how harmful and horrible the instances of his doing blackface were. Rather, the video appears to me like Shane saw his platform crumbling from his past and read comments and blogs that hurt him. Instead of apologizing and claiming responsibility for his wrongdoings, Shane apologizes to make the guilt and pain stop for himself. Overall, not his best apology.

Apology

#2

Shane Dawson's second apology video was posted on January 10th, 2018. This apology video follows the accusations that Shane is a pedophile. The video begins with him playing the aforementioned podcast clip and is immediately followed by him yelling into the camera "I am not a f***ing pedophile!" Once again Shane says that he's sorry, but not for the right reason and not for the people that he's hurt. Instead, Shane starts his apology by saying that he's sorry that he made "s***ty jokes 6 years ago" and that he's sorry that he was so insecure that he had to play this shock value character. Dawson goes on to say that he acknowledges that his so-called jokes from his early career days were offensive and horrible and that the podcast clip was cut to make him look worse. He claims that if you had listened to the whole thing you would have heard about the experience that he had called "very creepy" and not mistaken his failed jokes for the truth. Dawson goes on to give his audience the full context to the podcast clip and reminds his audience that the viral clip was edited to cause his career damage. Shane also reminds his viewers and loyal fans that this is such a triggering accusation for him as he was molested as a child and has been publicly passionate about shining light on how horrible pedophilia is. To close the video, Shane apologizes to the people and families that the clip offended and triggered, saying that he's triggered by it as well. But before the video ends and after he states that he's happy that he's a changed person and that the person he is today does not find those jokes funny, Shane says that while he is sorry that this clip offended and hurt people, he is also not because the clip is missing so much context. My thoughts on this feel like a very similar reaction to Shane's first apology video. I do feel that Shane is acknowledging the way this clip may have hurt or triggered people, but he is still giving excuses and defending himself. It's a sincere video but not a sincere apology and I think that theme has come across a lot in his two apology videos.

Apology

#3

Circling back to the beginning of this paper, Shane Dawson's most recent Youtube video is titled "Taking Accountability" and was posted on June 26th, 2020. This rendition of Shane's apology follows the resurfacing of all his past mistakes. The plot twist here is that A-list celebrity family, The Smiths, became involved once seeing the distasteful joke Shane made about daughter and sister Willow Smith. However, despite this being the main reason for Shane's cancellation in 2020, he did not directly address that clip or situation in his video. I will say that Shane's third apology was much better than his first two. He appears to have acknowledged the hurt that he has caused people and truly changed in his content and in his personal life. Even so, Shane still profited off of his horrible content for years and never sought to reconcile for that. It was only years after he had been called out that he deleted his videos. After all of these allegations resurfaced and were brought to Youtube's attention, the platform demonetized all of his active channels and they are still standing by that demonetization. Dawson also didn't address The Smith family at all and still held subtle hints of defensiveness and personal pity during his apology. And while yes, I do believe that whenever he made crude attempts at jokes, that in his head, he really did think that they were coming from a place of comedy not to cause pain. I also do believe that these disgusting behaviors were a projection of the horrible and traumatic childhood that he had and he sought to disguise his insecurities in shock value humor. But that is not to say that these remarks were okay. I believe Shane Dawson knows this, but with his defensiveness and lack of effort to actually face his consequences head on, his apology fell flat for myself as a viewer and for the court of public opinion.

**Where To Go
Now?**

**My
Recommendations**

Moving Forward

The Youtuber apology has become a phenomenon on the internet. However the video comes across, the internet will always be there to rip it to shreds. It's because of this and because of how often these apologies have had to be done in the last couple of years alone, that there has become such a format to a Youtube apology. It is my opinion that Shane Dawson has given three of the worst Youtube apologies, especially for the severity of his actions. Since his last apology, Shane has not posted on Youtube and only posted once on his Instagram for the death of his dog Charlie and the comment section was disabled. However, within the past week, Dawson has posted two new Instagrams. The first of the two was a photo of him and his husband on vacation captioned, "Dads left the house" with a P.S. that followed where Shane tells his fans that he's sorry he hasn't posted a video in a long time and that he is working on his mental health and is re-evaluating his life. He promises fans that he is not abandoning his channel after 15 years of creating and closes by wishing his followers well and saying that he misses them. Shane Dawson's most recent Instagram post was published five days ago today (July 25, 2021). The post is a photo of him on his 33rd birthday holding a cake along with a funny birthday caption and a P.S. of him thanking his followers for the nice birthday wishes. Based on the court of public opinion, Shane Dawson's return to the internet is not welcomed. While I, as a previous fan of Shane's, am still sorting out my feelings about the seemingly soon return of Shane to Youtube, I as the professional, have a plan for Dawson's return to the internet.

Red Table Talk

My recommendations for Dawson's internet comeback are plans that I have made after seriously listening to the court of public opinion, the people who were seriously offended by his past "jokes", and to his most disappointed fans. The way that I see it, Shane has a few viable options if he wants to make a comeback. One way to come back would be to return to Youtube by starting to make videos again and not mentioning anything about his cancellation. Realistically, yes, Shane probably could return to the internet without addressing his controversial past and be just fine. Most likely he would, as he still does, have millions of fans and followers who just want to see his content, paying no mind to his history. While this option is viable, it is not an approach I recommend. What I do recommend is this: Shane should return to the internet first by addressing his past on none other than Jada Pinkett Smith's Red Table Talk. Now, I know that this is an intense measure to take, especially for Shane who, after watching and observing for a few years, is an insecure, introverted, "nice guy" persona. However, with such a closely related incident that directly affected the Smith family, I think that the interview would give Dawson a chance to truly explain himself and the reasons behind his foul behavior. The interview would allow Shane to address all of his harmful mistakes. I believe that having Shane confront a famous family member that was directly impacted by his actions, would further prove that Shane has changed and can claim responsibility for his past behaviors.

Donating & Coming Back

In addition to this interview, I would suggest that Shane donate a large sum of money, somewhere between 1-3 million dollars, to a few different charities. Charities such as Black Lives Matter or The Bail Project would show that Shane is attempting to reconcile with the black community. Another genre of charities that Shane should donate to is to those who are seeking counsel from traumatic childhood instances as a way to show his grappling with his ill-mannered pedophilic jokes. On top of the interview on Red Table Talk and his donations to charities that align with his mistakes, I recommend that Shane Dawson, upon his return to Youtube, addresses his controversies once more. When he does this I believe the apology should be no more than fifteen minutes and should not include any signs of defensiveness or excuses for his past. Dawson should reiterate that he is sorry for all of his mistakes and then go on to unpack why it is that he found those jokes he made to be okay. It could be a really good idea to sit down for a portion of the video, or in another video, with a Twitter user who had been trying to tell Shane about his wrongdoings since the beginning or his personal therapist. As a makeup guru and a social worker, Youtuber “Smokey Glow”, otherwise known as Hannah Rose, says in her “Dear Shane Dawson...” video, “if you truly want people to believe that you have changed and if you truly believe that you have changed, instead of being defensive about everything, defensive of the criticism you’re getting, defensive about people being upset with you, you have to take it.” She goes on to address that it does not matter how many times he has apologized because that does not absolve him from talking about it again. I strongly stand by her statement and believe that Shane should talk about his mistakes again if he wants the court of public opinion back on his side.

Donating & Coming Back

It is because of this sentiment that seems so prominent amongst the Youtube community that Shane needs to address his mistakes again before making a full return to the internet. I would also like to note that when Shane returns to Youtube that he doesn't act as if his time off was a choice. What would show real growth to his audience is if he can acknowledge that this time off was not a want, but a need for him. He needs to show that in order to make the personal changes to never hurt the online community that he is a part of again, he was forced to go offline and do the work. Another quote from Hannah Rose's video that I thought felt so valuable for Shane to hear is, "If your mental health causes you to do things that hurt other people, it's not necessarily your fault. But, it is your responsibility to fix it and make the changes so you don't continue to hurt people. It is your responsibility to try and get those things under control." Based on this intelligent reaction to Shane's defense of mental health, I think it would be incredibly smart of Shane to have sought counseling this past year, and if he hasn't to start now and make visible progress before his return. If Shane has sought counseling for his trauma, which so greatly impacted him to make a majority of his career decisions, I recommend that he discusses his progress with his therapist and unpack for his viewers why he made his poor decisions. To conclude his video Shane should announce his commitment to donating to specific causes and charities as well as showing his real change and growth by acknowledging that he profited off of systemic racism and all of his other offensive content that he produced and vow to never allow that to happen again. Overall, I believe that Shane Dawson can and will be making a comeback to Youtube. I hope he is able to go about it the right way and make great changes in both his personal and professional life.

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