

THESIS

DIGITAL NETWORK COMPOSING PRACTICES: DIGITAL REMOVAL IN THE TRY
GUYS MEDIA ECOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

DIGITAL NETWORK COMPOSING PRACTICES: DIGITAL REMOVAL IN THE TRY GUYS MEDIA ECOLOGY

With an increased accessibility and democratization of digital editing tools, recomposition has the potential to occur to any text or artifact circulated in a digital space. One form of recomposition that must further be considered is digital removal practices, including erasure, deletion, deflection, and exclusion of human or non-human objects in a digital composition. These practices have the potential to impact digitally networked composing practices and how we think about rhetoric and writing in media ecologies. This thesis focused on the intersection of digital removal practices and Ridolfo and DeVoss' theorization of *rhetorical velocity*, which considers composing for recomposition, and its co-influence on digitally network composing practices. Through a case study of The Try Guys, a group of popular YouTube personalities, this thesis explored the influence of a participatory culture in a media ecology and the role recomposition plays in a public scandal. Data was collected from The Try Guys media ecology surrounding the removal and/or revision of a former member, Ned Fulmer, and the larger medial ecology comprising The Try Guys' social media presence. These data illustrated the significant influence of participatory culture, as an influx of users associated with The Try Guys fandom contributed to the rhetorical velocity and recomposition of information and context produced by the Try Guys. Specifically, data illustrated that participatory cultures can and do shape how digital removal unfolds within and beyond digital networks. This thesis (1) emphasized the increased influence of a participatory culture on the curation and circulation of content in a media ecology and (2) explored how digital removal practices have the potential to influence how we theorize rhetorical velocity and how we must be strategic for composing as authors, writers, users, creators, inventors, teachers, and students.

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DEDICATION

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INTRODUCTION

After the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001, films, television, and other forms of media digitally revised their content that included the World Trade Center or any correlation to terrorism. As a result, some projects were edited prior to being published, delayed, or entirely scrapped (“List”). However, for these recomposed artifacts that were widely circulated across digital networks, the World Trade Center was now digitally removed and revised from the public record in an effort to respect the nation’s collective trauma, those who had died, and the overall repercussions of this national tragedy for future political, social, and cultural implications. Despite the increased circulation of these recompositions, this digital revision and erasure of the World Trade Center did not occur in print texts that discussed 9/11 though, despite its symbol as a cultural touchstone for the American economy being refashioned into one that was a reminder of a national tragedy. This example illustrates that the rhetorical salience of human and non-human objects within our cultural memory is heavily influenced by recomposition, revision, erasure, and removal – some of which is mediated through digital means.

I was only two years old when *Spider-Man* was released, and I had originally thought that version released in 2002 was technically the original. However, this film’s promotional materials were removed and recomposed for circulation due to including the World Trade Center in their trailers and posters. The film itself not only digitally removed the World Trade Center, but scenes were digitally revised in order to add new dialogue and sequences that included moments of public sentiment and pride for New York after the national tragedy (@LogicDog). I was technically alive when the original promotional materials were circulated, but I was not coherent enough to understand they were recomposed. In fact, I did not know the original film was digitally revised and removed prior to publication until I began writing this thesis; I grew up thinking Sam Raimi’s

recomposed *Spider-Man* was the original version. However, what are the implications when a recomposed version is circulated more than the original?

The media response to 9/11 marked a huge shift in recomposition being needed on a large scale in response to public sentiment and need for nationalistic identity in a time of political, social, and cultural turmoil. However, recomposition practices such as digital removal and revision have become a common response to public sentiment today, especially with the influx of participatory culture being circulated across social media platforms. In June 2022, Lizzo, a musician, received online backlash due to her usage of an ableist slur in her song “GRRRLS.” As a result, she digitally revised the song by changing her lyrics. Six weeks later when Beyoncé released her album *Renaissance*, fans also noticed she used the same ableist term in “Heated.” The vast circulation of the fan backlash that often accompanies cancel culture that erupted when Lizzo included the term, resulted in Beyoncé also digitally revising the lyrics. Although Lizzo and Beyoncé are not the first musicians to digitally revise their lyrics, the speed of their revisions and the circulation of fan discourse ultimately shows the power that participatory culture can have when it comes to recomposition. As a result, questions regarding the future of responses to scandal are important to consider as an increasing participatory culture has wide circulatory effects.

Both cases of recomposition not only showcase the increased accessibility of digital editing tools, but they also mark an increase in the circulation of these artifacts in digital networks. In this thesis, I consider digital removal and digital revision practices as a form of recomposition. While scholarship in rhetoric and composition has considered forms of recomposition such as digital revision in the context of digital composing tools such as word processing (Daiute; Eyman and Reilly; Dave and Russell), presentation programs (Eyman and Reilly; Conradie), and videos (Baepler and Reynolds), the discussion of the circulatory impacts of these recomposition practices on users and creators has been understated and underrated within the field. With the increased potential for

any user to become digital editors themselves, we must begin strategically composing for delivery and the potential for recomposition (Ridolfo and DeVoss). In particular, I argue that digital removal practices have repercussions for how we theorize digital rhetoric and how we theorize Ridolfo and DeVoss' rhetorical velocity across digital platforms. The field stands to learn about how these forms of recomposition, specifically digital removal practices that hold the potential for erasure, deletion, and deflection, affect the meaning and circulation of texts.

In this thesis, I argue that digital removal practices have the power to impact digitally networked composing practices and effectively impact how we think about rhetoric and writing in medial ecologies, especially as a participatory culture further influences these ecologies. Digital removal, revision, and other recomposed practices impact the circulation and reception of content within and across social and cultural spaces such as social media, film and television, and advertisements, especially as a participatory culture has erupted with the increasing accessibility of these digital tools for users across digital networks. In this thesis, I aim to show that digital removal practices impact how we think about composing as the rhetorical velocity (Ridolfo and DeVoss) of these recomposed texts has further increased, changing how we think about these texts as focused on content and more focused on their circulatory intensity.

Participatory Culture, Media Ecologies, and Authorship

These recomposition practices have the increased potential to occur in any digital network due to the increasing participatory culture that has erupted with the age of social media. With the increased circulation of discourse in digital spaces, a participatory culture has increased engagement and communication among users in media and other online platforms. A participatory culture includes members of a community who often feel some form of "social connection" and allows them to participate in a space that encourages "artistic expression and civic engagement" (Jenkins, et al. 24). Scholarship on participatory culture has focused on its development among fandoms

(Jenkins; Scott; Guschwan), video games (Consalvo; Jenkins), social media (Jenkins, et al.; Massanari; Lang), and even scientific fields (Pearce and Venters). Due to the potential for this networked activity, participatory culture has been discussed as a way to further develop pedagogical practices (Rheingold; Joseph and Czarnecki; Potter; Jenkins) and be incorporated as a way to discuss and take part in politics and activism (Flansburg; Delwiche; Luehrs and Heaven; Fuchs; della Porta and Mattoni; Jenkins, et al; Jenkins). In this thesis, I argue that participatory culture has evolved into forms of participatory composing that allows for users to recompose a text or artifact in a digitally networked space.

Participatory culture has also laid the groundwork for parasocial relationships to develop within platforms between users and creators. The term “parasocial interactions” was first coined by sociologists Donald Horton and Richard Wohl in 1956. In their article “Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance,” Horton and Wohl focus on how parasocial relationships develop in television. Parasocial interactions occur between an actor, who can either play themselves or a fictional role (215), and a spectator, who face their own expectations in their role as the audience (220). In the age of digital media, these parasocial relationships no longer exist between just an actor and an audience; parasocial relationships have the power to exist on any platform or any medium where a user has the ability to develop a connection with a popular figure with a large following, whether that be a celebrity, social media influencer, etc.

The increase in digital media platforms has allowed for a symbiotic interconnected relationship to form between participatory culture and parasocial relationships since they both encourage a social connection between users and creators. John R. Gallagher calls this relationship that the audience can have with a creator’s digital content “textual attention,” which allows for a writer to continue interacting with their writing or content even after it’s published (97), especially since a participatory culture encourages an audience to continue to interact with content as it

circulates. Therefore, participatory culture and parasocial relationships are able to coexist and build off each other in digital environments, fostering an influx of audience participation and the potential for them to even become creators, laying the groundwork for an influx of potential users to become digital editors and recomposers.

In the context of digital removal, digital revision, and other forms of recomposition, participatory media platforms have allowed for an influx of everyday users becoming creators. Due to an increasing technological shift, these recomposition tools have become readily available to users rather than only available to specialized and expert populations as they used to be primarily used by film, television, and media production companies. Therefore, users and audiences now have the power to contribute to media ecologies. A media ecology is not only the “interrelationships” within environments (Ong 6), but it is also how the “interaction between media and human beings gives a culture its character and... helps a culture to maintain symbolic balance” (Postman 10-11) As a result, participatory culture and parasocial relationships have the power to shape content and meaning of these circulated texts (original or recompositions) and the overall content of the media ecology due to their interactions together and contributions on the “afterlife” of these texts after they have been published (Gallagher 97). Although I will dig into the repercussions of this recomposition and afterlife of a text in my discussions of rhetorical velocity in the next section, it is important to note how these media ecologies complicate what it means to be an author when considering the potential for circulation and increased accessibility to digital composing tools.

Authorship in digital spaces has been discussed in the context of copyright (DigiRhet; Amidon, et al.), pedagogical approaches (Baepler and Reynolds; Alexander), accessibility (Spyridakis; Dolmage; Costanza-Chock), and more. However, as a participatory culture and increased accessibility of technology begins to bridge the gap between users and creators, authorship belongs to not just one creator but rather, becomes a collaboration between users, creators, and/or the

platform's data. As a result, authorship becomes a difficult term to define and assign due to the "participatory web" of social media. This web of continuous contributions is "products of coauthorship" rather than a delineated term signifying individual ownership (Amidon and Reyman 7.) In fact, the setup of these platforms allow for this collaboration to occur due to the embedded nature of the participatory culture; the underlying politics of these platforms also include inherent contributions (hidden or unhidden) that a user is always interacting with (Amidon and Reyman 111-112). Therefore, these platforms begin to facilitate a space where users are welcomed and encouraged to participatory compose, and potentially even recompose content they interact with. Assigning authorship of digital removal practices and other forms of recomposition ultimately becomes complicated when considering the development of participatory culture that has created a democratization of tools and placed users in the position to become creators. As a result, a creator's original intentions or purpose for a text has the potential to become appropriated (Ridolfo and DeVoss) or ignored as the increased circulation in digital spaces allows for users to collaborate and compose texts together. Concepts like Ridolfo and DeVoss' rhetorical velocity, as discussed in the next section, ask us to begin considering when a creator's intentionality gets lost, displaced, and/or erased, how that ultimately impacts their ownership of the text. The participatory nature of these digital spaces has created new opportunities for a collaboration amongst users and creators alike, but there are also potential negative implications when composers digitally revise, remove, remix, and even remediate versions of content circulate across these spaces and it becomes unclear who the original composition belonged to.

Remediation, Recomposition, and Rhetorical Velocity

As the increased democratization of digital removal, revision, and other forms of recomposition continue to circulate in a participatory culture, the potential for negative appropriation (Ridolfo and DeVoss) increases. Rhetorical velocity complicates the relationship these

recomposed practices have with participatory culture and authorship, which is why it is so important to consider how these processes continue to impact circulation in digital networks. This thesis seeks to explore how rhetorical velocity intersects with digital removal practices since the shifts in the culture and technology has increased the exigency to consider potential ramifications as any user now has the power to create and digitally edit these artifacts. Digital removal practices asks us to contend with the reality that we must view our compositions as more than just content. An increasing participatory culture encourages us to consider how the circulatory intensities of these recompositions is more important since content can be removed, erased, or even deflected from the original author's intentions and purposes within seconds.

Digital rhetoric and computers and writing have been indirectly discussing these recomposition practices for years in concepts such as remediation. Remediation is a concept developed by John David Bolter and Richard A. Grusin in their pivotal 1996 article that focuses on the future of digital rhetoric and digital spaces. Defined as the “representation of one medium in another,” (338), remediation has existed since the Greeks. In *Writing Space: Computers, Hypertext, and the Remediation of Print*, Bolter claims the shift from oral mythology to a more literate culture is an example of remediation (23). Although discussions of remediation often take place among the evolution of digital technologies and spaces, as will this thesis, it is important to acknowledge that remediation is an important process that examines the transformation of media and texts in general, analog or digital. Bolter and Grusin claim that “a medium is that which remediates... [and] appropriates the techniques, forms, and social significance of other media and attempts to rival or refashion them in the name of the real” (98). Refashioning or remediating is often how platforms are built; for example, TikTok's interface with shortened, video content is not a new concept but is rather, a descendant from Vine, which was also a descendant from YouTube. Media is constantly

remediating itself and as digital tools continue to become more accessible, the influx of these remediations has the power to circulate further.

In this thesis, I consider recomposition as a form of remediation. While scholarship in rhetoric and composition has considered remediation (Bolter; Bolter and Grusin), including a focus on remediation's role adapting writing instruction (Donahue; Grego and Thompson), multimodality (Bergstrom; Prior, Solberg, et al.), multiliteracies (Alexander, DePalma, et al.; Lee and Carpenter), and even teaching philosophies (Alexander, Chabot, et al., I argue for broader implications of remediation as practices for recomposing (Ridolfo and DeVoss). It is important to begin considering how touchstones such as remediation that have been discussed in our field for years echo the exigency Ridolfo and DeVoss create with strategically composing for recomposition as remediation focuses on a larger scale recomposition of media-to-media changes. For example, with the TikTok example discussed above, remediation involves the recomposition of certain elements across media shifts, whether that be the short video format or even the way the interface is designed across mediums.

It is important, however, to distinguish remediation and recomposition in conjunction with digital removal and revision. Digital removal and revision practices have the potential to be remediated practices if they are pulling from older media content and creating something new, whether that be a new version or one that completely deflects from the original content. For example, when *Spider-Man* was digitally edited after 9/11, there were promotional posters from the film that had to digitally remove the World Trade Center since that was being removed from the film as well; this example is a form of remediation as it is shifting from one media (film) to another (posters). Recomposition, however, is a more encompassing term as it does not just center on media subsuming other media; rather, it allows for aspects and iterations of artifacts to be digitally edited. In *Spider-Man*, there were scenes in the film digitally revised to include an increased nationalistic

pride for New York after 9/11; however, since this digital revision only occurred in one media, this practice is a form of recomposition rather than remediation. If the scenes were revised into another media outside of the film itself, then it would be remediation. Therefore, when I am discussing processes like digital removal and revision practices, they are considered forms of recomposition as objects and aspects are always being edited, but they are not always considered a form of remediation as they do not always include media to media changes.

Recomposition involves the editing or altering of a text after it has been composed – a “reassembled artifact” (Grinter). Recomposition has the potential to impact any element of a composition or in any context where a text or artifact is being composed. These alterations can take the form of recomposing in pedagogical spaces (such as editing a paper after composing it or recomposing a PowerPoint presentation into a video) to recomposing digital infrastructures (such as designing software for websites or adapting businesses for digital practices). Recomposition can, at times, alter the intention or purpose of the original creator or author whose composition is being reassembled (Ridolfo and DeVoss). Ultimately, recomposition, like digital removal and revision, is a form of destabilization for a fixed artifact. However, with an increase in circulation in digital spaces, recomposition has more of an arena to influence any network as the potential for recomposition can come from any user due to the increased democratization of digital tools to recompose, remove, or revise human or non-human objects.

In a time of remediation and recomposition, it is important to take Jim Porter’s digital delivery further, which considers the importance of updating the field in an increasing technological age. In “Recovering Delivery for Digital Rhetoric,” Porter uses a framework of five key concepts in order to develop a more holistic look at how we can further understand production in digital communication/spaces: body/identity, distribution/circulation, access/accessibility, interaction, and economics (208). Porter’s digital delivery has been a pivotal concept in updating rhetorical canons to

meet the field where it is currently at. Although digital delivery provides a framework to begin considering how users communicate in digital spaces, rhetorical velocity takes this concept further by considering the potential for user creations, specifically recomposition. Rhetorical velocity, due to its focus on being strategic in composing for rhetorical delivery (Ridolfo and DeVoss), has been discussed in scholarship on legal contexts (Ridolfo and Rife; Sugg) and on social media (Williams) in relation to circulation. Circulation involves the flow of texts, media, and/or information among networks and includes scholarship within pedagogy (Edbauer; Biesecker), ecologies (Edbauer; Hawk), political communication (Chaput; Laquintano and Vee; Gries; Edwards), and publics and counterpublics (Hawk; Peneny and Dadas; Powers; Carlson; Dionne et al.). Circulation studies also includes scholarship on its role in digital spaces and the implications it has for users and creators (Johnson-Eilola; Eyman; Powers; Edwards; Gries; Cagle; Carlson). For my thesis, circulation and rhetorical velocity are important as I consider the intersections and affordances the relationship between digital removal practices and rhetorical velocity play in digitally networked spaces.

Rhetorical velocity is a concept created by Ridolfo and DeVoss that inherently focuses on the importance of authorship, specifically the intentions and purpose behind creating an artifact or text. When a text enters the digital space, there is a potential for it to be recomposed by another creator and appropriated. Texts are not static objects or artifacts, but rather, the potential for them to be updated by any user increases, forcing a creator to “attend to the afterlife of their writing” (Gallagher 97) due to the increased potential for their original composition, content, and intentions becoming repurposed and recomposed across digital networks. The afterlife of a text not only anticipates a participatory culture interacting with it, but it also forces an author to be strategic in composing. Authors need to begin making rhetorical moves and considering factors such as who has the potential to recompose their work and how it might be circulated (Ridolfo and DeVoss). As the potential for authorship in a digital space increases in a participatory culture where any user has

the power over a digital artifact to recompose and change content, there is also an increase in the need for other creators to begin considering the potential for their original text or artifact to be recomposed. These recompositions no longer just have the potential to occur from third parties, however, as creators might choose to recompose their own texts and recirculate them before any user has the potential to update the afterlife (Gallagher) of a text, just as Sam Raimi did with *Spider-Man* and Lizzo and Beyoncé did with their lyrics.

These new opportunities for invention, therefore, are contingent on the participatory action of users on how they make meaning of these recompositions. For example, a meme could be remixed and redistributed on a different social media platform than where it started or a press release could completely change shape and form depending on the platform it is on and the interactions among users. One salient example of this is Pepe the Frog, a meme that started off as the “sad frog meme” and originated on a comic, but as it became more popular and circulated across platforms, it was recomposed and turned into a vehicle for antisemitism and racism (“Hate”) due to the influence of rhetorical velocity. Rhetorical velocity also focuses on the speed and “temporal lifespan” of these artifacts. For example, sometimes a recomposition of an original text gets circulated more than the original, resulting in this recomposition to be considered the original artifact. As a result, however, the original author/creator’s intentions and purposes can become displaced, and at times, silenced in the process. As a result, the issue of power dynamics becomes an important consideration in strategically composing. Keeping with Pepe the Frog, no longer was it a family friendly symbol in a comic, but an increasing participatory culture and availability recomposing tools resulted in its meaning and symbolism completely shifting upon circulation and rhetorical velocity into a form of hate speech, completely displacing the original intentionality of the artifact’s inception. As I will discuss later in this section, the negative appropriation (Ridolfo and DeVoss) of this meme highlights the increased possibility for content to change its meaning once a

participatory culture steps in and recomposes the artifact and at times, can completely shift and deflect from a creator's original intentions.

Rhetorical velocity and appropriation (Ridolfo and DeVoss) are especially important to consider when it comes to already marginalized populations having the potential for their work and/or original intentions to be silenced or displaced. A recent popular example of recomposition is the resurgence of "Fast Car" by Tracy Chapman due to a popular cover of her song by Luke Combs. This new version gaining traction not only shifts the purposes and intentions of a Black woman's lyrics, but the popularity and traction of this song resulted in a white man profiting off her original work. Although Combs invited Chapman to perform her song with him at The Grammys and she consequently won a Country Music Awards for her song due to this resurged popularity, the ethical implications of a white man recomposing an already marginalized woman's original work had the potential to turn into negative appropriation. Now, an audience might take Combs' work as the original version of the song rather than Chapman's, even though her career centered on this song; as a result, her original intentions and purposes had the potential to get lost with this recomposition if not for Combs' highlighting her original contributions to the song. Although this recomposition did not turn into hate speech as Pepe the Frog did, it is important to consider that in a world where digital editing tools are increasingly becoming accessible, not all recompositions are as publicly acknowledged as these examples. Users on social media have the increased potential to recompose any texts or artifacts that come their way and in turn, recirculate their recompositions; this participatory culture continues to blur the lines of assigning authorship across digital networks.

Rhetorical velocity considers a creator(s)' original intentions in their work and the potential for appropriation from users (Ridolfo and DeVoss). A recent example involves Donald Trump supporters taking over and pretending to be Judge Juan Merchan's daughter on X, despite her deleting her account; by posing as this political figure's daughter, these users essentially

reconstructed and recomposed her account, circulating news and tweets that were not her (Gregorian and Reiss). The concept of catfishing and pretending to be someone else on social media is not new, but the implications for what this example shows is how the digital removal and eventual recomposition of a woman's social media by other users highlights how a participatory media, especially when it intersects with political intentions, can result in the appropriation of a user's original intentions, purposes, and in this case, identity. As digital removal and digital revision continue to become more prevalent and accessible practices in digital spaces, considering their relationship with rhetorical velocity comes back to power dynamics: we must consider who or what is being removed, erased, deleted, displaced, etc. when a text is recomposed and what it means when these recompositions with removal are circulated more than the original text or artifact. Removal, as this example illustrates, not only creates opportunities for new forms of collaboration and invention, but it can also create new types of circulatory effects within digital networks. As a result, given the increased accessibility and role of digital editing tools as well as the participatory culture, it is not only important to understand the role of an author and creator in creating recomposed content, but also the role of users contributing to the construction and circulation of content within these digital participatory networks.

Digital Removal and Digital Revision as Recomposition

In this thesis, I argue that digital removal, digital revision, and other forms that involve digital manipulation of human or non-human objects are forms of recomposition. Currently, looking up the term “digital removal” yields results on medical processes (Ford, Hoi, et al.; Kyle, Prynne, et al.; Fiorese, Peserico, et al.), discussions in science, technology, engineering, math (STEM) disciplines (Carasso, Sanderson, et al.; Wenbin; Faraji and MacLean), and editing objects out of films (Failes). There is more scholarship on “digital erasure” pertaining to privacy rights (Lessig; Tsesis), algorithms (Madland, Ofosuhen, et al.; Carli, Como, et al.) and forgetting in the digital age (Tamò

and George; Bode and Jones) in legal and political disciplines whereas rhetoric and composition's focus on digital erasure mostly pertains to race and ethnicity (Brown, Mendenhall, et al.; Euteneuer); while the latter is particularly important for the field to consider, I want to suggest that we begin thinking about how these digital removal and erasure practices have more implications than focusing on rather erasure and silencing in general (Murray 1983; Gere 2001; Teleky 2001; Glenn 2004) and become more focused on how digital removal and erasure impacts the future of composition and content as this deflection and taking away of an object has wide implications when thinking about its relationship with rhetorical velocity. This thesis seeks to explore how more scholarship is needed in rhetoric and composition and computers and writing to consider digital removal as a form of erasure and recomposition, has the power to circulate across networks and impact the future of digitally networked composing practices in our field and beyond.

However, digital revision, which is focused on the manipulation, alteration, and refashioning of new and old media, has been a widely discussed phenomena but its role and circulatory effects as a form of recomposition still needs to be considered. As discussed earlier, scholarship in rhetoric and composition has considered revision (Faigley and Witte; Sommers; Berkenkotter and Murray; Horning and Becker; MacArthur), including a focus on revision processes with digital composing tools such as word processing (Daiute; Eyman and Reilly; Dave and Russell), presentation programs (Eyman and Reilly; Conradie), and videos (Baepler and Reynolds). Other existing scholarship surrounding digital revision focuses on topics such as remix, digital tools for revision processes in first year writing courses, and revision of data in scientific research. However, rhetoric and composition needs to go beyond in considering the potential implications for digital revision practices rather than limiting digital revision to one modality (oftentimes textual and print-based writing) or in academic composing contexts. As a result, we are failing to acknowledge the potential

magnitude digital revision has to seep into any digital network (social media platforms, business infrastructures, etc.) and destabilize texts and their relationship with the author and the audience.

Although digital removal is a form of digital revision in the sense that it can manipulate, alter, and refashion new and old media through removal and erasure, not all digital revision is digital removal as sometimes revision can focus on the addition and inclusion of more objects on an artifact. As a result, we need to begin considering the importance of digital removal practices if we are going to keep discussing digital revision in our scholarship as both forms of recomposition can impact content as it circulates across digital platforms and beyond into social and cultural activity. Specifically, I am focusing on the relationship between digital removal practices and what Ridolfo and DeVoss deem rhetorical velocity, what Gries has referred to as remix in circulation studies, and what Porter calls digital delivery.

There are numerous examples of digital removal and digital revision in film and television that can complicate our theories of the relationship between these concepts as a form of recomposition as these industries have been at the forefront of developing these technologies. The process of digital removal, also known as digital wire removal in the film industry, began in the 1980s with *Howard the Duck* (1984) and a program called *Layerpaint* in order to remove the wires from Howard and a chair being pulled out of an apartment. In *Back to the Future*, Marty McFly's wires and pipes attached to his hoverboard were digitally removed by another program called *Wirem* (Failes). Disney+ digitally revised a scene in the film *Splash* (1984) by extending Daryl Hannah's hair to cover her nudity (Rose). The Duffer Brothers, who created *Stranger Things*, digitally revised dialogue to fix a plot hole of a character's birthday being inconsistent across episodes (Whiting). These examples ultimately showcase the increased usage of digital removal and revision practices as forms of recomposition in purposes of aesthetic and realism as well as censorship.

There are also analogic versions of forms of recomposition that exist outside of digital spaces. In 1954 when U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy was investigated by the U.S. Army, a key piece of evidence that included a photograph included early forms of revision. Army Private G. David Schine, a former consultant to McCarthy, was seen in a photograph alone with Secretary of the Army Stevens; however, it was revealed the next day that the photogram was an “altered, changed, edited...” photograph submitted as evidence to prove the credibility of Schine’s relationship with the U.S. Army (“National”). Although not digital, this form of removal and revision ultimately showcases the increased potential implications for when a recomposed version of a text gets circulated more than the original in a political context and the ethical implications when it is hard to distinguish which version is the original. This McCarthy example emphasizes how removal can be weaponized to gain trust and credibility in political arenas, just as I discussed with the recent example of Trump’s followers reconstructing a digitally removed social media account highlights the role recomposition can play into the co-constructing and appropriating of an artifact, or in this case, person, for their own political and conspiratorial gains. Both cases of removal with McCarthy and Trump further emphasize how removal practices can be weaponized to serve as a means for political gains, even if misinformation is circulated in the process; with the increased potential for this removal to occur across digital networks, it is even more dire that we begin considering the potential for this recomposition’s circulation, as McCarthy demonstrates these practices are far from new.

Currently, the recomposition of human and non-human objects unfolds all around us. A friend can digitally remove an ex-partner from their photographs. Memes can digitally remove an object and effectively impact its meaning across platforms. Advertisements can digitally revise human objects to accentuate the effects products may have. Scientists can digitally revise visualizations such as graphs or charts of their research results and remove unwanted data. Although digital removal and revision have the potential to exist in any space, it is important to reiterate the

distinction between the two and why this thesis focuses on the circulation of rhetorical velocity of digital removal and erasure practices and not just digital revision. As discussed previously, digital revision scholarship already exists and focuses on the manipulation, alteration, and refashioning of objects in digital artifacts, but it does not account for the erasure and deletion of objects as digital removal does. Digital removal instead focuses on the taking away and deflection of meaning from an original composition. Although both digital removal and revision impact the original meaning of a text or artifact, digital revision does not account for the circulatory effects and impacts of removal, erasure, deletion, and deflection which have become widely circulated practices across digital networks; therefore, a key part of recomposition becomes missing when we only consider digital revision and not the impacts of digital removal and erasure. In my thesis, I plan to look at a widely circulated case of digital removal in recent popular culture – the digital removal of Ned Fulmer in *The Try Guys* as I will discuss in the next section.

Research Questions and Case Study

Many industries have begun to consider how they must adapt their infrastructures in an effort to combat the increased usage of recomposition and circulation in digital spaces, ranging from businesses (Furr and Shipilov) to political communication (LaQuintano and Vee). As increased legislation regarding digital revision in advertisements has developed, there has been an increase in discourse on the usage of digital removal and revision in law and copyright. Although a wider literature review on this issue could be beneficial to digging into the future of these forms of recomposition, it is important to note that the fact this practice and other forms of recomposition have developed a need for political and legal legislation; this increased concern emphasizes the potential implications of these practices due to the increased circulation of digitally recomposed artifacts and the future they may have on users and creators.

However, as I have discussed in this Introduction, the future of these recomposed practices, specifically digital removal, should be discussed more widely in our field. As our society has shifted to an influx of creators, so has the influx of the social and cultural activity that recomposition impacts, ranging from scientific research to social media. Even though our field has not fully dissected the potential ramifications of digital removal, the pedagogical implications of this practice increase as the influx of users have become creators, meaning that our students either have the power to recompose or most likely encounter these edited artifacts day-to-day on social media. As the democratization of tools increases, it is important to consider how we teach users and creators the implications for these recompositions as they continue to become more prominent. These practices also impact future composing practices such as how we approach creating digital content and the potential for its circulation across platforms. As Porter's digital delivery revamps rhetorical canons, we also need to begin considering how our composing practices can be recomposed, appropriated (Ridolfo and DeVoss) and even remediated (Bolter and Grusin). Digital removal must be considered as the erasure, deletion, and deflection of content, figures, objects, etc. could impact how these texts and artifacts are understood with respect to rhetorical velocity.

Broadly, my thesis seeks to look at developing more increased awareness of digital removal and its influence on digitally networked composing practices for users and creators. More specifically, my thesis seeks to bring these discussions of digital removal, digital revision, and other forms of recomposition into our field, especially since the circulation of these practices will only continue to increase across digital networks. As a result, my thesis broadly asks, how do digital removal and erasure practices intersect with rhetorical velocity? What are the repercussions of this relationship on the future of digital composing and the social, political, and cultural implications of these practices on users, creators, and our field?

To begin answering these questions, my thesis will include a case study of popular YouTube personalities, The Try Guys, and their response to one of their members, Ned Fulmer, had an affair with an employee; as a result, he was removed from the company and also digitally removed and recomposed from video content. Although there are many popular cases of digital removal such as 9/11 and other popular culture examples discussed throughout this Introduction, what makes the case of The Try Guys so salient is the fact that the ensemble has formed their own media ecology where fandom's have the power to co-construct meaning with The Try Guys and effectively impact the circulation of recompositions. In response to the parasocial relationships built with their fans and the increase of participatory culture that discovered this scandal, The Try Guys and their company, 2nd Try, LLC. digitally removed, digitally revised, and recomposed Fulmer out of videos before publishing them to their channel in order to protect their branding and relationship with their audience. In an age of media influencers and other public figures constantly being circulated across platforms, The Try Guys is a classic example of recompositions becoming popularized to the public. Due to the scandal making The Try Guys media ecology popularized and widely circulated in the public eye, these recomposed artifacts are able to get a platform, which allows for digital removal and revision to become an example and model for a recomposed response to cancel culture and other factors such as marketing and branding.

In Chapter 1, I discuss the methodology I am using for my case study of The Try Guys. Heavily inspired by John Gallagher and Laurie Gries' work on Internet case study methodology, I have bounded this case spatially, temporally, and relationally in order to dissect the various types of digital removal, revision, and recomposition that occurred in The Try Guys media content in response to the Fulmer scandal. I will also discuss my data collection of audiovisual and textual artifacts in order to develop a narrative about how these recompositions occurred through my examination of two videos prior to the Ned Fulmer scandal becoming public knowledge and two

videos after. Then, I will discuss my analytic framework which is influenced by Gries and Liza Potts' work with actor network theory in an effort to explore the exigency and circulatory impacts of recomposition, specifically digital removal, on digital network composing practices.

In Chapter 2, I discuss the formation of The Try Guys and their fanbase that has developed since their creation in 2014 on BuzzFeed to their independent channel created in 2018. Since their inception, The Try Guys' success hinges upon their branding where each member has their own public image and identity assigned. As a result, the fanbase is able to feel personally connected and seen by the ensemble and their content. This chapter seeks to give context as to how The Try Guys are their own media ecology whose participatory fanbase has effectively impacted how the ensemble is viewed and marketed. The ensemble would not be successful without their fanbase, but with how involved and participatory they have become, I present The Try Guys media ecology as one whose digital removal of a public figure as one worthy of examination.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the influence of the fanbase on The Try Guys media ecology. Through Liza Pott's interpretation of actor network diagrams, I hope to illustrate the media ecology of The Try Guys from 2014-2022 to after the scandal became publicized. Since 2014, The Try Guys have fostered an ecology where parasocial relationships combined with participatory culture has aided for the circulation of rhetorical activity within the ecology and outside of it. As a result, Ned Fulmer's affair was first discovered by fans and The Try Guys became aware of it via Reddit platforms in 2022, allowing for the fanbase to co-construct meaning of the scandal's narrative as it circulated to the public. Because of the participatory and parasocial influence of the fandom, the audience was able to lift up the lifestyle brand of Ned Fulmer as a family man, so when his affair was revealed, the fandom's rhetorical velocity and interpretation of these recompositions of Fulmer extended outside of the ecology and into the public media.

In Chapter 4, I analyze the digital removal and erasure of Fulmer from Try Guys video content and media platforms. Through my examination of four videos, I aim to illustrate how the visibility of these recompositions ultimately shifted in tone before the scandal became public and after it left The Try Guys media ecology. As a result, other human and non-human objects spatially proximal to Fulmer were recomposed as a result, emphasizing the circulatory effects of Fulmer's removal to impact anyone associated with him. The digital removal of Fulmer also transferred to The Try Guys' marketing and branding in an effort to protect their family friendly image that circulated throughout the ecology and was now seeping into other public media. Through this chapter, I aim to emphasize how The Try Guys' digital removal has important repercussions for how we look at digital networks in the future.

In Chapter 5, I summarize the main implications and takeaways from this case study of The Try Guys and their digital removal of Ned Fulmer. In this chapter, I explore how the increased participatory culture and social web has continued to blur the lines between author and audience in digital environments, especially with the increased democratization of tools for recomposition. As a result, the intersection between digital removal practices and rhetorical velocity is important to consider since they have the power to influence how we view composing practices in digital networks. This chapter also looks at the pedagogical implications for digital removal practices and recomposition as these artifacts are often circulated across the media our students consume. Finally, I aim to look at how recomposition is used as a response to various rhetorical activities such as branding, public sentiment, and collective trauma. Therefore, we must begin understanding how these recompositions, specifically digital removal and erasure, have the power to impact any digital network as the potential for rhetorical velocity increases.

CHAPTER 1: METHODS

This chapter seeks to discuss the case study I am using for The Try Guys. As this ensemble and their interactions with their fanbase primarily exists on digital networks, it is important to adapt case study as a method in order to account for the temporal and spatial differences regarding studying digital artifacts. After bounding my case and collecting data, I will be using actor network theory (ANT) combined with circulation based on Liza Potts and Laurie E. Gries in order to analyze the circulatory effects of recomposed practices in The Try Guys media ecology. Overall, this case study aims to answer my main research question of the influence and intersection between digital removal and erasure practices with rhetorical velocity in order to better understand the implications of this relationship on users and creators of digital networks.

Internet Case Study as a Method

Case studies are a form of qualitative research that examine bounded systems. Oftentimes, case studies involve data collection to understand and analyze a case “in depth and within its real-world context” (Yin 45). Case studies are used in research across disciplines and professions such as pedagogy (Bardovi; Boyce; Crossley; Merriam; Pilcher and Coffey; Thaller; Yin), government organizations (United Nations; UNFPA), psychology (Bromley; Kloss; McLeod), social work (Gilgun), technical communication (Brockmann), healthcare (Carolan, et al.; Walshe), and media studies (Karthigesu). However, there are multiple methods and approaches to case studies such as explanatory, descriptive, and exploratory (Yin 38; Kleinman 47) that all focus on the differences in data collection, sites, and boundaries. While explanatory case studies seek to answer “how and why” to trace a process over time, exploratory case studies seek to develop a hypothesis for further questioning (Yin 40). Descriptive case studies take both these approaches one step further by

seeking to understand the mechanics and details of a phenomena to illustrate how it came to be (Bronwyn, et al.). Broadly, case studies as a method offer a deep examination into some phenomena.

More recently, the emergence of digital environments and communities have prompted scholars to consider how these digital tools and phenomena push the limits of case study methodology. For instance, Laurie Gries has adapted this methodology to account for the circulation of media artifacts in digital networks. Through iconographic tracking and actor network theory, Gries' five-year case study traces the *Obama Hope* image across these platforms and environments. In his case study of YouTube, Dustin Edwards' case study focuses on circulation within the platform and how its operation and interaction is further impacted by surrounding networks. Through his examination of Content ID, Edwards traces the impacts of infrastructures in the platform's ecology. John Gallagher has even termed what he calls an "Internet case study" methodology that focuses on the emergence of adapted methodologies that account for these digital environments and the importance of creating boundaries for digitally networked research. Gries, Edwards, and Gallagher emphasize the exigency of adapting case study methodology for examining Internet case studies, as these spaces are constantly in flux. Internet case studies add to a rich history of case study methods by further emphasizing the need for bounded systems of data collection and analysis when examining digital environments and phenomena.

Internet Case Study of The Try Guys

In my own case study methodology, I examine The Try Guys media ecology and seek to explore the collective activity that led to the creation and circulation of recomposed artifacts. This case study develops a bounded system that examines and traces these artifacts from their inception in the media ecology to their circulation across digital networks and platforms. Specifically, this thesis seeks to ask: How does digital removal affect the rhetorical velocity of various kinds of content and, conversely, how does rhetorical velocity shape and inflect forms of digital removal?

To understand the spectrum of human and non-human objects impacted by digital removal, digital revision, and other forms of recomposition that I will define in the coding section of this chapter, I examine a site of a popular YouTube channel that has much commentary on the circulatory effects and future impacts of these practices in digital spaces. The case of The Try Guys illustrates what happens when the velocity of a fandom runs rampant within a media ecology and effectively impacts the curation of content; eventually, this leads to the branded ensemble's content, purposes, and interactions are shaped by this parasocial group of fans. I also examine how users and creators of digital spaces need to consider the potential for recomposition (i.e., rhetorical velocity) once they publish in digital spaces. Since I will be dealing with sites that exist in digital spaces, an adapted case study framework and methodology is needed in order to account for the temporal differences and increased circulation that occurs in this media ecology. As a result, Gallagher's framework and focus on bounding an Internet case study will guide me in my data collection.

Boundaries and Data Collection

I utilize Gallagher's "A Framework for Internet Case Study Methodology in Writing Studies" in order to bound my case study spatially, temporally, and relationally. Lori Kendall created these boundaries in her article that calls for an increasingly bounded method for Internet research even back in 2009 before this methodology had fully emerged: spatial boundaries examine where, who, and what is being studied; temporal boundaries examine the start and end of the data collected; and relational boundaries examine relationships to subjects and objects being studied (2-3). Gallagher's adaptation of these boundaries places them in conversation with the influx of interrelationships that need to be considered when examining digital networks and environments. In his methodology that seeks to place Internet case study methodology in the field of writing studies, Gallagher focuses on the interplay between algorithms, data, internet-based search engines, speed of networks, frequency, and other factors that need to be considered in digital case studies (10).

For my case study of The Try Guys, I will use these three boundaries by Kendall and Gallagher to account for the continuous flux of digital environments as well as the continued movement and activity within The Try Guys media ecology. Since I will be focusing on sites that contain digitally removed, revised, and other forms of recomposed human and non-human objects, it is important for a stabilization to occur in the boundaries for this case. The Try Guys also began in 2014, so not only have they created much content, but this content has also been circulated across many digital platforms due to their participatory fanbase, so bounding the study spatially and temporally is especially important to further dissect the recomposition at play in this media ecology.

In September 2022, it was revealed on social media that Ned Fulmer, a member of The Try Guys, had an extramarital affair with one of his employees (@datesaremyfave). As a result, the remaining three Try Guys and their company 2nd Try, LLC. digitally removed Fulmer from previously recorded videos and published them with this recomposition. Although there were some videos that were never published and completely removed from circulation due to Fulmer's presence being heavily featured, Fulmer was digitally removed from at least nine videos that were published on YouTube, which includes his sections and appearances throughout episodes as well as his removal from merchandise branding that I will further discuss in Chapter 4. Fulmer's digital removal began when the company, 2nd Try, LLC., launched an internal review of his affair with his associate producer ("what happened." 0:27-1:03); as a result, Fulmer was digitally removed from videos prior to the scandal becoming public and continued to be revised and removed from videos until the end of December 2022.

Much of the recompositions at play here involve a response to the branding and marketing identity The Try Guys cultivated through their fandom relationships and media ecology. Digitally removing a human object, Ned Fulmer, who caused this public scandal helps maintain the family-friendly and nontoxic masculinity branding reinforced in this assemblage created from the ensemble

and their fandom. The recomposition also reinforces the parasocial relationships among The Try Guys and their fandom that I will discuss in Chapter 3. Examining the media ecology of The Try Guys allows for an understanding of the circulatory impacts of participatory culture in the larger context of a digital network.

Through Gallagher's case study methodology, I am bounding this case in three ways: spatially, temporally, and relationally. Since this case's existence is highly dependent on the fandom first alerting The Try Guys of the affair and dictating when the scandal became publicized as I will discuss in Chapter 2, it is important for me to bound the case since it becomes a discussion of parasocial relationships among Internet personalities and fans. Spatially, I will be gathering artifacts on how the scandal was discovered, the accompanying responses to people involved in this scandal, and the recomposition involving the digital removal of Fulmer. As a result, I will be collecting data from platforms such as Reddit (where the scandal and the recomposition was discovered by fans), Instagram (where the scandal was addressed publicly by the company and the Fulmers), and YouTube (where the videos that digitally edited Fulmer were published and circulated).

The Reddit platform is a key actor in this examination of The Try Guys. Not only is Reddit where the scandal first entered a public, digital platform, but this is also where the recompositions of Fulmer first became circulated and whose rhetorical velocity eventually resulted in the scandal being addressed publicly. As a result, an examination of the platform and the fandom's interactivity will help me examine artifacts such as textual forums of audience discourse and screen captures of Fulmer's recompositions. The Reddit platform will not only showcase the parasocial relationships among The Try Guys and their fans, but they will also show the increasing power of participatory culture and how these fans eventually led to the digital removal and recomposition of Fulmer. Through Instagram, I will primarily be working with the public statements of The Try Guys, Ned Fulmer, and Ariel Fulmer. These are the only published and circulated textual artifacts and social

media posts from Ned and Ariel Fulmer since the scandal became public on September 27th. Since their original circulation, both posts have been digitally removed from their social media accounts and only exist on Reddit (@datesaremyfave). This deletion emphasizes the implications of digital removal as a whole, especially when statements regarding public scandals are removed but still live on due to a fanbase continuing to circulate this content across platforms and networks.

Through YouTube, I will be examining videos where Fulmer's appearances and footage was digitally removed, digitally revised, and recomposed. Due to the scandal, other human and non-human objects were also recomposed due to their association with Fulmer as I will discuss in Chapter 4. I will examine two videos prior to the scandal becoming publicized. In these videos, the digital editing of Fulmer is subtle and hard to detect by someone who is not a part of The Try Guys media ecology. Eventually, these recompositions were spotted by fans and circulated on Reddit, resulting in the scandal entering a more public sphere on September 27th. I will also examine two videos after the scandal became public. These videos include recompositions that are much more blatant and visible to any audience member who is watching and tangentially aware of the Fulmer scandal. Ultimately, these videos indicate a difference in tone and composition from the team months after the scandal broke in September. Overall, this case study of The Try Guys will be spatially bounded through my examination of three social media platforms (Reddit, Instagram, and YouTube) where I am less focused on the platform infrastructures, and rather, am more focused on the circulatory effects within The Try Guys media ecology.

Temporally bounding the case study of The Try Guys, I plan to collect data from September 2022 where the scandal was revealed to The Try Guys during Labor Day weekend; the scandal was eventually publicly addressed on September 27th. In September, there were two videos where Fulmer was digitally removed that were published prior to the public statement. From November to December 2022, The Try Guys also published videos in their *Without a Recipe* series in which I will

examine two videos of recomposition where, as mentioned previously, the visibility of these recompositions shifted dramatically. Overall, this case study will be temporally bounded from September 2022 to December 2022.

When it comes to relational boundaries for this case study, I have no personal relationships with the subjects and objects I am analyzing. There is no primary data being collected since I will not be interviewing or interacting with The Try Guys, the fans, the Fulmers, or anyone else involved and impacted by these recompositions. However, like much of the fanbase of The Try Guys, I have a parasocial connection to these YouTube personalities I am studying. As a fan, I heard speculation about Ned Fulmer cheating on Ariel Fulmer on September 26th through X (formerly Twitter). From there, I began looking at Reddit threads that speculated on the digital removal of Ned Fulmer from videos. When the news officially broke on September 27th through The Try Guys Instagram, I was shocked and felt betrayed as I had watched The Try Guys since they were a part of BuzzFeed. This scandal was publicized during my first semester of my master's program; since I would not stop talking about it, my peer and I co-wrote a paper focusing on the rhetorical velocity of The Try Guys apology video to the *Saturday Night Live* skit, the parasocial relationships between The Try Guys and their fans, as well as the history of apology videos. Although this paper was helpful in processing the scandal and my own parasocial connection to The Try Guys, the digital removal aspect of Fulmer was something that was sticking out in conversations with my advisor, Dr. Amidon, who suggested I dig deeper into the implications of this practice. So even though I have no actual relationships with The Try Guys in this case study, my parasocial relationship with the ensemble also aids me in my understanding of The Try Guys media ecology, considering I am very much a part of it.

Data Visualization and Analysis

To fully encapsulate the levels and shifts of recompositions occurring in these four videos, much of my coding methods for analysis are influenced by Clay Spinuzzi's description of coding. In

Topsight 2.0, Spinuzzi describes the process of coding as “tagging” and lays out three types of codes: starter codes for what “you expect to find,” open codes for what you “find along the way,” and axial codes for “connections” across codes (137-138). For The Try Guys, I only utilized starter and open codes as that provided me enough data to work with the bounded scope of my study; however, I sought to make connections across codes through my analysis pulled from Gries and Potts as I discuss below. In total, I coded and examined four of The Try Guys YouTube videos: “Try Guys Ruin Chocolate Eclairs w/ Pro Chefs • Phoning It In” and “Try Guys Try Stand-Up Comedy” before Ned Fulmer’s scandal became public knowledge and “The Try Guys Make Pop-Tarts Without A Recipe” and “The Try Guys Make Illusion Cakes Without A Recipe” after Ned Fulmer’s scandal became public knowledge.

My starter codes sought to understand genre conventions and recomposing practices within these four videos. For genre, I sought to look at the frequent and established conventions and components within much of The Try Guys content. For example, since 2018 when 2nd Try, LLC. was formed, a typical video on the YouTube channel included an opening and ending credits with the four-color branding of each Try Guy. In the popular series *Without A Recipe* or in any other food-based challenge on the channel such as “Try Guys Mystery Wheel Cooking Challenge: Partner Swap,” the judging panel would include a total of three judges to critique the competing dishes (@TheTryGuys). I sought to code for these genre conventions, as TryceraTops or those familiar enough with The Try Guys content would be able to recognize when these genre conventions were not being followed. When it comes to “Eclair” and “Stand-Up Comedy” published prior to the scandal becoming public, the shifting of genre conventions such as the opening and ending credits being altered and there only being two judges ultimately served as a giveaway to fans that something was awry at 2nd Try, LLC. since their content was not following the typical precedented genre that

had been set in place since 2014. These genre conventions will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 when examining the recomposition of Fulmer in all four videos.

As much of this analysis centers on the recomposition of Fulmer, my starter coding also included looking for these practices. When using the term recomposition, as I discussed in my Introduction, I define the term in the context of the digital editing of human and non-human objects in digital spaces. For example, digital removal and digital revision, as I will define below, are both forms of recomposition as they focus on the reassembling (Grinter) of objects in these spaces. I define human objects as objects attached to and associated with the human body. Examples pertaining to The Try Guys include (but are not limited to) the digital removal and revision of torsos, hands, arms, etc. within these videos. I define non-human objects as objects that are not a part of the human body and physiology. Examples pertaining to The Try Guys include (but are not limited to) the digital removal and revision of cooking materials, baked goods, photographs, etc. These examples of human and non-human objects will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

The two main types of recomposition I focused on in coding these four videos included digital removal and digital revision practices. Although both terms were discussed in the Introduction in the context of how they have been employed in the field and various contexts, it is important to consider these processes in the context of The Try Guys media ecology. Digital removal is a process that seeks to erase, delete, deflect, exclude, reconstitute, remediate, and/or revise a human or non-human object in digital space. For example, in “Pop-Tarts,” Fulmer’s body is completely erased and reconstituted as a pink elephant; not only does this removal exclude this human object, but it also deflects the meaning of Fulmer’s original branded pink color, as I will discuss in Chapter 4.

As discussed in my Introduction and above, digital removal is a form of digital revision, but not all digital revision is digital removal as sometimes revision can focus on the addition and inclusion of more objects on an artifact. Digital revision involves the manipulation, alteration, reconstituting,

remediating, and refashioning of human and non-human objects. When it comes to 'The Try Guys' digital revision of Fulmer, there were at least five types of revision I noticed throughout my coding. The examples that follow appear in the episode "Illusion Cakes" that I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 4: cropping is where the original artifact is cut and shortened in length and size such as Habersberger and Kornfeld arms being cropped; zooming is when the frame of reference has a close-up shot of a particular aspect such as Lee Yan's face receiving a close up during the judging; blurring is where the object becomes less visible and made less distinct such as Fulmer's reference photographs not being clearly recognizable; adding is the inclusion of another element or an object into an artifact such as the rooster being digitally edited and added into the video; and replacing is the manipulated movement of one object being placed over the other such as Fulmer being replaced with a rooster.

For my open codes, I noticed themes rather than genre conventions and recomposition practices. Within the videos, there is an acknowledgement of recomposition from the digital editors, the human or non-human objects, and/or the artifact itself acknowledging that recomposition is occurring. In "Pop-Tarts," the 2nd Try, LLC. editors make reference to Fulmer's scandal and his resulting recomposition with the digital removal of Fulmer and his revision and reconstitution into a pink elephant as the "elephant in the room" that is being directly addressed. The inclusion of "Everything is Fine: A Totally Normal Season" in the episode's introduction also acknowledges Fulmer's scandal by breaking the fourth wall as the editors know most viewers of the episode, by the time it aired in November 2022, knew about Fulmer's affair. As mentioned in my examples of digital revision practices, the other Try Guys, besides Fulmer, were recomposed or impacted by the recompositions of Fulmer. This associated and proximal recomposition includes the human or non-human objects being recomposed or impacted due to being in the same frame or space as the original object of recomposition. For example, this recomposition includes Keith Habersberger

experiencing less screen time due to being in many of the same shots as Fulmer and Zach Kornfeld being cropped out of judging due to being near Fulmer in “Pop-Tarts.”

Finally, my open codes included observing the branding of The Try Guys that were impacted by these recompositions. I define branding in the context of The Try Guys media ecology as practices of marketing and branding of a product or public persona. Examples pertaining to The Try Guys include the four-color branded introduction being replaced with merchandise promotions in “Stand-Up Comedy.” Within these marketing promotions, Fulmer was also recomposed out of them, showcasing how The Try Guys tried to digitally edit him from all branding associated with this era of The Try Guys. Overall, these starter and open codes will aid me in my data analysis chapters (Chapters 4 and 5) that also utilize Gries and Potts, as mentioned below.

To fully encompass the networked activity in The Try Guys media ecology, I utilize Gries’ and Liza Potts’ interpretation of actor network theory. Gries’ concept of iconographic tracking “account(s) for how images flow, transform, and contribute to collective life” by examining their circulation and “consequences” among other digital life (337). Similar to Gries, I will incorporate mapping and visualization tools (109) through actor network theory. My goals are to illustrate the flux that exists as a network of rhetorical activity evolves and trace the circulatory nature of these original and recomposed artifacts within the ecology. I ultimately aim to begin constructing a narrative that showcases the impacts and future implications of recomposition by examining The Try Guys by adapting the final part of Gries’ four-part case study.

Gries utilizes seven “interrelated material processes – composition, production, transformation, distribution, circulation, collectivity, and consequentiality” (113). My case study on The Try Guys will utilize four of these processes: composition, transformation, circulation, and consequentiality. These processes are less clear-cut definitions and more focused on how each process builds off each other to trace artifacts and their collective activity. For example, composition also focuses on the

potential for recomposition and circulation (rhetorical velocity) while circulation focuses on the potential for transformation; therefore, the four processes I chose are less bounded and clear-cut than the case study itself, but they will still help me trace the networked activity within The Try Guys media ecology and their circulatory effects outside of the ecology.

Similar to Gries' case study, I will also utilize actor network theory in my analysis. ANT originates from Michel Callon, Madeleine Akrich, Bruno Latour, and John Law (Potts 285; "Actor"), but I will primarily be looking at Latour's version of ANT in my analysis of The Try Guys. Latour's ANT hinges on three factors: non-humans are agentive actors; social phenomena are not stable; and it builds rather than deconstructs (Latour 10-11; Cagle 71). "Actors" are humans or non-humans that have agency (Latour 52). A group of actors form a network that can create an "actant" (Latour 84; Potts 286). These actors or actants can develop an "assemblage" of relations within these networks (Latour 7). Overall, ANT seeks to decenter the human by describing the relationships with a network of human and non-human actors.

Much of my understanding of ANT is influenced by Liza Potts who has done much work looking at the role ANT plays in social media response and risk communication. Potts' diagramming and visualizations represent networks of rhetorical activity, which will be useful in my own case study of The Try Guys with so many actors at play such as The Try Guys, their fanbase, and public media. ANT allows for a further dissection of how these actors, specifically The Try Guys and their fandom, work together within their own media ecology. Tracing activity emphasizes the circulatory effects of these recomposed artifacts. When using actor network theory as a frame for my case study on The Try Guys, I plan to develop a social and participatory web inspired by Potts (343) that will trace the relationships between human and nonhuman actors in The Try Guys media ecology. Using ANT to "identify the components of the network" and "survey the assemblage of actors and connections" (Potts 345), I hope to describe and analyze the relationships at play between the

human actors, while highlighting the recompositions at play that remove a human from the content and ultimately disrupt the networks and branding built by The Try Guys ecology. Ultimately, ANT helps me understand the impacts of the parasocial and participatory fandoms on the meaning making of assemblages and curation and circulation of content within the media ecology.

Overall, this case study seeks to examine the relationships and circulatory impacts of original and recomposed artifacts such as digital removal practices. As these tools to digitally edit have become more democratized, there has been an increased circulation of these recomposed artifacts amongst platforms; however, the rhetorical velocity of these artifacts does not always make it clear when an artifact is an original or if it was recomposed. These new forms of recomposition also impact how we relate to these artifacts; the possibility for circulation across media platforms has increased along with an increased participatory culture. As a result, implications regarding accessibility and authorship has increased: rather than tools for digital removal practices being available to a select population (oftentimes film and media production companies), these tools are available to any population who has access to technology (cameras, phones, laptops, iPads, etc.). By using Gries' strategies (composition, transformation, circulation, and consequentiality) and Potts' social web (ANT) to trace these recompositions, this case study of The Try Guys aims to examine the future implications and circulatory effects of recomposition across networks. I am hoping that by examining The Try Guys, which is a case of a popular media ecology heavily influenced by parasocial relationships and participatory culture, that I can construct a narrative that examines future implications of digital removal practices on our field and for the future of composing in digital networks.

CHAPTER 2: CASE STUDY OF THE TRY GUYS MEDIA ECOLOGY

In this case study, I will focus on the formation of The Try Guys and their public personas and branded identities that eventually sparked the parasocial connections made with their fans that will be discussed in Chapter 3. Then, I will discuss the branding of Ned Fulmer as a family man who loves his wife to showcase why fans felt so betrayed by him cheating on his wife with his employee. I will also include a timeline of the events beginning in September 2022 when The Try Guys found out about the scandal through the fanbase, the resulting recompositions of Fulmer, and the public response to the scandal. I aim to illustrate the events leading to the digital removal and revision of Fulmer from The Try Guys videos and media content, and the resulting implications of their circulation that I will delve into in my next two chapters. To fully understand how The Try Guys scandal became widely circulated and publicized, it is important to recognize how the ensemble, their company, and their content have been rooted in fan participation and virality since their inception. This chapter seeks to construct a narrative that explores the formation of The Try Guys media ecology and how much influence the fandom had from the start, allowing for the rhetorical velocity of Ned Fulmer's scandal across digital networks.

Roots in BuzzFeed and the Commodification of Identity

The roots of the Internet personalities, The Try Guys, began at BuzzFeed, a digital media company created in 2006 by Jonah Perretti and John S. Johnson III ("BuzzFeed"). The company aimed to create and track viral content across the Internet, and began with content on web pages and blogs; they eventually caught their stride by creating video content on platforms such as Facebook in 2007 (BuzzFeed) and eventually YouTube in 2011 (@BuzzFeed). Over the years, BuzzFeed has developed popular content, ranging from quizzes, lists, and news stories, that has circulated across various social media platforms. Their most popular video platform to date is

YouTube with over 18 billion views and 20 million subscribers (@BuzzFeed). This popularity is due to some viral videos, but it is primarily due to short form web series such as *Worth It*, *BuzzFeed Unsolved*, *Ladylike*, and *The Try Guys*; these series garnered fanbases and consistent views for the company to maintain its intention of virality and circulation across digital platforms.

The Try Guys were formed in 2014 and became the first BuzzFeed video to include a recurring cast of members (de Luna). The four members, Eugene Lee Yang, Keith Habersberger, Zach Kornfeld, and Ned Fulmer were originally interns at BuzzFeed. Tasked with making viral videos, the idea for their first video together came from a brainstorming session from Habersberger, Kornfeld, and fellow producers Adam Bianchi and Caitlin Cowie (“The Try Guys Explain” 4:09-4:20). Lee Yang and Fulmer were asked to be in the video where the men were tasked with trying on ladies’ underwear (“Explain” 4:26-4:30). This video, *Guys Try On Ladies’ Underwear For The First Time*, was the first BuzzFeed video to turn producers into “on-camera personalities” (de Luna), and it was an instant success. Shortly after, the four men formed The Try Guys – a name coined by Habersberger and branded by Lee Yang – a group who would try any task or challenge together (“Explain” 5:24-5:54). This first episode began the typical video format for the channel with the ensemble trying a new thing; eventually, the concept would expand into an expert teaching The Try Guys how to do something then the four practicing before attempting to do said thing (“The Try Guys Try Drag”).

From 2014-2018, The Try Guys made 121 videos with BuzzFeed (“The Try Guys”) and even won at the YouTube Streamy Awards (*The Try Guys*), a notable awards show for web series and video content. However, their individual contracts with BuzzFeed expired in 2018. The decision to form their own company came from Kornfeld after Lee Yang’s contract ended before the group’s (“The Try Guys Rewind 2018” 0:38-1:10). As a result, The Try Guys left BuzzFeed to form their own independent production company called 2nd Try, LLC. The group acquired the rights to The

Try Guys brand and now have 8.05 million subscribers, as of 2024, on YouTube (@TheTryGuys). Since they left BuzzFeed, The Try Guys published a book (*The Hidden Power of Fucking Up*), went on a world tour (*Legends of the Internet*), had a Food Network show (*No Recipe Road Trip*), branched off to podcasts (*The TryPod*, *You Can Sit With Us*, and *Guilty Pleasures*), spin-off series on their YouTube channel (*The Food Babies*, *Without Instructions*, etc.), and individual business ventures (such as Keith's Hot Sauces) ("*The Try Guys*").

The success of The Try Guys after leaving BuzzFeed ultimately hinged on the large fanbase they garnered while at the company, which was in part due to the relationships they were able to develop with their audience on BuzzFeed that ultimately transferred to their own company. Before digging into the ensemble's personalities and branding that is uplifted by their fanbase, it is important to note The Try Guys are not the only former content creators from BuzzFeed who developed these connections with their audience; in fact, this connection was often encouraged and exploited by the company. A former BuzzFeed content creator, Gabriel Dunn, admits "utilizing [their] personal stories" ("BUZZFEED Tea" 6:45-6:50) was a norm for creating content on BuzzFeed, making it hard to find a balance between personal identity and YouTube personality. With much of *BuzzFeed Video*'s content hinging on recurring cast members across series, content creators were encouraged to commodify their identity in order to connect with their audience and increase views. Although not all popular BuzzFeed content included this vulnerability such as "How Many Rubber Bands Does It Take to Explode A Watermelon? (Unedited)" (@BuzzFeed) many former content creators on the channel realized they ultimately had "no ownership" over their names, faces, and identities in the content created for BuzzFeed ("Why" 5:34-5:38).

The multimedia company is not the first to commodify identity in an effort to increase virality and revenue, and it certainly will not be the last; however, BuzzFeed's creation of popular content creators across platforms marks a time in digital media that allowed for an understanding of

what makes viral and popular content circulate. For a time at BuzzFeed, the viral success of Internet content was equated with branding your identity. Now, former BuzzFeed creators such as The Try Guys, Safiya Nygaard, Watcher Entertainment, and Quinta Brunson have created content ranging from YouTube videos to books to Emmy-nominated network television shows. As a result, BuzzFeed's concept of branding yourself for digital media to form personal connections with a fandom has been a marketing strategy that has its own rhetorical velocity amongst digital networks, which has continued to increase with the rise of parasocial relationships and participatory culture, as I will discuss further in Chapter 3. When dissecting The Try Guys and their relationship with their fanbase, it is important to consider how these personal connections were encouraged from the roots of their inception on BuzzFeed and ultimately transferred to the success of their own company.

The Try Guys were a part of a large wave of content creators who embraced sharing their identities and personalities in digital content in order to connect with their fanbases; although they were not the first group of YouTubers to commodify their identity, The Try Guys represent a case of the blurred lines between digital media creator, branding, and identity. Since much of their time on BuzzFeed was focused on marketing their identities and personal lives, as I will dissect below, it is important to acknowledge that 2nd Try, LLC. was created to be a launching pad for The Try Guys to own their creations, projects, branding, and to even expand to individual business ventures; however, with their roots at BuzzFeed, The Try Guys built a loyal fan following that eventually became a parasocial connection due to the ensemble weaving so much of their personality and identity to their branding as a group of YouTubers.

The Branding of Ned Fulmer as The “Wife Guy”

Since the group was formed on YouTube in 2014, The Try Guys have marketed themselves as ordinary guys trying new things, from a labor pain simulation to eating everything on a menu (@TheTryGuys). As a result, they have garnered a fan following and even fan nickname,

TryceraTops, that views them as inspirational (@EugeneLeeYang). Ultimately, the inclusion of The Try Guys personal lives in their content blurs the boundaries of public persona and identity, complicating the marketing of The Try Guys and the connections they have with their fandom.

Although The Try Guys have their identities and branding weaved throughout their video content, *Behind the Try: A Try Guys Documentary* contains footage where the four Try Guys publicly address for the first time their branding, marketing, and own identities as YouTubers. As a result, much of this context and discussion of their branded identity is based on their documentary that came out in 2020. This documentary recounts The Try Guys tour, *Legends of the Internet*, that took place from June to October in 2019 in 23 American cities and three international dates. On this tour, each Try Guy was assigned a theme based on their identities as YouTubers, which was based on their “iconic brand of ‘trying everything and anything’” (“Tour”). On this tour, Keith Habersberger represented “Food,” Ned Fulmer represented “Love,” Zach Kornfeld represented “Fun,” and Eugene Lee Yang represented “Gay” (“Behind The Try” 22:09-22:11)

Although each term was an oversimplification of their identity in The Try Guys ensemble, each word managed to market and brand each member based on what the audience have come to know them as: Habersberger’s brand centers on loving food and having a geographic tongue, which he has showcased in series like *Eat the Menu* and in his own product, Keith’s Hot Sauces (22:23-22:26); Fulmer’s brand centers on loving his wife, Ariel Fulmer, and his two sons (1:16:00-1:16:22) (which I will explore in the next section); Kornfeld’s brand often centers on being spontaneous and bubbly in series like *Candid Competition* while living with chronic pain due to ankylosing spondylitis (1:19:39-1:20:36); and finally, Lee Yang’s brand centers on being an Asian American man in the LGBTQIA+ community, which he has showcased in his comfortability with sexuality in videos such as “The Try Guys Try Drag For the First Time” and eventually publicly coming out in *I’m Gay* (33:13-33:31). These themes for the tour are labels – Food, Love, Fun, and Gay – that remind the

audience what each Try Guy represents. Each theme is a broad aspect of life, allowing The Try Guys to come off as relatable to their fan base since every audience member is able to connect to some aspect as broad as loving food or as specific as being a part of the LGBTQIA+ community. When the audience feels seen, they feel connected to these Internet personalities, and as a result, begin to feel bonded to them. Through these branded identities, The Try Guys have constructed a persona to market their identities to their audience and ultimately, build a personal connection with them.

Rather than fully delve into each of The Try Guys branded identity, I will primarily focus on Ned Fulmer's since his personal connections with the audience were most put at risk in 2022 due to his affair with an employee; ultimately, this affair resulted in his branding, public persona, and career that was lifted up in The Try Guys media ecology being put at risk, as I will discuss in Chapter 3. Although The Try Guys' reputation was also at risk of being tarnished due to this affair, they ultimately rebranded, which led to the digital removal and recomposition of Fulmer in the first place, as I will discuss in Chapter 4.

Ned Fulmer's branded identity as a member of The Try Guys is the "wife guy" who often mentions his wife or family in videos ("every time"). As a result, Fulmer, the company, and the fandom lifted this identity as a family man who loves his wife. In the documentary, Fulmer says he felt like he caught his "stride" as a Try Guy when he started posting relationship videos with Ariel ("Behind" 29:32-29:38). As a result, much of Fulmer's brand is centered on being a family man. Ned Fulmer even admits that he "never expected family life [to be] his personality" but that this personality he showcases as a Try Guy is a result of "digital media and YouTube culture" representing who he is as a person. Ultimately, this family persona and brand as a "wife guy" fits his overall goal of having a "lifestyle brand" (1:16:00-1:16:47). In fact, Fulmer has built up this "lifestyle brand" as a family guy through his other projects outside of The Try Guys. This brand will further be discussed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.

When Ned Fulmer worked at BuzzFeed, Ariel and he began making relationship videos on the BuzzFeed YouTube Channels *BuzzFeed Video* and *As/Is*. Starting in 2016 and ending in March 2018, these eight videos showcase Ned Fulmer bringing his private life into his public persona as a YouTube personality (@BuzzFeedVideo). It is important to consider that his brand as the wife guy began prior to The Try Guys own company and YouTube channel. On *BuzzFeed Video*, Ned and Ariel Fulmer were presented as a couple who, similar to the premise of The Try Guys, would do certain tasks and challenges together such as breaking up for a week, swapping jobs for a day, and buying a house together (@BuzzFeedVideo). Through these videos, the audience was not only able to further connect with Ned, but they also became connected with his wife Ariel, finally getting to know her in an environment the audience is used to spectating.

Once The Try Guys developed 2nd Try, LLC., Ned and Ariel continued creating series and projects together. With The Try Guys, Ariel Fulmer was a part of The Try Wives, a spin-off group that includes the partners of The Try Guys: Ariel Fulmer (Ned's wife), Becky Habersberger (Keith's wife), Maggie Bustamante Kornfeld (Zach's wife), and Matt McLean (Eugene's partner). The Try Wives, a name coined by McLean, have a series on *The Try Guys* channel such as *Try Wives Wine Time*, standalone episodes, and a podcast called *You Can Sit With Us* ("The Try Wives"). *The Try Wives* allows for the audience to further connect with The Try Guys' personal lives and invest in their personal experiences with their partners such as their weddings and birth videos (@TheTryGuys).

Ariel Fulmer also had projects with The Try Guys outside of creating content; in fact, she interior designed the new Try Guys office that was featured in *Architectural Digest* ("Inside") that boosted her career. Outside of The Try Guys, Ned and Ariel Fulmer wrote a book called *The Date Night Cookbook* and created a podcast together called *Baby Steps* ("The Try Guys") They also have their own YouTube videos housed under Ned Fulmer's personal account where they posted more content about their family, eventually even creating their own LLC. in 2018 called Fulmer Media,

Inc. for their own projects (“Fulmer”). Ned and Ariel Fulmer also partnered with Target and created social media content on YouTube and Instagram for the brand (@NedFulmer). As a result of Ned Fulmer’s branding as the family guy at BuzzFeed and at 2nd Try, LLC, much of Ariel Fulmer’s public persona centered on her husband. Similarly, much of Ned Fulmer’s persona centered on her since her presence helped uplift his public persona as a Try Guy. As a result, Fulmer’s recomposition had repercussions for Ariel Fulmer’s projects and associations with The Try Guys and their spin-off series, ultimately resulting in her removal from the company and its projects, as I will discuss in Chapter 3. Due to how closely linked both Ned and Ariel Fulmer’s lives were as YouTube personalities, it is no surprise that fans were so deeply upset when they found out Ned Fulmer had an affair with his employee.

Timeline of the Ned Fulmer Scandal and Events Leading to Recomposition

Much of the timeline I am constructing is thanks to TryceraTops on Reddit. I will mention posts here that were first circulated before the scandal became public on September 27th, 2022. However, some posts that were originally circulated have been deleted as well as some accounts that first posted these artifacts as proof, so I have done my best to hold onto that residual circulation. There are some events missing such as an overview of Fulmer’s digital removal on The Try Guys other YouTube channel, *Second Try*; however, my scope is primarily focused on the Try Guys branding and videos that were circulated from their main channel since that channel is much more popular and has more influence over circulation across platforms. This timeline is also missing retroactive hints that there was an internal Human Resources review at 2nd Try, LLC. pertaining to the scandal before the public officially found out. Although these hints are part of what notified fans something was awry with the company, I am more focused on the hints that were digital removals of Fulmer since that recomposition is the main focus of this case study. This timeline I have constructed can be seen below in Figure 1.

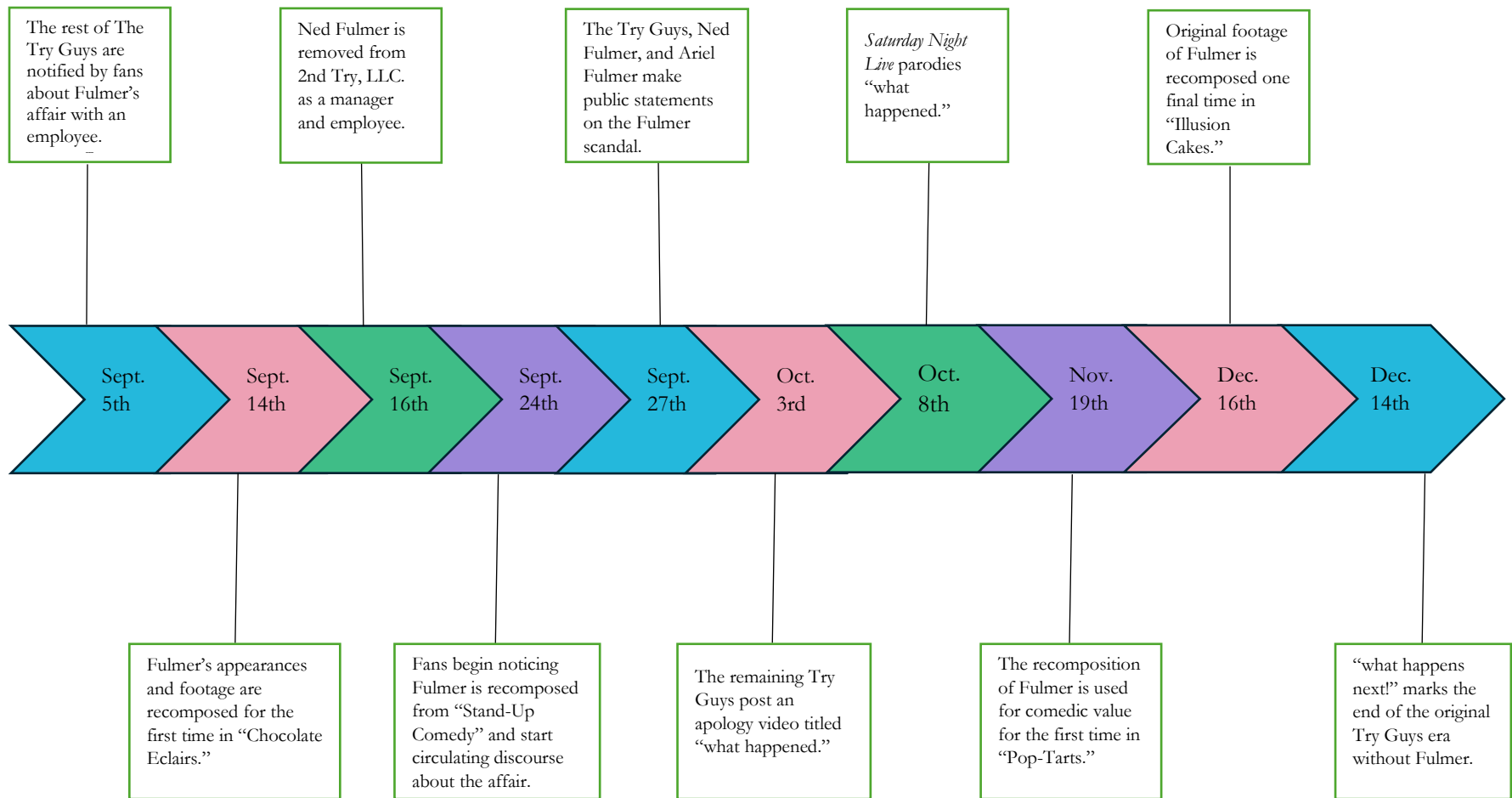


Figure 1: A timeline of main events of the Fulmer scandal and recomposition

On September 5th, 2022, Keith Habersberger, Zach Kornfeld, and Eugene Lee Yang were notified by fans that Ned Fulmer was cheating on his wife, Ariel, with an employee, Alexandria Herring (“what happened.” 0:27-0:44). Herring was an Associate Producer at 2nd Try, LLC. and was a part of series on the channel, called *Food Babies* (@TheTryGuys). Once the other Try Guys confirmed with Fulmer and checked on Herring, they launched a “three-week process of engaging with employment lawyers, corporate lawyers, HR, PR, and more” (0:53-1:03). During this process, Fulmer was recomposed and digitally removed from videos posted on *The Try Guys* YouTube channel.

Less than two weeks later on September 14th, the first recomposition of Fulmer occurred in “Try Guys Ruin Chocolate Eclairs w/ Pro Chefs • Phoning It In.” In this video, Fulmer’s sections and appearances judging were digitally removed and digitally revised, as I will discuss in Chapter 4. On September 16th, unbeknownst to fans, the remaining Try Guys, Habersberger, Kornfeld, and Lee Yang removed Ned Fulmer from 2nd Try, LLC. as a manager and employee (“what” 2:18-2:29). Fan speculation surrounding Fulmer’s absence in videos circulated on Reddit after September 24th when “Try Guys Try Stand-Up Comedy” premiered with all The Try Guys except for Ned Fulmer (@TheTryGuys). Fan suspicions were confirmed three days later on September 27th when The Try Guys posted on all their social media platforms a public statement regarding the scandal that addressed Fulmer no longer being with the company. Ned Fulmer also made a public statement on the scandal and apologized for cheating and Ariel Fulmer made one on the scandal, thanking everyone for their support (@datesaremyfave)

On October 3rd, the remaining Try Guys posted an apology video on all of their social media platforms. In this video, “what happened.”, The Try Guys gave a brief timeline of finding out about the scandal, the process of conducting a three-week internal review at the company, and the removal of Ned Fulmer from the company. The rhetorical velocity of this apology video eventually reached

Saturday Night Live in their version, “Try Guys.” In this parody, cast members played exaggerated versions of Habersberger, Kornfeld, and Lee Yang with news reporters claiming the remaining members were making a big deal out of a man cheating on his wife (“Try Guys – SNL”). The parody of Try Guys video content from a nationally recognized sketch variety series emphasizes the wide circulatory effects Fulmer’s affair was having on The Try Guys media ecology now being put under a microscope by the public.

Two months later on November 19th, the first episode of the new *Without a Recipe* season premiered with “The Try Guys Make Pop-Tarts Without A Recipe.” This series, which is one of the most popular on the channel, features The Try Guys baking or cooking food without a recipe. In each episode of the 2023 season, Ned Fulmer’s sections and appearances were digitally removed and recomposed; this episode, along with these recompositions, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. The fifth episode of the *Without a Recipe* season premiered on December 14th with “The Try Guys Make Illusion Cakes Without A Recipe.” Although not subtle about the recomposition of Fulmer once again, this episode marked the final time Fulmer was in the original era of The Try Guys that began in 2018. On December 17th, Keith Habersberger, Zach Kornfeld, and Eugene Lee Yang posted “what happens next!” In this video, they recounted the past six months and thanked their fans and 2nd Try, LLC. for the support. They also talked about the exciting future and new era for the channel after the scandal.

In forming this timeline, I aim to have demonstrated enough background to fully encapsulate the formation of The Try Guys, their branded identities, and what led to the cases I am analyzing of Ned Fulmer being recomposed within content on the channel. In Chapter 3, I will dig deeper into the participatory culture and parasocial relationships that reinforce The Try Guys media ecology and branding, especially of Fulmer; as a result, these connections with the fanbase eventually led to the fandom’s involvement in co-constructing meaning of the recompositions and aiding in

their circulation and velocity outside of the ecology. Then, in Chapter 4, I will examine four videos where Fulmer has been recomposed, specifically, digitally removed and digitally revised, in order to highlight how these recompositions ultimately became different rhetorical acts due to the authorial agency of 2nd Try, LLC. shifting as the scandal continued to circulate outside of the ecology.

The Try Guys media ecology emphasizes how they have tried to create a “new environment [that] reprocesses the old one” (McLuhan 13). From their creation on BuzzFeed in 2014 to their own channel in 2018, The Try Guys have funneled virality and commodifying identity in order to maintain their success. The Try Guys have not only been able to adapt their content to maintain success on media platforms, but they have been able to emulate that success with these branded identities through projects outside of their channel. 2nd Try, LLC. has eventually grown to recompose their own content by using recomposition as a response to Ned Fulmer’s public scandal; as a result, these recompositions ultimately upkeep their public image and help maintain their success in the current age of digital media. The circulation of the recomposition also shows how The Try Guys has the power to influence and challenge how recomposition practices can be used to protect branding and in response to cancel culture. Framing The Try Guys as a media ecology allows for a further dissection and analysis of how their fandom influences the construction of their brand and how this construction ultimately led to these recompositions being circulated across digital networks.

CHAPTER 3: PARTICIPATORY CULTURE AND PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS OF THE TRY GUYS FANDOM

As I have mentioned throughout this thesis, Fulmer's affair with an employee primarily became public knowledge due to The Try Guys fanbase. In this chapter, I focus on the parasocial relationship of The Try Guys fans, also known as TryceraTops, with members of the media collective. In particular, I examine how the personal connection these fans feel with the ensemble ultimately demonstrates rhetorical activities that are shaped by participatory media and cultures erupted in Reddit forums that eventually circulated to the public. As a result, the TryceraTops were able to contribute to the co-construction of a narrative of the scandal since the fandom discovered the affair and posted it to Reddit forums. Eventually, the composition and rhetorical velocity of discourse within the participatory media spaces grew to such force that The Try Guys were forced to contend with the issue and released a public statement on the scandal. In turn, this response created additional downstream ripples within rhetorical activity surrounding The Try Guys' media ecology, including further widespread circulation of the discourse surrounding Fulmer's affair and the company, 2nd Try, LLC. The Try Guys media ecology lifted Ned Fulmer's brand as a family man who loves his wife, which was what his public image was popularized as; however, the scandal ultimately shattered his plans for a lifestyle brand that was cultivated and aided by his assemblaged image in the media ecology. This is significant as this chapter seeks to focus on the participatory and social web of the TryceraTops to begin tracing the rhetorical velocity of the fandom's impact within the ecology and eventually, their circulation into the public sphere that impacted how people outside of the ecology interacted with the ensemble and the scandal. These parasocial relationships that aid the success of The Try Guys media ecology ultimately led to the circulatory effects and rhetorical velocity of these recompositions.

Visualizations of The Try Guys Media Ecology and Fandom Influence

In this section, I use an actor network diagram heavily influenced by Potts’ work as I discussed in Chapter 1. My aim is for these diagrams to illustrate the interrelationships and circulatory effects of TryceraTops in continuing to perpetuate and lift the media ecology, while working to co-construct its meaning to an outside audience. For Potts, “Actor network theory enables us to robustly analyze and discuss the efforts of multiple actors to push information through a given network” (29). Although The Try Guys create the content the fandom interacts with and that created the ecology in the first place, the fandom still has enough influence to impact the narrative unfolding when the scandal occurred. Figure 2 explores The Try Guys media ecology prior to the scandal becoming public in September 2022, while Figure 3 focuses on how Ned Fulmer’s affair impacted the construction of the ecology as well as its circulatory effects.

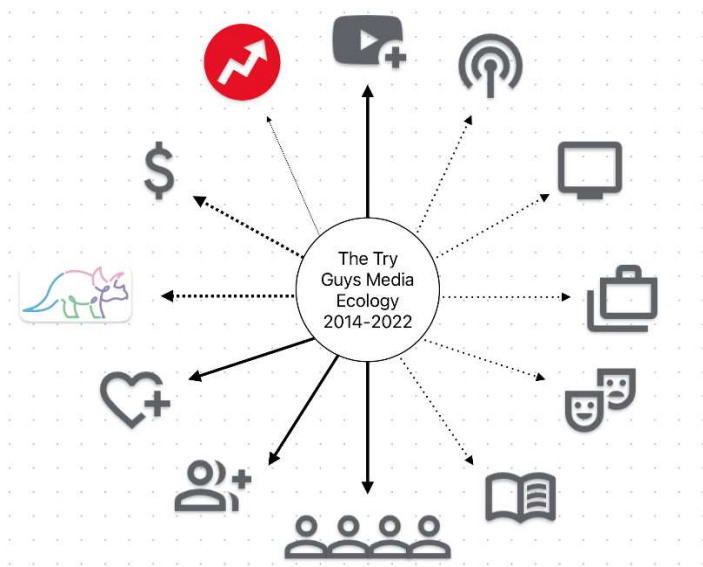


Figure 2: Actor network diagram of The Try Guys media ecology prior to Ned Fulmer’s affair.

This actor network diagram in Figure 2 features The Try Guys media ecology at the center. According to Potts, a central actor is “linked to various actors that are present because they directly affect the central actor; without these supporting actors, the central actor could not exist without any relevant people, technology, organization, and so on, to construct, make relevant, or validate this

actor” (33). I argue that The Try Guys media ecology itself is a central actor due to their interrelationships with their fandom, social media, and numerous media projects and business ventures outside of their YouTube channel, all with wide circulatory reach across digital platforms. As mentioned in Chapter 2, The Try Guys began at BuzzFeed in 2014 on the media company’s YouTube Channel. As signified by this actor network theory web above, each line signifies a different bond strength and intensity between actors. The solid and thickest lines signify autonomy The Try Guys have over their content. Primarily through releasing content on YouTube, the four-part ensemble, which is represented by the group of four people in the diagram above, has gone on to include their staff and even their romantic partners in their content through the inclusion of “supporting actors” (Potts 33) such as their partners in The Try Wives (as represented by the heart and addition symbol) and the inclusion of their staff (as represented by the two people and the addition symbol). As a result, the fandom is able to cultivate personal relationships and connections with The Try Guys by viewing how their personal lives intersect with their branded identity as the ensemble. Although they began on the YouTube platform, the ensemble have been able to expand their brand across social media platforms, represented by the YouTube logo with the addition symbol. These additional forms of media such as X, Instagram, TikTok, and Reddit, allow for a participatory culture to erupt with the fandom and the ensemble.

The most consistent and strongest bond The Try Guys have is with their fandom and success as Internet personalities, as seen through the thick dotted lines. Despite leaving BuzzFeed and no longer having any ties with the company, (as seen in the thin relationship line), the development of 2nd Try, LLC. strengthened their bond and relationship with the fandom since much of their success as a startup company was dependent on this audience involvement cultivated on their original platform and eventually circulated across other social media platforms. Ultimately, this increased fandom participation and involvement with the ensemble resulted in the name

TryceraTops and a branded logo with all of The Try Guys colors (blue, pink, green, and purple) being used and circulated across the ecology, which is presented by the TryceraTops logo. This strong relationship bond with the audience directly ties to the revenue and success as YouTubers, Internet personalities, and owners of the company, which is presented by the money symbol. Therefore, the success of the central actor is directly correlated and contingent on how strong these bonds are between The Try Guys and their fanbase whose job is to support this ensemble through their consistent views of content, their participation on social media platforms on and outside of YouTube, and sometimes, paid support through Patreon, which is additive to the money symbol that represents revenue.

Due to their success on YouTube, The Try Guys have also created projects outside of the platform. Represented by the slightly thinner dotted lines, these projects have included a book (*The Hidden Power of Fucking Up*) represented by the book symbol; a world tour (*Legends of the Internet*) represented by the theatre symbol; had a Food Network television show (*No Recipe Road Trip*) represented by the television symbol; podcasts (*The TryPod*, *You Can Sit With Us*, and *Guilty Pleasures*) represented by the podcast symbol; and individual business ventures (Keith's Hot Sauces, *The Date Night Cookbook*, and Zadiko) represented by the brief cases symbol. Similar to their channel and success as a company, these business ventures are only made possible through the fandom participation and interaction that has erupted since the ensemble was created in 2014. As a result, The Try Guys have been able to increase their publicly branded image outside of the ecology due to the continuous support from TryceraTops.

Through this actor network diagram, I aim to illustrate how involved the fandom is in the success and branded identity of The Try Guys. Within The Try Guys media ecology, the TryceraTops have a relationship and overall impact with each actor. The only way 2nd Try, LLC. is able to maintain success is through the parasocial relationships and participatory nature of their

fandom. As a result, the configuration of the media ecology is contingent upon the fans lifting up the branded identity of The Try Guys by interacting and participating with their content. In return, The Try Guys strengthen the parasocial bond with their fandom by giving them access to their personal lives outside of their public brand. Therefore, this dependent relationship between The Try Guys and TryceraTops effectively impacts the construction of The Try Guys media ecology and its circulation. As a result, the ecology was susceptible to being heavily impacted by any event that threatened these brands, setting the stage for Ned Fulmer's affair to have major ripples within the ecology, as I show in Figure 3 below.

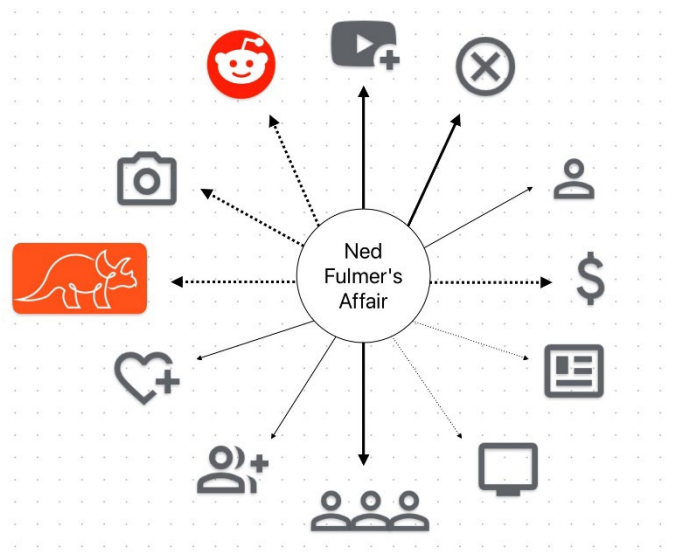


Figure 3: Actor network diagram of Ned Fulmer's affair's impact on The Try Guys media ecology.

When Ned Fulmer's scandal was discovered by fans in September of 2022, its circulatory effects ultimately shaped The Try Guys media ecology. No longer is this ecology the central actor in this actor network diagram seen in Figure 2, but the scandal's velocity is contingent upon the fandom's discovery of the affair, their response, and their parasocial and participatory involvement. As in Figure 2, the solid and thickest lines signify autonomy The Try Guys have over their content, although this autonomy inevitably shifts due to the scandal. The Try Guys still funnel and publish

their content through YouTube and additional platforms (represented by the YouTube logo and addition symbol), but now there are recompositions and digital removal at play here as signified by the “x”; however, they still maintain control over their company and remove Fulmer from the company, effectively becoming a three-man ensemble, which is represented by the three people.

Overall, the autonomy The Try Guys have over their content and even their interrelationships among supporting actors (represented by the heart and addition symbol and the two people and addition symbol) lessens as the fandom itself becomes the main driving force for how the ecology is reconfigured due to the scandal. The lone person presents the isolation of Fulmer from the ecology as well as his social media platforms due to not being as active as an Internet personality due to the scandal. In this diagram, I make the argument that these weakened relationships are mostly due to the power the fandom has in constructing the branded identity of The Try Guys, to the point that when that construction is threatened, such as by this scandal, the fandom’s velocity ultimately shifts the interactions happening within The Try Guys media ecology and outside of it.

The TryceraTops’ interaction and influence is signified by the thick dotted lines. As discussed in Chapter 2, fans first discovered the affair at a Harry Styles concert and circulated photos online, which is represented by the camera symbol. These photos were the driving force to the Reddit threads, represented by the company’s logo, that theorized something was awry at 2nd Try, LLC. The logo itself of The Try Guys shifts from all four colors branded (as seen in Figure 2) and becomes an orange TryceraTops, emphasizing the impacts of this scandal on the overall branding of The Try Guys and 2nd Try, LLC. as I discuss in more detail in the final section of this chapter. This logo as well as the revenue stream, represented by the money symbol, are still heavily contingent on the fandom to lift the brand and content up, even amidst the scandal.

Due to the rhetorical velocity that made this scandal leave the Reddit platform and enter the public domain as I discuss in Chapter 2, there are relationships and bonds formed between The Try Guys and the media as presented by the slightly thinner dotted lines. At the time, many news publications and social media platforms were circulating information on The Try Guys, who to a majority of the population, did not know of its existence; this relationship is presented by the news symbol. As a result, much of people's first interactions with The Try Guys were through Fulmer's affair and a large fanbase who were circulating this information. Some relationships formed briefly in this time period include a *Saturday Night Live* skit that primarily focused on the fandom responses and reactions. Due to this negative publicity of a branded image lifted up by the fandom and the media ecology, The Try Guys' show on The Food Network, *No Recipe Roadtrip*, had its time changed to a less accessible time, which effectively impacted its ratings and resulted in its audience still primarily being their fan base despite moving platforms; this show is represented by the television symbol.

Through this diagram, I aim to show how involved the fandom was in the circulation of Ned Fulmer's affair from the Reddit threads that were only circulated within the ecology to the fact that these interactions were entering the public domain. As a result of this fan involvement, many audience interactions with The Try Guys was first seen through this scope of how parasocial their fans were. Some media like *SNL* thought this scandal was being blown out of proportion since the fandom was upset; as a result, the audience then deflected the blame from Fulmer and the power dynamics involved with having an affair with a subordinate and focused on the parasocial bond with the fandom. Therefore, not only did the fandom have enough velocity to get the scandal to leave the Reddit platform, but their strong bond and relationships with The Try Guys ultimately impacted the viewpoint of how people outside of media ecology interacted with the ensemble after the affair.

Before digging into the next section, it is important to note the shifts in the strength of relationship bonds before the scandal occurred (Figure 2) and after the scandal became the main actor in the network (Figure 3). As a result, it is important to note how much of an influence the fandom's strength continues to have on the ecology despite not being the central actor in these diagrams. This next section discusses how the strength of the fandom and these bonds occurred by digging into the concept of parasocial relationships and how they formed amongst the ensemble and their fandom. I aim to showcase how these bonds ultimately led to the lifting up of The Try Guys brand, which is what backfired once Ned Fulmer's brand was threatened.

TryceraTops and The Try Guys: A Parasocial Relationship

The term “parasocial interactions” was first coined by sociologists Donald Horton and Richard Wohl in 1956. In their original article “Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance,” Horton and Wohl focus on how parasocial relationships develop in television. Parasocial interactions occur between an actor, who can either play themselves or a fictional role (215), and a spectator, who face their own expectations in their role as the audience (220). In an increasing digital age where communication and social interaction is possible almost instantly through social media platforms, the term parasocial interactions has an increased potential to occur between any public figure or celebrity (in any medium, environment, or platform) and their audience. The case of The Try Guys, a group who began on YouTube, a media platform that allows users to interact with creators and vice-versa, emphasizes the increased potential for these parasocial relationships to occur.

As YouTubers and Internet personalities, The Try Guys have all found different balances of private and public lives that blur their authenticity and fictionality as actors. Much of this conflicting balance has to do with the audience's influence on persona. According to Horton and Wohl, the persona is a “continuing relationship” that is a “regular and dependable event” for the audience

(216). This persona helps the actors “build” their “performance on a cumulative structure of [audience] assumptions about their response” (221). As a result, the personas of The Try Guys are directly correlated to the expected audience responses. Starting off as a recurring cast of characters on BuzzFeed allowed The Try Guys to build a loyal fanbase and create their own branding and dependability within their own company. So, each member getting their own color (blue, pink, green, and purple) and a simplified identity marker (Fun, Love, Fun, Gay), further strengthens the bond between the group and their fans since their characterization and persona becomes dependable and well-known to a fanbase who regularly consumes and interacts with their content. In fact, some 2nd Try, LLC. videos are created based on popular demand from TryceraTops, and many comments and questions are included based on audience participation and the channel’s Patreon. The Try Guys also have a recurring schedule of posting videos every Wednesday and every Saturday (@TheTryGuys). So when The Try Guys posted they will be going down to one video a week starting from September 20th to the end of October (@throwaway72017201), fans were able to detect something was awry at 2nd Try, LLC. since this dependability and consistent schedule the company created in 2018 was shifted.

The audience’s responses also depend on their responsibility to the actors. Horton and Wohl define audience/spectator responsibilities as being “expected to contribute to the illusion by believing in it, and by rewarding the persona’s ‘sincerity’ with ‘loyalty.’ The audience is entreated to assume a sense of personal obligation to the performer” (220). The Try Guys rely on audience viewership and participation in order to create content and revenue. The ensemble was first created on BuzzFeed because the four men were tasked with going viral to increase hits, site traffic, and circulation. Without the wide viewership, The Try Guys would not have been able to form their company 2nd Try, LLC. Much like other YouTubers and Internet personalities, The Try Guys rely on views to get sponsorships and have their videos monetized, so, their success is highly contingent

on their relationships with their audience. Not only do The Try Guys need to be dependable for their viewers, but their viewers also must be dependable by watching and consuming their content in order to keep their company afloat. As a result, The Try Guys media ecology is contingent on this relationship and dependency between content creators and fandom.

Horton and Wohl also focus on the role platforms play in actors' lives and how these platforms create relationships between the audience and the actors, claiming that "in addition to the management of relationships between the persona and the performers, and between him and his audience, the technical devices of the media themselves are exploited to create illusions of intimacy" (218). When it comes to the Try Guys, YouTube is the main platform that houses their content and their branded identities. Horton and Wohl focus on how a "subjective-camera" makes the camera angle mimic the eyes of the audience (218). Although this happens for most YouTube videos, The Try Guys often use the subjective-camera to invite the audience into their lives and personas. For example, some videos like *Without a Recipe* include The Try Guys talking to the camera and audience as they cook, breaking the fourth wall and acknowledging the audience. There are also times during this series where each Try Guy does different confessionals, which mimic an intimate one-on-one or small group setting between a Try Guy and their audience ("Try Guys Bake" 0:00-4:50). This technique allows The Try Guys to further connect with their audience and build intimate relationships with them, in turn, increasing their viewership, monetary benefits, loyal fanbase, and dependency overall. The relationships cultivated on this platform also allow for a further circulation to other platforms as illustrated in Figure 1.

Without audience participation and loyalty, The Try Guys would have never reached the success they currently have. However, The Try Guys also have a big impact on the audience as well. On their tour, *Legends of the Internet*, many fans told Eugene Lee Yang Eugene that they came out because of his video *I'm Gay* (1:32:51-1:33:29). As mentioned in Chapter 2, their tour also showcased

their branded identities by having four broad themes for each Try Guy that allowed the fanbase to find some relatability with each member, highlighting how their fanbase was strong enough to leave the platform of YouTube, where a majority of their content is created and circulated, to enter the real world and sellout venues in order for their fanbase to see them perform live.

These parasocial relationships and participatory culture from the fanbase allow for The Try Guys media ecology to stay afloat. However, these relationships ultimately lead to a dependency between both actor and spectator that impact the power dynamics and construction of the ensemble's branded identity. This next section seeks to highlight how this dependency for the fandom to lift up these public personas from each Try Guy not only led to the demise of Fulmer's branded identity, but it also impacted the overall construction of The Try Guys media ecology.

The Lifestyle Brand of Ned Fulmer

In the documentary, *Behind The Try: A Try Guys Documentary*, The Try Guys give further insight on their personal experiences and conceptions of their identity as the ensemble, specifically by showcasing what their life was like on their world tour. In particular, Fulmer admits his goal as a Try Guy is to cultivate a "lifestyle brand" that he wants to build with his wife, Ariel Fulmer. As a result, the Fulmers created Fulmer Media, Inc. ("Fulmer Media"), in order to house these projects outside of The Try Guys, including a podcast called *Baby Steps* (@BabySteps) and a book called *The Date Night Cookbook* ("The Date").

This discussion of a lifestyle brand emphasizes the importance Fulmer sees the YouTube platform playing in its creation. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Fulmer admits in the documentary that he never expected for family life to be his personality on YouTube. However, he does not mind this characterization because he loves his family and according to him, a "digital life/space is where you are personal" ("Behind" 1:16:00-1:16:47). Rather than finding a line between his public life and private life, Ned made his private life with his family his brand as a Try Guy. As a result, his affair

with Alexandria Herring was shocking to most fans since he built his entire persona as a Try Guy based on being a family guy who loves his wife.

Fulmer was also able to build this persona due to what Horton and Wohl call the “supporting cast,” which are other actors and crew that come in who must be treated like “close intimates” to build the credibility of the actor (217). For The Try Guys, this supporting cast involves incorporating their romantic partners (The Try Wives) and their coworkers (at 2nd Try, LLC.). While the inclusion of their coworkers as a supporting cast furthers a close bond and understanding of the ensemble as a whole, Fulmer’s entire brand is focused on the inclusion of his wife. Because Fulmer involves his wife, Ariel Fulmer, and his sons in Try Guys content, the audience gets a glimpse into his relationships with family and sees if his persona persists outside of content and into his personal life. Ultimately, through the inclusion of his wife and her own interactions with The Try Guys and The Try Wives, the audience has been provided an intimate look into the private lives of Fulmer and further build a bond with a man whose branded identity became the family guy. Seeing The Try Guys, specifically Fulmer, interact with their “supporting cast” emphasizes the credibility and character personas they have created for themselves and how the fandom finding out about the Fulmer affair before anyone else was inevitable due to these parasocial connections.

Fulmer constructed a brand identity as a Try Guy at the start of 2nd Try, LLC. in 2018. However, its continued existence was mostly in part due to the participatory fan base embracing the branded identities and images for each Try Guy. Due to how consistently Fulmer was pedaling this lifestyle brand and how the fanbase was continuously lifting up this label of Fulmer as a “wife guy,” any threat to that image would inevitably lead to a sense of betrayal felt from the fandom. As a result, Fulmer’s affair being discovered by fans rather than the ensemble first informing them not only emphasizes their parasocial and participatory relationships, but it also emphasizes how involved

the fandom was in maintaining this idealized image of a man who loved his wife, which would eventually have ripples through The Try Guys media ecology.

On September 1st, 2022, fans of The Try Guys who went to a Harry Styles concert in New York City took pictures with Ned Fulmer and noticed him with Alexandria Herring (@Chrissy_cat18), an associate producer of 2nd Try, LLC. and Fulmer's subordinate. Fans recognized Herring since she has appeared in numerous Try Guys videos and is a part of a series called *The Food Babies* (@TheTryGuys). One fan, @Julia.Ashley, direct-messaged Ariel Fulmer and Will Thayer, Herring's fiancée, on Instagram with videos of Fulmer and Herring intimately dancing together in public. There was also a photograph a fan took at a Harry Styles concert where Fulmer and Herring attended that night, with the same blue shirt seen in the videos (@Chrissy_cat18). These images would not be widely circulated until September 27th.

Shortly after on September 2nd and 3rd, Will Thayer created a Reddit account, u/hamilton390, that has now been deleted. On this account, he made a post saying "Multiple people have see[n] Ned around NYC this week making out with women at the local bars. It's unfortunate for Ariel, his family, and the try team but this is true." One Reddit user, @Laurasaurus_ (who is @ghostpeppernm in the figure below), responded that this rumor was made up. Thayer then direct-messaged this user on the platform, sending screenshots from his Instagram direct messages with the name blurred out (the user is presumably @Julia.Ashley based off his interaction with her on October 15th). These screenshots include the videos the user sent to Thayer and screenshots of messages sent to Ariel Fulmer about Ned's affair. Thayer then sent Ned's phone number to @Laurasaurus_. Thayer also posted another Reddit comment referring to the cheating that can be seen in Figure 4 below (@throwaway72017201). Thayer's Reddit account has since been deleted.

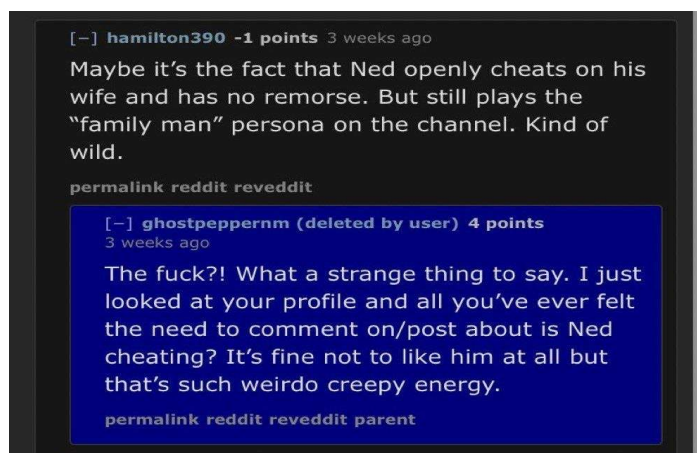


Figure 4: Thayer's comment on Reddit referring to the scandal followed by a comment from another Reddit user.

Due to the fan speculation as well as the involvement of Thayer on Reddit, who is directly impacted by this affair, Habersberger, Kornfeld, and Lee Yang were notified by fans about the scandal on September 5th. It is unclear which fans alerted them, but fans believe Thayer either reached out or that the group had noticed the Reddit threads being circulated (“ok, let’s talk about it” 13:12-13:15). Once they confirmed with Fulmer and checked on Herring, they launched a “three-week process of engaging with employment lawyers, corporate lawyers, HR, PR, and more” (“what” 0:53-1:03) The fact that an affair from Fulmer was discovered by fans before The Try Guys found out themselves emphasizes how involved the fanbase is in the construction of the media ecology and effectively impacts the power dynamics embedded within the ecology. These dynamics will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

In the remaining weeks leading up to this scandal becoming publicly circulated to a wider audience outside of the fandom, Reddit threads continued to be created that theorized something was awry at 2nd Try, especially due to Fulmer making less appearances in The Try Guys podcast, *The TryPod*, and not appearing in videos such as “Try Guys Ruin Chocolate Eclairs with Pro Chefs.” The direct messages from Will Thayer were not posted by the user, @Laurasaurus_, since they did not think it was real. However, once fan speculation about something being awry at 2nd Try, LLC became more widely circulated, @Laurasaurus_ posted on Reddit. A Twitter account

@nedfulmerexpose (created due to the scandal) tweeted screenshots from the video taken by @Julia.Ashley, but the original post was deleted and would only be reuploaded on September 27th (@throwaway72017201).

Due to videos such as “Try Guys Try Stand-Up Comedy” and Fulmer’s continued disappearance from 2nd Try, LLC. content, these Reddit threads about Fulmer’s affair with Herring became further circulated on September 27th. Some threads focused on proof that Fulmer was digitally removed from the “Phoning It In” episode and “Stand-Up Comedy.” Other threads discussed the content sent by @Julia.Ashley to Thayer and Ariel Fulmer about the scandal. The Twitter account, @nedfulmerexposed provides an archive of how the scandal was first discovered by fans and posted by Thayer on September 1st (@nedfulmerexposed). Habersberger and Kornfeld admit that since they found out about the scandal at the start of September, they were continuously searching for key terms related to Fulmer’s affair on different social media platforms; therefore, they were keenly aware when fan discourse discussing the scandal was being further circulated, allowing them ample time to realize when to post a public statement on the scandal before wide media coverage was published and gained velocity. As a result, on September 27th, The Try Guys posted a public statement on all their social media platforms regarding the scandal and claiming Fulmer was no longer working with the company. Before posting, they also warned Ned Fulmer and Ariel Fulmer, which also gave them time to draft up their own public statements on the scandal (“ok” 49:20-49:27).

Shortly after the public statements issued by 2nd Try, LLC. and the Fulmers, the remaining Try Guys, Keith Habersberger, Zach Kornfeld, and Eugene Lee Yang, post an apology video called “what happened.” on all of their social media platforms. In this video, The Try Guys only mentioned “multiple fans alerted [them] on Labor Day weekend, giving no specific date or name of fans, so it is unclear if it was user @Julia.Ashley or @Laurasaurus_ that alerted the company. To

accompany this textual, public statement, The Try Guys also issued an apology video, “what happened.” As discussed in Chapter 2, this video was a scripted and very formal statement approved by their lawyers and their PR team. However, their podcast episode, “ok, let’s talk about,” released on October 6th, features a more open conversation about the events that transpired regarding the scandal. In this episode, Habersberger and Kornfeld give a concrete timeline of finding out from fans about the scandal. They mention they feel like the fans and The Try Guys have been put through a “break up.” Kornfeld directly acknowledges the term “parasocial” used in the media and says that the fans are allowed to “care about the content [they] watch” if The Try Guys had an “impact” on their life (“ok” 35:42-36:23). Kornfeld defending the fans and their relationship with The Try Guys further proves the intimate relationships that The Try Guys have built with their fans over the years.

The Fandom’s Co-Construction of A Narrative

As discussed, the parasocial relationships and participatory culture embedded within The Try Guys fandom resulted in Fulmer’s affair being discovered by fans and eventually circulated outside of the ecology. The fandom’s understanding and familiarity with The Try Guys content also resulted in them recognizing the recomposition of Fulmer, even when these edits were not the most visible (as I will discuss in Chapter 4). The fans then circulated these recompositions on Reddit and once they gained enough traction, The Try Guys and the Fulmers publicly addressed the scandal on their social media. As a result, the fans were able to co-construct the narrative of when Fulmer’s affair became public knowledge with these public figures. Although The Try Guys tried to control the narrative through their recompositions, the fandom also had a lot of power due to their participatory culture and circulation on Reddit as well as their close ties to the construction of the media ecology. The fandom that built the success and the revenue of The Try Guys were also ultimately the downfall of one of its core members, Ned Fulmer, and his dreams for a lifestyle brand.

Since the fandom became so familiar with the branded identity of Fulmer as the “wife guy,” this extramarital affair ultimately resulted in the fandom cancelling Fulmer. For example, when Fulmer was digitally removed and digitally revised to be replaced with an elephant as I will discuss in Chapter 4, the fandom further circulated this recomposition on platforms such as X, Instagram, Reddit, and TikTok, claiming that the 2nd Try, LLC. editors needed a raise (@chrystual). The fact that this recomposition of Fulmer that is now publicly visible and accessible to any audience had the potential to become memeable material circulated across platforms outside of YouTube due to The Try Guys fandom further showcases how the participatory culture of the fandom is so embedded with how the media ecology functions. As mentioned, this constructed identity as a family man and wife guy ultimately led to feelings of betrayal among the fanbase, which would further lead to them being able to co-construct how this scandal impacted people associated with Fulmer.

Not only was Fulmer considered to be cancelled by a majority of the fandom, but other figures attached to Fulmer were impacted by his removal from the company and the resulting recompositions. Since Ariel Fulmer’s career was so attached to her husband Ned Fulmer’s success in The Try Guys, as discussed in Chapter 2, she was also eventually removed from The Try Guys media ecology. For example, when it came to her involvement in *The Try Wives*, she made her last appearance in *You Can Sit With Us* on September 6th. On October 6th, she was also digitally removed from the podcast’s logo, alongside Becky Habersberger and Maggie Bustamante Kornfeld who also experienced recompositions due to Fulmer’s affair, showing how the increased circulatory effects of this scandal ultimately impacted other members of The Try Guys media ecology (@throwaway72017201). Fulmer’s affair and removal from the company ultimately impacted the career of Ariel Fulmer as a part of *The Try Wives* and resulted in her own removal from the company as a result of her association with Fulmer. It is important to note though that Ariel Fulmer was welcomed to continue to be a part of *The Try Wives* despite her husband’s affair, but she chose to

remove herself from the company entirely due to this scandal (“ok” 54:56-55:08). Either way, Fulmer’s affair and the resulting recompositions ultimately impacted his own wife’s success as an Internet personality as well as his own idea for a lifestyle brand.

Fulmer’s affair with Alexandria Herring, who was the Associate Producer at 2nd Try, LLC. at the time, impacted her career with the company. Although she was not fired from the company and was welcome to keep her position, the circulation of fans’ criticism of her across platforms and blatant cyberbullying resulted in her leaving the company. As a result, Herring left the company in October 2023 and it is currently unclear where she is working now (@throwaway72017201).

Herring’s social media presence has also been stunted due to the scandal, as she has not posted anything since prior to the scandal becoming public on September 27th (@aaherring). Will Thayer, her ex-fiancée also digitally removed her from his Instagram and deleted posts with her in it (@wht3). Due to her association with Fulmer and having an affair with him, she has also been recomposed not only from the channel and the company, but also through social media due to the power of fan circulation and cyberbullying. It is important to note that regardless of her affair with Fulmer, the power dynamics involved in her being a subordinate should be considered since Fulmer was not only her manager and boss, but he was also a co-owner of the company she worked at. Regardless, Herring’s presence in digital media has been removed due to the scandal in 2022, highlighting the power the fandom has across platforms.

Due to the affair, The Try Guys also removed or “unlisted” some videos from their YouTube channel (52:16-52:49). Although unclear when these videos were removed from circulation, four videos in total become unlisted from *The Try Guys* YouTube channel in September 2022: “Women Wear Wedding Dresses” (@Kirstinmarae217) “Try Guys Extreme Japanese Street Food Challenge” (@Over_Nebula), “Food Babies 60 oz Tomahawk Steak Challenge” (@Boring_Strategy5678) and “The Try Team Gets Celebrity Hair Makeovers” (which has since been

republished; @TheTryGuys). These videos were unlisted from YouTube since The Try Guys did not want to be “insensitive” to the situation of Herring and Fulmer (“ok” 52:15-53:20). Not only do these videos further digitally remove Herring from the channel, but they also impact other workers at 2nd Try, LLC. by removing their appearances and their contributions to the videos. One 2nd Try, LLC. worker, specifically YB Chang, has been impacted the most due to her association with Herring. *The Food Babies* was a spin-off series of *Eat With Keith* and was created in 2019. This series included Herring and Chang eating food with guests (@TheTryGuys). Not only does Chang make appearances in each of these videos that were unlisted and removed from circulation on the channel, but she also worked and edited these videos that were removed. Not only is Chang’s appearances digitally removed from circulation, but her contributions are removed as well from these videos on *The Try Guys* YouTube Channel. The series *Food Babies* also did not start back up until 2023 and the format heavily shifted due to Herring no longer appearing, further impacting her appearances on the channel. Due to her direct association with Herring who was impacted due to her association with Fulmer, Chang was caught in the crossfire and was removed from content as a result.

Fulmer and the remaining Try Guys also experienced a form of recomposition outside of digital removal and digital revision practices. Before the scandal became public on September 27th, The Try Guys had a television show airing on The Food Network called *No-Recipe Road Trip With The Try Guys* that premiered on August 31st, 2022. However, due to the scandal, the show’s airing shifted from Wednesdays at 10pm EST to Fridays at 10am EST. The new timeslot for the television show effectively lowered the potential for the show to have high viewership and ratings, ultimately impacting the future branding of The Try Guys, especially outside of the YouTube platform. In fact, the show’s final episode premiered on September 30th, and it is unclear whether or not the show ended earlier because of the scandal or if it originally had five episodes (@throwaway72017201). Because of Fulmer’s affair with an employee, the remaining Try Guys and their staff at 2nd Try,

LLC. who helped them with the show experienced their own recomposition by being moved from a more public and viewed timeslot to one that would experience less visibility to a wider audience. Although fans of The Try Guys already knew about the ensemble prior to the show, The Try Guys had an opportunity to increase their fanbase and their own platform on The Food Network but as a result of the scandal, this success for The Try Guys on a television platform did not have the chance to prosper.

It is important to note that due to the networked state of The Try Guys media ecology, Fulmer's recomposition does not mean he is the only one impacted. Each Try Guy is impacted due to their scenes being cut or minimized when in the same frame as Fulmer in *Without A Recipe*; Ariel Fulmer's career with The Try Guys no longer exists due to the affair; Alexandria Herring's career with The Try Guys also no longer exists due to the affair and her social media presence has also been stunted; and other workers at 2nd Try, LLC. have had their contributions recomposed, whether it be in their work on those videos that were unlisted or in their visible appearances in these videos, such as YB Chang. As a result, it is important to note the circulatory effects of TryceraTops are only possible due to these parasocial relationships and the participatory culture within this fandom. By circulatory effects, I am referring to the power of the fandom to co-construct meaning of content within The Try Guys media ecology, such as four-color branding and pink elephants, and the rhetorical velocity of this content across media platforms. Due to the participatory nature of this fandom and their ability to lift up the brand of The Try Guys, they ultimately impact how the ecology is viewed from an outsider's perspective once the scandal breaks. Even though the ensemble's success is contingent on the interactivity among this fanbase, the whole point of YouTube personalities is to increase their popularity and content's circulation across platforms; so, when the only interaction people have with The Try Guys is through their parasocial fandom, it is no wonder their responses becomes the subject of focus rather than the scandal itself.

Through this chapter, I hope to have highlighted how The Try Guys media ecology simultaneously lifted up the fanbase to have autonomy to collaborate with each other and The Try Guys content. As a result, this ultimately led to Fulmer's affair with Herring to have increased velocity within the ecology and eventually into the public sphere. Through their recompositions of Fulmer, 2nd Try, LLC. were able to exert authorial agency over the scandal, as I will discuss in Chapter 4. However, the parasocial relationships and participatory culture of the fandom that uplifted Fulmer's branded identity and ultimately led to their subsequent betrayal by the affair. This participation also allowed for the rhetorical velocity of these recompositions to have an "afterlife" (Gallagher 97) outside of The Try Guys video content and media ecology as these recompositions would have no meaning if not for the fandom's interaction with them. A pink elephant is just an elephant gif until the fandom recognized the references it had to Fulmer and his brand with The Try Guys and circulated this discourse across platforms; they were able to co-construct what these recompositions meant to the ecology and, in turn, the public image and perception of The Try Guys as well. It is the velocity of the discourse on these recompositions by the fandom that resulted in the recompositions I discuss in the next chapter to take on meaning in regard to Fulmer's affair.

CHAPTER 4: THE DIGITAL REMOVAL AND REVISION OF NED FULMER

In this chapter, I consider two forms of recomposition at play within The Try Guys digital editing of Ned Fulmer: digital removal and digital revision. While there are, of course, additional forms of recomposition at play within this media ecology, including the forms of participatory composing described in the prior chapter, these forms of recomposition often occur within The Try Guys videos and branding promotions. It is important to note that these forms of recomposition become subsumed within and lead to additional forms of fan recomposition, as TryceraTops circulated these recompositions as evidence that something was awry at 2nd Try, LLC. Ultimately, these events culminated in The Try Guys and the Fulmers publicly addressing the scandal as I discussed in Chapter 3. The digital removal, digital revision, and other forms of recomposition that occurred in The Try Guys media ecology are due to an affair Ned Fulmer had with his employee. Although 2nd Try, LLC. are not the first public figures to use recomposition as a form of damage control, they mark a shift in the increased accessibility of these practices and represent how these practices can be a form of response to an increasing participatory culture, especially as a practice for crisis communication/marketing. In this chapter, I examine four videos where Ned Fulmer is recomposed in forms of digital removal and digital revision. Through this analysis, I aim to look at how these recompositions illustrate three circulatory effects: how the recompositions of Fulmer increases the desire of the fandom to collaborate and participate to find moments where Fulmer is absent from video content; The Try Guys and 2nd Try, LLC. digitally editing Fulmer in direct and indirect ways; this spectrum of visibility inevitably leads to these recomposed practices from 2nd Try, LLC. exerting authorial agency over Fulmer and his branded identity as a former member of The Try Guys to protect their own branding in the process.

Types of Recompositions in The Try Guys Media Ecology

Before digging into my analysis, it is important to define terms I will use here as there are more forms of recomposition at play in The Try Guys video content. As discussed in Chapter 1: Methods, recomposition occurs when aspects and iterations of artifacts are digitally edited. As mentioned, digital removal is a process that seeks to erase, delete, deflect, exclude, reconstitute, remediate, and/or revise a human or non-human object in digital space. Digital revision is a form of recomposition that involves the manipulation, alteration, and refashioning of human and non-human objects. Throughout my coding, I noticed at least five types of revision at play in The Try Guys ecology: cropping, zooming, blurring, adding, and replacing. I will use these terms throughout my analysis of Fulmer's recomposition in the following sections.

In total, The Try Guys digitally edited and recomposed Fulmer from at least nine videos between September 2022 when the scandal was first discovered to December 2022 when The Try Guys entered in a new era post-Ned Fulmer (as I will discuss later in this chapter). This chapter examines four videos from *The Try Guys* YouTube channel: "Try Guys Ruined Chocolate Eclairs w/ Pro Chefs" and "Try Guys Try Stand-Up Comedy," which were published prior to the scandal becoming public on September 27th; and "The Try Guys Make Pop-Tarts Without A Recipe" and "The Try Guys Make Illusion Cakes Without A Recipe," which were published after the scandal became public.

Recompositions Prior to the Scandal Becoming Public

When Fulmer was first recomposed in the videos "Eclairs" and "Stand-Up Comedy," there was fan speculation that theorized Fulmer was being digitally edited out of videos. As I will discuss in the next section, these videos were the two main texts that eventually resulted in the scandal taking on a more public quality due to the amount of fan circulation bringing these recompositions to light. Due to fans' familiarity with *The Try Guys* YouTube channel and the genre moves within

their video content, TryceraTops were able to spot something was awry within the typical format of “Eclairs” and “Stand-Up Comedy.” Since “Eclairs” was the second episode of the series, *Phoning It In*, and it is also a food competition, which is a typical genre for the channel, the show typically has three guest judges who judge the dishes from The Try Guys. The first episode of the series also included Fulmer appearing as a judge in “Pro Chefs – Phoning It In,” so fans were under the impression that he would judge the episode again in the second episode since he was not competing as a Try Guy. So, when there were only two judges in “Eclairs” and Fulmer was not present, fans began to speculate and eventually, notice recompositions of Fulmer, as I will discuss below, were occurring. However, these moments of recomposition within this video are subtle and not visible to every audience member, just the fans who are quite familiar with their content due to a parasocial connection. It appears that at this moment, 2nd Try, LLC. did not want to make these recompositions known to the public that something was going on within the company.

In “Eclairs” there are four frames total where Fulmer is slightly visible, which equate to at least five seconds total. Fulmer’s hand potentially appears twice in the video, but Fulmer’s sleeve is the most visible and appeared a total of two times shown in the screenshot below where the sleeve is slightly visible as he sits by another judge, Monique Chan. Although a slightly visible sleeve, fans speculated it was Fulmer due to the sleeve not appearing again in a frame of the video, as Garrick Bernard, another judge in this episode, was sitting by Chan and was wearing a black shirt. As a result, this notice of the sleeve was predicted by fans to be Fulmer’s, resulting in them assuming that Fulmer was being strategically edited from The Try Guys content. Fulmer’s sleeve is only slightly visible in this frame of the video, but it is a subtle feature of Fulmer that hardly makes this recomposition recognizable. In fact, the color of his shirt only appears in two frames; it appears Fulmer is otherwise digitally revised and cropped (39 frames or 1 minute and 45 seconds) or digitally removed and erased (6 frames or 14 seconds), as seen in Figure 5 below.



Figure 5: Fulmer's sleeve visible in "Try Guys Ruin Chocolate Eclairs w/ Pro Chefs."

Again, due to the fan familiarity with the content and genre moves with the YouTube channel, they were able to recognize the potential recomposition at play in "Eclairs." Although subtle and seemingly speculative, this noticeability of recomposition from fans in this video ultimately highlight how the participatory culture built within The Try Guys media ecology is what led to these Reddit theorizations that were collaboratively developed eventually gained enough traction and circulation to a more public audience to notice something was awry at 2nd Try, LLC. A viewer of this video who was watching for entertainment and not looking for anything in particular would know no difference as they are not as familiar with content within the ecology; however, fans who were theorizing Fulmer was being removed from videos would catch this subtle recomposition. Since there are no original artifacts that are published and circulated to indicate Fulmer was wearing this shirt and also was judging, fans would not know Fulmer was supposed to be in this video if not for The Try Guys admitting after the scandal became public that they were "digitally removing" Fulmer from their videos during their three-week HR investigation ("what" 0:53-1:03).

Fans were also familiar with the genre moves within "Stand-Up Comedy," as the format of this video is what The Try Guys started with on BuzzFeed. As mentioned in Chapter 2, The Try Guys first videos began by learning a new thing from an expert, practicing, and then trying said new thing. However, there are also no original artifacts that exist outside of this video to indicate Fulmer

was present to begin with, but rather the familiarity with the content and moments of slight visibility of Fulmer in this video that led to fan theorization he was being digitally edited from videos. In fact, Fulmer's appearances and recompositions are a bit easier to catch just because Fulmer appeared more visible for the first half of the video (when the expert is teaching them stand-up); the second half of the video involves each Try Guy performing stand-up in front of an audience, so it is difficult to catch recompositions as these scenes appear to be removed. As a result, Fulmer is slightly visible in two frames, which equate to at least two seconds total. Fulmer's torso appears twice in this video, but he is most visible when his torso and arms appear in one frame for at least one second as seen in the photo below.

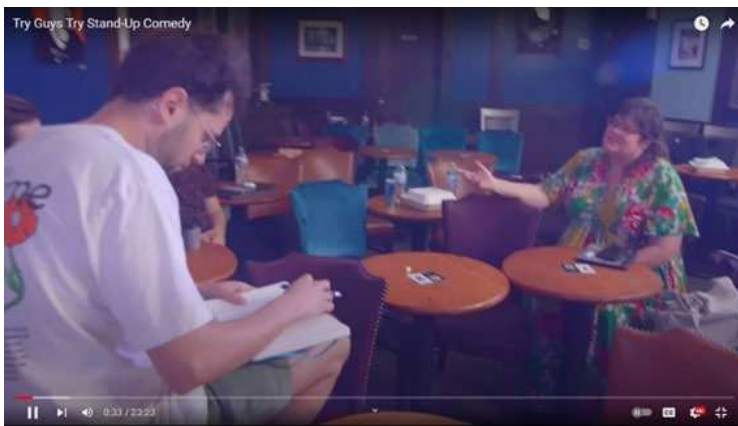


Figure 6: Fulmer's torso visible in "Try Guys Try Stand-Up Comedy."

Fulmer's torso is slightly visible in this frame of the video, but it is not a recognizable enough feature of Fulmer to recognize the recomposition is occurring as the color of this shirt only appears in this frame. There is also another slight view of his shirt that appears again later on in the video when his black shirt is visible for two frames or four seconds. Although these shirts and torsos were not proven or confirmed to be Fulmer, the fan collaboration and speculation that erupted on Reddit theorized these torsos were Fulmer due to these torsos never appearing again in the video as well as his obvious absence from a video genre he typically appears in. Fulmer otherwise appears to be digitally revised and cropped for 28 frames or one minute and 1 second; although less digital

removal and erasure occurs in this video, there is still one frame within these moments of digital revision where Fulmer appears to be digitally removed and replaced with a wooden beam for one second. The slight visibility of Fulmer in some frames as well as the digital cropping and zooming of certain shots of other Try Guys ultimately led to fan theorizations that Fulmer was being digitally edited from content. Again, fan speculation would not be confirmed until October when The Try Guys admitted Fulmer was digitally removed from content.

“Eclairs” and “Stand-Up Comedy” were published prior to the scandal reaching the mainstream media. However, Due to the increasing participatory culture with *The Try Guys* content and the genre moves within The Try Guys media ecology, fans collaborated and theorized Fulmer’s absences were due to digital editing from 2nd Try, LLC. and eventual company shift was at play if Fulmer was no longer present in as much *The Try Guys* content. As mentioned in this section and in Chapter 3, this speculation caught enough traction and velocity to a point where a public audience outside of this ecology was being alerted. Although these moments appear to be a slight visibility of Fulmer and the digital removal and digital revision seem microscopic, a parasocial fanbase was able to recognize nuances and differences in The Try Guys content that resulted in fan speculation circulating. Ultimately, these personal connections the fans felt with The Try Guys are what led to these recompositions and rumors that something was awry at 2nd Try, LLC., eventually leading to The Try Guys, Ned, and Ariel Fulmer to release public statements about Fulmer’s affair.

Recompositions After the Scandal Became Public

As mentioned, the fan speculation of these recompositions in “Eclairs” and “Stand-Up Comedy” eventually circulated more broadly from Reddit on the morning of September 27th into other social media spaces. As a result, these recompositions took on a more public quality as The Try Guys made a public statement on the scandal. Over a month after the scandal left Reddit forums and became public to mainstream audiences, there were still recompositions of Fulmer on

The Try Guys YouTube channel. Some recompositions such as the digital removal of Fulmer in “the try guys audition for a broadway musical” would not have been public knowledge if not for The Try Guys announcing it in a podcast (“ok” 51:38-51:58). It is important to note though that The Try Guys directly discuss and name the digital removal of Fulmer only a handful of times publicly. For example, The Try Guys only explicitly discuss this removal in “what happened” and “ok, let’s talk about it”; otherwise, there are indirect ways 2nd Try, LLC. have acknowledged these recompositions of Fulmer within the video content itself. For example, recompositions of Fulmer became much more apparent and visible after the public became aware of Fulmer’s affair. Some notable examples I will discuss in this section are two videos in *Without A Recipe* (*WAR*), their most popular series on the YouTube channel. *WAR* first began at BuzzFeed and eventually evolved into a long-running series that picked up speed once 2nd Try, LLC. was formed in 2018. As of 2024, this series has over 33 videos on their YouTube channel with over 12.4 billion views (@TheTryGuys).

In the typical genre of an episode of *WAR*, there is a preview of what the episode contains. Afterwards, there are title credits (that typically change each season) that appear before the competition starts. Once the competition starts, there are pre-tapes/pre-recordings where The Try Guys each explain what they plan to cook or bake, without a recipe. Then, two of The Try Guys are paired up with each other while creating their dish and afterwards, three judges (who change each episode, except Rosana Pansino) critique their dishes and rank each Try Guy. Each episode of *WAR* has included the original four Try Guys, except for a few episodes starting in 2021 due to an increase in marketing and collaboration with other channels after the COVID-19 pandemic. The typical format and genre of all four Try Guys appearing in *WAR* started back at the end of that season with “The Try Guys Make Ice Cream Cake Without A Recipe” and was continued in the next season that ran in 2021 (from “Try Guys Bake Cinnamon Rolls Without A Recipe” to “Try Guys Bake Gingerbread Houses Without a Recipe” where Fulmer makes his final appearance in the series). This

rotating cast of guests as contestants would later occur in the tenth season aired in 2023 of *WAR* after the Fulmer scandal became public and a fourth member was needed to compete in this competition series.

The new Try Guys season of *WAR* began on November 19th, 2022, with “The Try Guys Make Pop-Tarts Without A Recipe.” In this season, Fulmer was recomposed prior to the episode being published, which was a rhetorical move made public by the remaining Try Guys (Habersberger, Kornfeld, and Lee Yang). Although this series marks the last time original appearances and footage of Fulmer were recomposed, five episodes of this season included recompositions that were much more visible and recognizable to their audience, marking a shift in tone from 2nd Try, LLC.; recompositions prior to these videos were much more subtle and not acknowledged within the videos as to avoid public knowledge of the scandal. Therefore, the 2022 season of *WAR* further indicated The Try Guys were embracing their recompositions of Fulmer in an effort to frame this visibility as a way of acknowledging the scandal rather than hide from it.

Here I compare “Pop-Tarts” and the final episode with Fulmer’s original footage in this era of The Try Guys. “The Try Guys Make Illusion Cakes Without A Recipe.” Both episodes each start off with recompositions of Fulmer. In “Pop-Tarts,” the introduction to the video appears to include the digital removal of Fulmer as he is not present in the season preview. The opening credits to both episodes also remove Fulmer from the original title sequence used in previous seasons of *WAR*; rather, Fulmer’s scenes are removed and replaced with more screen time for Habersberger, Kornfeld, and Lee Yang. At the end of each title sequence, the title of the season is shown: “Everything is Fine: A Totally Normal Season.” This textual acknowledgement at play indicates that 2nd Try, LLC. are still not directly naming the scandal and the recomposition but rather, are still making notice of it to their audience. However, by referencing something that is not “normal” with

this season of *WAR*, The Try Guys continue to showcase how Fulmer's recomposition is still the object and focus of the media ecology despite not directly naming it.

There is also a brief acknowledgement after the credits about Fulmer's absence and removal when Kornfeld is assigned the superlative "No Longer the Fourth Best" (3:44-4:00), blatantly acknowledging there are now only three Try Guys and no longer four within the company. This superlative also indirectly mentions that Fulmer will not be appearing in this video, at least in his original form. This superlative only appears in "Pop-Tarts" as there is no textual reference to Fulmer in the final episode, "Illusion Cakes." As a result, the start of each video immediately sets the tone that this series will no longer try to hide these recompositions of Fulmer, but will be quite direct that they are at play (as I will discuss below). Although these digital edits are visible to an audience not familiar with the ecology, it is important to note that 2nd Try, LLC. are still not directly naming the scandal has occurred or that Fulmer is no longer with the company. As a result, the editing in both *WAR* episodes not only includes more moments where Fulmer appears to be digitally removed and revised, but there are moments where Fulmer's presence is acknowledged and much more visible. In "Pop-Tarts," although Fulmer is not visible while cooking, his cooking materials are visible in two frames or two seconds; in "Illusion Cakes," these cooking materials are visible for 15 frames or 39 seconds. These cooking materials or non-human objects eventually become recomposed as I will discuss later in this section. It is important to note though that the absence of objects associated with Fulmer continues to reinforce his own absence in the video, without directly naming it.

In "Pop-Tarts, Fulmer is visible in most of the judging sequences that last for at least 17 minutes and 17 seconds, as seen in Figure 7 below. However, it is important to note that Fulmer's face is never visible; rather, his torso is. Although fans noted Fulmer's torso appeared in "Eclairs" and "Stand-Up," the torsos were speculated to be Fulmer; in *WAR*, 2nd Try, LLC. has shifted their editing practices to no longer remove his torso from appearing, but rather, continue to use it as a

strategy to further indicate he is no longer associated with the company or the ecology. His torso only appearing also marks a further dehumanization of Fulmer as his face or any visibly recognizable part of him is present. In total, Fulmer's torso and arms appear for 76 frames and three minutes and 17 seconds. The increased visibility of Fulmer marks a shift in 2nd Try, LLC. no longer worrying if the audience sees the former member; rather, The Try Guys are beginning to control the narrative of Fulmer's scandal that had widely become circulated at this point. When Fulmer's torso is visible, his shirt says "I Love Bad Ideas," which was formerly a part of a merchandise line based off of Ned Fulmer's branded identity as a family man who loves bad ideas; this slogan was meant to challenge this notion that he is only a family guy who plays it safe ("I love"). Not only does this shirt come across as ironic after the affair became public due to his "bad idea" to have an affair with his employee, but it also is a reference to a slogan that Fulmer himself mentioned throughout his time with The Try Guys and further serves as a critique of Fulmer's brand and positionality he tried to establish with the company. As a result, Fulmer's appearance with his own brand now, after his scandal became public, further indicates that Fulmer's brand that was established and lifted up within the media ecology no longer stands for what it was and rather, comes off as ironic and more of a betrayal considering his affair.



Figure 7: Fulmer's torso visible in "The Try Guys Make Pop-Tarts Without A Recipe."

In “Illusion Cakes,” Fulmer is visible in most of the judging sequences that last for at least 19 minutes and 15 seconds. However, it is important to note once again that Fulmer’s face is never visible but rather, his torso is. In total, Fulmer’s torso and arms appear for 76 frames or three minutes and 16 seconds. This increased visibility, again, marks a distinct shift in tone from 2nd Try, LLC.’s editing and recomposition of Fulmer, but this rhetorical act of recomposition still never directly names that the scandal has occurred and shifted the media ecology. However, unlike “Pop-Tarts,” Fulmer’s visible torso includes a floral shirt that makes no reference to his identity or branding and does not serve as a visual reference to recomposition as “I Love Bad Ideas” did. Rather, the torso is less recognizable as an act of recomposition for audience members who are unfamiliar with Try Guys content and who might not know a fourth member is missing since the editors are still not directly naming the recomposition or the affair; due to the velocity of the scandal across media platforms, however, it is assumed that most of an audience would know Fulmer was being digitally edited out of content due to fan discourse that acknowledged these recompositions. This episode also features more visible features outside of his torso and his arms; in fact, his hands are slightly visible for one frame or one second and his legs are visible for one frame or four seconds, eight frames or eleven seconds. Although these body parts are less recognizable than a torso, these moments of Fulmer’s appearances emphasize the 2nd Try, LLC. editors are no longer being subtle about their recompositions; rather, they are making it known Fulmer is visible but not fully recognizable or included in any footage published in order to exert authorial agency over Fulmer and his brand that is no longer associated with the company.



Figure 8: Fulmer's body digitally removed and replaced by an elephant, in reference to the "elephant in the room."

These more visible acts of recomposition at play in *WAR* allow for the digital removal and revision of Fulmer to become present for any audience member and not just eagle-eyed fans, meaning that recomposition no longer used as a vehicle to hide a scandal from the public but rather, has become an act of authorial agency that has caught velocity and left The Try Guys media ecology. As a result, Fulmer is further dehumanized to a larger audience as his branded identity and even his body himself no longer appear in their original form on the channel. Due to this, an audience who might not be as familiar with the content are now introduced to a version of Fulmer that is digitally edited and recomposed by 2nd Try, LLC. in an effort to further exert that Fulmer no longer has any association with the company; as a result, the company is also able to exert authorial agency over what Fulmer's brand and association now means with the company.

Digital removal and digital revision in these videos no longer become two distinct processes; rather, these recompositions become combined acts to continue altering the content within The Try Guys media ecology. For example, Fulmer is digitally removed and erased from his scenes cooking, but in "Pop-Tarts," he is digitally revised and replaced by a pink elephant with the 800 pound sign (since the scandal is the "elephant in the room," Fulmer's brand color is pink, and the 800 pound sign references power dynamics involved in the scandal) and a dough boy (which was created by Habersberger in this episode); he appears to be removed and replaced by a wooden beam during

judging, which is the same one he was replaced with in “Stand-Up Comedy.” The elephant, which is the one that caught the most velocity among fans can be seen in Figure 8 above. In “Illusion Cakes,” Fulmer appears to be digitally removed and erased from his scenes cooking, and digitally revised and replaced by a rooster (since Lee Yang mentions eggs in this video) and a dominatrix (which was created by Lee Yang in this episode). Not only does Fulmer’s body appear to be digitally removed and replaced with the dominatrix, but the bottom half of Lee Yang’s body is replicated, which can be seen in Figure 9 below. In “Pop-Tarts,” these combined processes of digital removal and revision of Fulmer occur for 15 frames or 48 seconds. Outside of these combined digital editing practices, Fulmer appears to be digitally revised or cropped for 20 frames or 30 seconds and digitally removed and erased for five frames or one minute and 13 seconds. In “Illusion Cakes,” these combined processes of Fulmer seem to occur for 11 frames or 35 seconds. Outside of these combined digital editing practices, Fulmer appears to be digitally revised or cropped for 16 frames or 42 seconds and appears to be digitally removed and erased for eight frames or 21 seconds.



Figure 9: Fulmer’s body digitally removed and replaced with a dominatrix, created by Lee Yang.

With these more visible recompositions of Fulmer that still do not directly name the scandal, the editors still manage to make their recompositions visible to a wider audience outside of their media ecology now that the scandal has caught velocity. As the editors become more creative with their recompositions of Fulmer, they further dehumanize him by either replacing him with non-

human objects (elephants and roosters) or human objects associated with Fulmer (such as Habersberger's dough boy or Lee Yang's reference). As a result, the editors exert more authorial agency by recomposing him with other objects, which not only further dehumanizes him, but marks a clear shift in his removal and association from the company. However, by not directly naming the scandal or the affair and rather, making recompositions more visible and seemingly self-aware to the media ecology, 2nd Try, LLC. manages to make these events the center of the media ecology. So, despite not explicitly naming it, the company is still making notice of the recompositions of Fulmer that were a result of the scandal.

In a further act of dehumanization of Fulmer, non-human objects associated with Fulmer are also visibly recomposed. As this show focuses on cooking and baking, oftentimes materials used for these processes are made visible throughout the content, allowing the audience further insight on the creation process. Due to Fulmer's recomposition, his cooking materials (and eventually the final product) are also recomposed in combined processes of digital removal and digital revision. In "Pop-Tarts," for 10 frames or 25 seconds, Fulmer's cooking materials for his pop-tart appear to be digitally removed and replaced with unused cooking materials; however, there are two frames or two seconds where Fulmer's materials are shown to be used and full of ingredients. In "Illusion Cakes," for 12 frames or 30 seconds, Fulmer's cooking materials for his illusion cake also appear to be digitally removed and replaced with unused cooking materials; however, there are 11 frames or 27 seconds where Fulmer's materials are shown to be used and full of ingredients and scenes where he is even seen cooking for four frames and 12 seconds. It is important to note that prior to this episode of *WAR*, Fulmer's actions were not visible and were instead, completely recomposed; however, this episode further indicates that the editors no longer are concerned about Fulmer being visible, but they will still not include his face and give him that full exposure to the audience. Despite

this brief visibility of these materials and non-human objects attached to Fulmer, the recomposed frames indicate that his contributions are no longer to be associated with The Try Guys.

Human objects associated to Fulmer are also recomposed in this “Pop-Tarts.” In each episode of *WAR*, The Try Guys are put into pairs when they cook or bake their dishes for judges. In each episode of the 2022 season, there is one Try Guy who is paired with Fulmer and as a result of his recompositions, they also appear to be recomposed. In “Pop-Tarts,” Habersberger is impacted by being associated with Fulmer while in “Illusion Cakes,” Lee Yang is impacted by being associated with Fulmer. Although both Try Guys experience less screen time, Habersberger is the most impacted in the season premiere of *WAR*, only appearing for 30 frames or three minutes and 36 seconds. The editing of some of Habersberger’s scenes baking also result in further digital editing of both Fulmer and Habersberger. For example, there are three frames or 10 seconds where Habersberger is presumably talking to Fulmer, but Fulmer is digitally removed, ultimately impacting the content of Habersberger’s commentary since other dialogue, presumably Fulmer’s, is removed. There are also scenes where Habersberger is heard but his visibility is digitally removed in two frames or 35 seconds; he also disappears into a digitally revised and added in fog that removes his visibility for one frame or three seconds. These scenes further showcase how Habersberger’s screen time and visibility on camera is further impacted by being associated with Fulmer; as a result, not only are Fulmer’s contributions digitally removed, but so are Habersberger’s despite this individual not being a part of the scandal. There are only two frames or nine seconds where Habersberger has no association with Fulmer after the baking scenes. Due to the scandal and the accompanying recomposition of Fulmer, Habersberger’s appearances in this video are impacted as a result, highlighting the wide circulatory effects of Fulmer’s affair within the media ecology; no longer is Fulmer’s branded identity and association with The Try Guys being impacted, but now other members within the ensemble are also being impacted by the affair.

However, Lee Yang's appearances in the fifth episode of *WAR* with the last remaining original footage of Fulmer in this era of The Try Guys. Lee Yang appears more frequently for 46 frames and 7 minutes and 59 seconds. There are two frames or five seconds where Lee Yang is presumably talking to Fulmer, but Fulmer is digitally removed, which, similar to Habersberger, impacts the content of Lee Yang's commentary. There are only two frames and eight seconds where Lee Yang has no association with Fulmer after the baking scenes. Overall, Lee Yang has more than double the screen time than Habersberger when both were paired with Fulmer in *WAR*, which further indicates that the editors were becoming less concerned about Fulmer potentially appearing in frames and more focused on including appearances and content from the other Try Guys.

There are other human objects who are digitally edited in visual artifacts such as photographs and art. Fulmer's final product and pop-tart creation in "Pop-Tarts" is digitally removed and replaced with circus peanuts in reference to his recomposition as an elephant for one frame or three seconds. However, his final product is not visible in "Illusion Cakes." While baking, there is a scene where the Try Guys art with the four colored brands (as I will discuss later in this chapter), has Fulmer's figure replaced with the dough man from "Pop-Tarts" that was created by Habersberger. In this video, each Try Guy had reference photographs in order to bake and design an illusion cake. Although it is unclear what object he was referencing, the moments where the photograph are slightly visible, which is for three frames and three seconds, an arm is visible as seen in Figure 10 below. There are also scenes when the photograph has been digitally revised and blurred out to the audience for 11 frames and 26 seconds. Again, although unclear who this human object is that is being recomposed, it is important to note more people and members of The Try Guys media ecology being caught in the crossfire of Fulmer's scandal and becoming recomposed as a result.



Figure 10: Reference photographs for Fulmer's creation are seen to be presumably human (to the right of Lee Yang).

The spatial and proximal recomposition of non-human and human objects due to being associated with Fulmer emphasizes the circulatory effects of his recomposition. Although the impacts of these recompositions on other objects were less visible and noticeable prior to the scandal becoming public, these recompositions in “Pop-Tarts” have seeped into impacting other Try Guys appearances. In this case, Habersberger experiences less visibility and screen time, which heavily impacts his position as a YouTuber and content creator; however, Lee Yang in “Illusion Cakes” is still visible and has more screen time, ultimately marking a shift in the recomposed efforts from the editors. Although seemingly minor, these non-human objects that were also recomposed are directly attached to Fulmer and the creative output he aimed to achieve in this episode of *WAR* as he did in previous episodes of the competition series. As a result, these non-human objects being made visible not only indicate they were created and used by Fulmer, but they also mark a shift in allowing the audience to see that these objects are actually related to Fulmer rather than trying to hide the fact in “Stand-Up Comedy.” In turn, these recompositions become more accessible and recognizable to the public and not just for The Try Guys media ecology.

Overall, this spectrum of recomposition and the associated and proximal recomposition of objects associated with Fulmer ultimately controls this idea of exposure and visibility of his branded identity. Since recognizability is valued by YouTubers and Internet content creators, the fact that

some parts of Fulmer are still visible in the video ultimately showcase how The Try Guys and their editors are exerting authorial agency of Fulmer's affair and its impact on the channel. No longer is the company shying away from recomposing Fulmer as a result of the scandal as they had done in their less visible recompositions in "Chocolate Eclairs" and "Stand-Up Comedy"; throughout the total videos, the visibility of these recompositions of Fulmer is 6.44% and 4.84% respectively. On the other hand, "Pop-Tarts" and "Illusion Cakes" include visible re of Fulmer that are 57.9% and 54.29% respectively for each video. These dramatic jumps from a fraction of these videos with Fulmer's recomposition visible prior to the scandal becoming public illustrates the heavy shift in Fulmer's recomposition going from being subtle to now being present in over half of the video once users outside of The Try Guys media ecology are made aware of the scandal. However, it is important to note the implications for not directly naming the scandal in their content but rather, indirectly making reference to it emphasizes how it has become an integral part of The Try Guys media ecology, at least in the six months after the scandal became public. The *WAR* series marks a shift in the company owning the narrative and content within the ecology by using these recompositions of Fulmer to their advantage. Since the scandal resulted in The Try Guys becoming more popular and widely circulated across media platforms, it seems the company is making it clear that now that the scandal is heavily publicized, there is no need to hide these recompositions and rather, are using it to their advantage and making comedic value out of it. The digital removal and replacement of Fulmer as an elephant and him wearing "I love bad ideas" had high velocity across platforms and was widely applauded by fans. As a result, these recompositions in *WAR* no longer serve as damage control but rather, they serve as a way to use this scandal to their advantage and embrace their new era as a company without Ned Fulmer.

Recomposition in Marketing and Branding

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the media ecology and marketing of The Try Guys hinges on this idea that four men, Keith Habersberger, Ned Fulmer, Zach Kornfeld, and Eugene Lee Yang try new things together. This typical format continued to shift into side projects for each member since the ensemble formed in 2014. However, their branding shifted in 2018 when they formed their new company, 2nd Try, LLC., and broke away from BuzzFeed. As a result of this new shift, each Try Guy member was assigned a color: Habersberger was blue, Fulmer was pink, Kornfeld was green, and Lee Yang was purple. These four colors were culminated in the company's logo of a Triceratops (a play on the word "Try," which is why the fanbase is called "TryceraTops"). At the start of most videos not a part of a series (such as *WAR* or *Food Babies*), the original introduction credits with each Try Guy and their assigned color played at the beginning and end of each video; one frame of the beginning credits can be seen in Figure 11. The Try Guys and their color branding ultimately showcased how each member had distinct personalities and identities, but they still were able to come together and try new things as an ensemble, which continued to reinforce their branding and family friendly image discussed in Chapter 3. As a result, these four colors and this introduction further emphasized how The Try Guys brand was a consistent theme that showcased each of their personalities and identities to their audience, allowing for their fanbase to form parasocial relationships and connections with the ensemble since their branded identities were a consistent thing to connect to throughout their media ecology.



Figure 11: One frame of the original Try Guys branding credits with their assigned colors.

Before the Fulmer scandal became public knowledge, The Try Guys branding was experiencing a shift, specifically in their videos. The recomposition of Fulmer did not just exist in his appearances in video content, but rather, the recomposition circulated in the opening and closing credits of each video. On September 10th, Ned Fulmer appears in the final Try Guys original branded opening credits in “Keith Eats Everything at Pizza Hut • Complete The Menu.” This video marks the last appearance of the original opening credits with the four Try Guys colors. Shortly after on September 13th, a merchandise advertisement for their tracksuits was posted on Instagram with Fulmer appearing to be digitally removed despite still being a part of the company when they were shooting this promotional video. Despite appearing to be digitally removed, Fulmer’s brand color, pink, is still a part of this merchandise. As a result, this is the last Try Guys merchandise to feature his branding color. The inclusion of only his color and no longer Fulmer further dehumanizes him as his branded identity is able to still be a part of the media ecology but Fulmer himself will no longer have an association; as a result, the color becomes less associated with Fulmer as a digital media creator and more focused on his branded identity as a Try Guy. Fulmer himself might no longer hold up the family friendly brand The Try Guys media ecology lifted him up as but his branded color, pink, still remains as a symbol of this era of branding.

On September 14th, the original branded Try Guys opening credits were digitally removed and replaced with the tracksuit advertisement in “Chocolate Eclairs.” Although Lee Yang only appears in the opening credits, the closing credits includes Lee Yang and Habersberger in the tracksuits with Kornfeld present in the clipart; Fulmer is not visible. This merchandise advertisement appears again on September 17th in “Keith Eats Everything at a Vegas Buffet.” This time, however, Habersberger, Kornfeld, and Lee Yang each appear in this merchandise shoot, but Fulmer appears to be digitally removed once again. However, the four colors of the group, blue, pink, green, and purple, remain in the closing credits. So, despite Fulmer himself being digitally removed, his branded

identity and the associated color pink are still visible, further reinforcing how The Try Guys were still trying to protect their branded image before the scandal left The Try Guys media ecology and gained traction to a more public audience; as a result, once again, Fulmer's contribution to the brand itself was centered and lifted up rather than his physical contributions and work to the digital media content.

Rather than replace the opening branded credits with a merchandise shoot, in "Stand-Up Comedy," the credits are replaced with an advertisement for Neutrogena with Habersberger, Kornfeld, and Lee Yang; it is unclear if Fulmer was removed from this portion or if this was filmed after the HR review. However, Fulmer appears on final time in the original Try Guys branded closing credits. After this video, these closing credits will be replaced without the four colored brand. The Try Guys began in 2018 when 2nd Try, LLC was formed. Due to this video's recompositions resulting in more fan circulation, The Try Guys finally made a public statement about the Fulmer scandal. Later that day, The Try Guys also rebranded their profile picture on Instagram and Twitter to the color orange rather than including four Try Guys branded colors. They also removed the red heart that represented Ned Fulmer in their Instagram biography. After the public statement was released and news stories circulated about the scandal, the remaining Try Guys completely removed themselves from their original branding that began in 2018 with the formation of their company. Although the pink is digitally removed from this Instagram biography and profile pictures, the "orange era" does not begin until October 7th as seen in Figure 12. The merchandise line with the original Try Guys branded colors also gets replaced a month later starting on November 9th. This digital removal of pink and shift to entirely orange marks a new era for The Try Guys after Fulmer, further indicating The Try Guys are rebranding their image without him.



Figure 12: The Try Guys announcement for the Orange Era with Habersberger and Kornfeld representing the color.

The recomposition of Fulmer outside of Try Guys video content, which is primarily where most of his digital removals occurred, emphasizes how The Try Guys were using recomposition as a response and vehicle to their branded public image being threatened. Although I will further discuss the implications of this response in Chapter 5, it is important to note the circulatory effects that the removal of Fulmer in merchandise, promotional shoots, and branded opening credits has on digital networks. These recompositions were no longer fostered within The Try Guys media ecology and rather, were recomposed with the intention that they would be circulated outside of the ecology and home platform of YouTube and into other digital networks. I aim to explore the implication of these practices using Gries' interrelated processes in the next section as a conclusion to my analysis of the digital removal practices in The Try Guys media ecology by reiterating the velocity of a few of these recomposed examples of Ned Fulmer.

Gries' Interrelated Processes and The Recomposition of Fulmer

The digital removal of Ned Fulmer did not just exist within The Try Guys media ecology and rather, were created with the intention that they would be circulated outside of the ecology and home platform of YouTube and into other digital networks. As a result, this section examines the temporal lifespan (Ridolfo and DeVoss) and the interrelated processes inspired by actor network

theory occurring within the circulation (Gries) of these digital removals of Fulmer. As mentioned in my Introduction, the temporal lifespan focuses on what occurs when a recomposed version of an artifact lasts longer in circulation than the original (Ridolfo and DeVoss). Gries' seven interrelated processes for her thorough case study on Obama Hope inherently considers this temporality by looking at seven processes, but I will only examine four: composition, collectivity, transformation, and consequentiality (113-114). Each process flows and builds off each other, so I am less focused on the distinction between each and more focused on how by working together, these processes can help me construct a narrative that emphasizes the implications of these digital removal practices leaving The Try Guys media ecology and entering digitally networked spaces. Rather than focus on each example of recomposition examined within this chapter, I will focus on two examples, specifically Fulmer's torso appearing in "Stand-Up Comedy" and him being digitally removed and revised into an elephant in "Pop-Tarts" in order to emphasize the spectrum of visibility of recomposition within The Try Guys video content.

"Composition" focuses on the "rhetorical design" of an artifact being shaped through its rhetorical activity (114-116). In the case of these two examples, the compositions include the original footage and the recomposed version that was published. Although minute, Fulmer's torso appearing in "Stand-Up Comedy" was one of the first digital edits of Fulmer that fans noticed and circulated across Reddit. This frame of his torso was a result of other recompositions of Fulmer at play, further emphasizing the role of these digital edits from 2nd Try, LLC. to try and hide the scandal from the public. The quick view of the torso resulted in fans speculating whether or not Fulmer was meant to be in the video due to the video being a typical genre move; ultimately, this discourse and activity surrounding this frame gave meaning to the composition of Figure 6 as the collaboration of fans trying to figure out if something was awry at 2nd Try, LLC. resulted in the ensemble having to publicly contend and admit to the scandal. When it comes to Fulmer being removed and revised

into a pink elephant, fans were able to make meaning out of this remediation by using the recomposition as a form of reinforcement that Fulmer's brand was being deconstructed from the company and its media ecology. This recomposition in particular was the first one to gain enough velocity outside of the ecology due to fans lifting this digital edit as a reason for the editors to get a raise (@chrystual). Although each scandal marks a distinct moment in time (before the scandal was public knowledge and afterward), these recompositions highlight the role of the fandom in constructing meaning of these remediations and circulating them outside of the media ecology.

Collectivity examines the influence of associations users and participants might have on an artifact's lifespan in a network (Gries 124). When considering the digital removal of Fulmer, the recompositions themselves were created by 2nd Try, LLC. but once it became published content circulated across networks, the meaning and interpretations of these recomposed artifacts became shaped by the participants in the media ecology who collaborated to make meaning of these recompositions. The fandom ultimately impacted the temporal lifespan of these recompositions as they first used it as speculation (Fulmer's torso in "Stand-Up Comedy") to then, comic relief (Fulmer as an elephant in "Pop-Tarts") to justify these digital removal and revisions of Fulmer as necessary due to the sense of betrayal they felt from him tainting his public image as a family man by cheating on his wife. However, an audience who was not familiar with The Try Guys prior to the scandal did not understand these recompositions; for example, the *SNL* skit serves as an example of a mainstream audience not understanding why the recomposition of Fulmer in The Try Guys content and his removal from the company was a big deal and rather, became an arena to base the ecology off the fandom itself. Therefore, these recompositions took on different meanings dependent on the audience's connection to The Try Guys media ecology, emphasizing that the participatory culture and parasocial relationships of The Try Guys fandom had enough power to co-construct a narrative and bring meaning to these recompositions.

Not only does collectivity create a new understanding of Fulmer and The Try Guys for an audience unfamiliar with the content, but this collectivity also allowed for 2nd Try, LLC. to control the transformation of their content through the exertion of authorial agency. Gries' "transformation" highlights how a "circulating image changes in terms of design, form, medium, materiality, genre, and function as it enters into new associations" (117). Although the fandom helped co-construct the meaning of these recompositions, 2nd Try, LLC. had the agency and power due to only publishing these recompositions of Fulmer rather than any original footage of him in "Stand-Up Comedy" and "Pop-Tarts." Transformation accounts for the affordances and velocity of the recompositions in The Try Guys content and branding that eventually became circulated outside of the ecology. Due to the fandom and direct ways 2nd Try, LLC. referenced these edits within their content, these recompositions, especially the elephant, became memes and headlines, increasing the circulatory effects of The Try Guys fandom as the rhetorical velocity of these recompositions invited in a new audience that were not previously a part of the ecology. Despite not knowing any of the previous genre moves to recognize the recomposition as had occurred with "Stand-Up Comedy," these recompositions have now been transformed to a more public and visible medium that now associates recomposition of a former employee with a typical genre move in The Try Guys media ecology. As a result, the fandom further has power in co-constructing the public perception and understanding of The Try Guys to an audience outside of the media ecology.

Gries' final process, "consequentiality" examines the "affective consequences" and implications for materiality (125). The content of this thesis has mostly focused on the impact of digital removal practices across digital networks, but I have not even scratched the surface of the material consequences of Fulmer's affair and resulting recomposition from 2nd Try, LLC. had on real lives outside of this practice. Not only was a wife cheated on by her husband publicly, but Fulmer also had an affair with an employee whose life and career will forever be impacted due to the

circulation of her affair online. She not only lost her job and her fiancée, but she has no longer been welcomed on social media due to the affective response of the fandom. The company itself was also impacted as viewership did increase for a bit but now has plateaued since The Try Guys have continued to drop in followers since 2023. Through these examples of recomposition, the torso and the elephant also mark a further dehumanization of Fulmer, no longer wanting him associated with a brand he helped build with The Try Guys and 2nd Try, LLC. Overall, though, Fulmer's wish to cultivate a life brand was effectively crushed as the same fandom that lifted him up tore him apart and disowned him, welcoming the digital removal when he betrayed their trust and a branded family image he formed.

Through Gries' interrelated processes, I hope to have demonstrated the impacts of composition, collectivity, transformation, and consequentiality in order to further highlight the inevitable influence of the fandom on the circulation of these recompositions. The digital removal, digital revision, and recomposition of Ned Fulmer by 2nd Try, LLC. ultimately highlight how the company is responding to their content and their brand being threatened. As a result of the fandom's influence and participation, they are able to co-construct the meaning of what these edits mean for the ecology itself and for public media who are unfamiliar with the content. For an outside perspective who might not be familiar with The Try Guys brand and their influence on millions of fans, these recompositions might seem like an overreaction to a man cheating on his wife, as *SNL* portrayed. However, for a fandom that spent years lifting up these public figures and helping them gain success, it is important to acknowledge how these recompositions become a response to a scandal and betrayal felt within a media ecology built from YouTubers and their fans. Although 2nd Try, LLC. is able to exert authorial agency over Fulmer and his brand they cultivated together in 2018, it is ultimately the participatory action of the fandom to enact meaning on what these recompositions mean for the ecology and for the public. Therefore, the editors can directly or

indirectly recompose Fulmer in any way they want, but the glimpse of a shirt sleeve or the shift into an animal do not mean anything unless the fandom's discourse about these edits catches enough velocity and momentum to make these recompositions mean anything for the wider effects of these recomposition practices on the media ecology.

CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS

This final chapter seeks to offer one final push for the exigency of examining how digital removal practices and rhetorical velocity intersect and co-influence each other. Digital removal practices are bigger than the case of The Try Guys since this form of recomposition has been occurring across texts and artifacts for years. However, The Try Guys offers us an example of what happens when a media ecology intersects with recomposition and how both ultimately shape each other's construction. Here I discuss, then, the implications and takeaways from the analyses presented in previous chapters. The Try Guys highlights how a participatory culture and parasocial relationships have the potential to shape the content and construction of a media ecology. As a result, when recomposition practices such as digital removal take effect, there are new opportunities for invention and an increased participatory action for how these changes mean. The case of The Try Guys also highlights the influence of digital removal practices on how we theorize rhetorical velocity as there is an increased potential for individual parties and original composers to recompose their own work rather than just the potential of third parties. Overall, digital removal practices have vast implications for how we approach future research and concepts as it has the potential to shape digital network composing practices, especially in tandem with rhetorical velocity since both seek to center networks and circulatory effects rather than content. Finally, recomposition and digital removal practices have implications for any user or creator in a digital environment, which is why it is urgent to begin discussing how their relationship influences practices such as pedagogy and the increased need for future research and practices.

Influence of Participatory Culture

Parasocial relationships between a public figure and a fandom as well as participatory culture have the potential to shape the content of a media ecology. As discussed within this thesis, the

fanbase The Try Guys cultivated from their inception at BuzzFeed in 2014 gave them the opportunity to create their own company, 2nd Try, LLC., in 2018. Since then, they have gone on to have projects outside of their YouTube channel such as a book, a tour, podcasts, a television show, etc. due to the reliance of the company on the fandom to sustain them and support them. In return, the fans also rely on The Try Guys to be consistent with their upload schedule on YouTube and continue to interact with them on platforms outside of their main hub. The fans have also created a participatory network that allows them to communicate with each other on various platforms in discourse surrounding The Try Guys and the media ecology they built with their video content, their individual projects, and their inclusion of their partners, 2nd Try, LLC. staff, friends, and family into their content, which further allows for the fandoms to feel personally connected and parasocially bonded with the ensemble. Due to this bond formed, the fandom was able to recognize when Ned Fulmer, one of The Try Guys, had an affair with his employee, ultimately kickstarting the impacts of this scandal on the media ecology by co-constructing when the narrative entered the public domain and left fandom Reddit threads.

In response to the scandal, 2nd Try, LLC. digitally removed and recomposed Ned Fulmer in their video content. Not only did these recompositions in part happen due to the fandom and the sense of betrayal they felt when the “wife guy” publicly cheated on his wife, but the fandom also had the power to shape the media ecology of The Try Guys in general since their participation is ultimately what kept this brand and company running. Because of this close bond the fandom feels with the ensemble, much of the perception and overall circulation of The Try Guys brand from those outside of the media ecology is based on the perception of this relationship the fandom has with The Try Guys. For example, *SNL* mostly parodied the fandom response and what they deemed as an overreaction rather than the affair of Fulmer with an employee.

Therefore, the power of the fandom to lift up a brand of a man who loved his wife not only backfired on The Try Guys branding in general, but the power of the fandom showed up in the visible perception of the media ecology to an outside audience. As a result, the case of The Try Guys highlights how a fandom has the increased power and agency over these public figures and the curation and circulation of these media ecologies and brands they built due to a participatory culture embedded within social media and other digital platforms that allow for parasocial relationships to prosper among fandoms and public figures. When participatory culture turns into cancel culture, these fandoms can alter public perception of these figures due to their membership within these ecologies and the power they can have to curate these networks. Fandoms can also shape content within the ecology in response to their participation and needs as an audience such as creating the need for apology videos or public statements regarding scandals. As a result, the fandom has just as much power to lift the figure's brand and social capital up as much as they have to tear it down. The Try Guys and their fandom highlights the influence of a participatory culture on a media ecology and how, when intersected with recomposition and rhetorical velocity, the power of a fandom can have vast implications for how this recomposed content is understood and what these changes mean. As mentioned in Chapter 3, a pink elephant is just an elephant GIF until the fandom's participatory action made meaning of what this new content meant in the media ecology. Their co-construction of what these recompositions meant to the ecology, in turn, influenced and altered the public image and perception of The Try Guys to those outside of the ecology. As a result, a participatory culture, when paired with parasocial relationships, must always be considered in strategy for recomposition (Ridolfo and DeVoss) as the audience and everyday user has just as much influence for the curation and understanding of this content once it is circulated, no longer just the composers and potential recomposers have the power.

Rhetorical Velocity and Digital Network Composing Practices

As this thesis has stressed, there is a need to talk about the intersection of digital removal and recomposition practices with rhetorical velocity. The field has theorized rhetorical velocity as a remix practice as it considers how new users and creators might reintroduce new content in ways that might not align with the original composer's rhetorical objectives (Ridolfo and DeVoss). The case study of The Try Guys illustrates that removal and recomposition are practices that manipulate texts in specific ways and can alter how they mean within a network. Here, we have these creators recomposing an existing text to create new meanings, and to change the meaning of the media ecology. Digitally removing a human figure is much different than removing the World Trade Center; although both have their own semiotic and emotional resonances, the removal of a human carries its own affective consequences (Gries 125) and circulatory effects. I want to point out that there is an exigent need that as authors, creators, composers, and inventors, rhetorical velocity must always be considered. Recomposition does not just impact digital media and artifacts; any text that is composed or created has the power to be impacted by digital removal, erasure, revision, and other digitally editing practices. This section aims to explore how digital removal and recompositions' relationship with rhetorical velocity has effectively impacted the future of digital network composing practices.

As shown with The Try Guys recomposition of Fulmer, the accessibility of digital editing practices has steadily increased to any user compared to when these practices were only available to specific populations such as industries who were recomposing on a large scale. Due to the increased democratization of digital tools to digitally remove, revise, and recompose artifacts and texts, rhetorical velocity has a potential to exist, thrive, and circulate across digital networks. The influx of users becoming creators has developed an exigency to begin understanding how digital removal, recomposition practices, and rhetorical velocity have the power to destabilize the relationship between an author, an audience, and their text as content is always in a state of flux. This

complicated relationship emphasizes that composition is no longer just focused on content, but rather, is focused on the potential for the circulation of these artifacts across digital networks and the recomposition of networks themselves. Therefore, composition itself becomes secondary whereas the curation of these networks and their circulatory effects becomes put at the forefront.

The influx of creators in digital environments also further complicates what it means to author a text as the composition and content of a text has the potential to be recomposed or even remediated. Chapter 3 of this thesis not only highlighted how the concept of authorship gets complicated when considering the role of participatory culture and parasocial relationships, but it also explored the role that the audience has in co-constructing a narrative and meaning in a digital media ecology. Similarly, John Gallagher's *Update Culture and the Afterlife of Digital Writing*, focuses on the role of circulation in what he calls "update culture" (10), the continuous collaboration between authors and audiences in digital writing environments; as a result, after a text is "delivered, writers still have rhetorical activity, often in the form of labor." For Gallagher, this labor includes continuous invention, production, and delivery (97) of a text. In addition, this labor comes in the form of considering the potential for recomposition, rhetorical velocity, and the curation of a network and how a recomposed text circulates and changes meaning.

In a digital network, the concept of a finished product no longer exists as the potential for rhetorical velocity and recomposition runs rampant, that not only allows any text or artifact to be updated by any user, but it also forces a creator to "attend to the afterlife of their writing" (Gallagher 97) and the intersection of those labors due to the increased potential for their original composition, content, and intentions becoming repurposed and recomposed across digital networks. As a result, the circulation of these texts and artifacts across networks has the chance for various forms of trajectories and user interactions as there is an increased chance for recompositions of content to occur. With the case of The Try Guys, their recomposition of Fulmer experienced different user

responses and interactions when they left the media ecology and entered more public contexts. As a result, The Try Guys used recomposition as a way to respond to their fandom and hold their brand accountable; however, that also gave them less agency as the meaning and intentions of their recompositions were ultimately funneled through fandom interaction, often being used as a critique for the branded identity of Fulmer that was uplifted by the ecology.

Recompositions and Gallagher's update culture also impacts the role of users and audience in digital environments. Gallagher posits that "audience might be a concept used during the entire lifespan of writing – before, during, and *after* production, as well as in the midst of circulation" (153). As a result, not only can a participatory culture be fostered, the concept of "coauthorship" also evolves among a participatory and social web (Amidon and Reyman 110). Amidon and Reyman's chapter focuses on the impact of powerful companies and hidden contributions users might not be aware of in digital networks, which also comes into play when regarding authorship in digital spaces. However, I am most intrigued by the concept of "ownership of user contributions" (Amidon and Reyman 124) as it further complicates the role that audiences play in digital composition. For example, when fandoms primarily become the audience, they have the potential to impact how these recompositions arise or even are interpreted to a wider medial ecology. No longer is audience a static concept that cannot interact with an author, but now, audiences have the power to contribute to these texts through digital removal practices and recomposition. As a result, not only can an author's original intentions and purposes be lost as a text or artifact circulates due to an audience, but an audience now has the power to co-construct meaning over content, making the meaning itself secondary and its circulatory intensity in these network the primary focus.

Digital removal as a form of recomposition also allows for new opportunities for invention and an increased participatory action of how changes mean. Due to digital removal and erasure practices involving the taking away and deflection of meaning from an original composition, this

form of recomposition highlights how the potential for an appropriation of a text or artifact can continue to ultimately alter the meaning and original intentions of the author, especially when objects from these artifacts can be completely removed and not visible for audiences who might not have known they were there. In an increasingly update culture where artifacts and texts can continually be edited (Gallagher) and recomposed (Ridolfo and DeVoss), it is important to begin considering the impacts of how a participatory culture can effectively alter the meaning of this content whether it be through the actual act of digitally editing these texts or by the circulatory influence some users might have, especially if they are a part of an ecology who is fueled by this participation. As discussed in Chapter 4, the digital removal, revision, and recomposition of Fulmer took on meaning due to the fandom's interaction with it on social media, which resulted in them recognizing something was awry as they were able to recognize a shift within the digital network and media ecology of Ned's absence. However, the authorial agency 2nd Try, LLC. enacted with these recompositions allowed for them and their fandom to co-construct what these recompositions meant. Not every recomposition occurs within a media ecology or has the potential to be co-constructed, which is why composers need to further be strategic in their composing as now they must begin asking, how might their text be removed or erased or their meaning deflected or lost in circulation.

In response to a participatory culture and a democratization of digital editing tools, authors and composers have new ways to interact with their content and audience, as the case of The Try Guys illustrates. Rhetorical velocity not only has a potential for third parties to recompose (Ridolfo and DeVoss), but also, there is an increased potential for individuals and original composers to recompose their own work. As the increased potential for participatory culture erupts within digital networks, composing practices in these spaces must shift, which is why The Try Guys recomposed their own original video content and footage rather than a third party. This recomposition ultimately

becomes an act of authorial agency as The Try Guys are the ones who appropriate their original intentions and purposes rather than giving the power to a third party to interpret what Fulmer's absence from the media ecology now means. As a result, when these recompositions of Fulmer circulate outside of the YouTube platform, The Try Guys are able to control the narrative of what Fulmer's brand now means to their ecology and how these recompositions serve as a vehicle to take ownership and exert authorial agency over their content when their public perception and media ecology itself is impacted by the affair. As a result of an individual party recomposing their own work, the agency now has the potential to be back in the hands of the original composer as they are the ones influencing their original intentions and purposes.

Due to the now blurred lines between audience and authors in digital environments with the increased potential for recomposition and digital removal from any user or creator, this section demonstrates how this relationship, paired with rhetorical velocity, impacts how we look at digital composing practices in digital networks. A composition now has an increased potential for its meaning and content to be digitally removed or further recomposed in an effort to increase its circulatory potential within a network. Composition is now more than ever being focused less on content and more on the agency and intentions of its author and its potential to be further recomposed and circulated by other users. Therefore, rhetorical velocity's implications should not only extend to discussions of composing for circulation and recomposition, but it should also extend to the ethical implications of what it means when we recompose objects, especially human.

Pedagogical Implications

Due to the wide circulatory effects of recomposition, we must begin examining how it has shown up in classrooms, even prior to the democratization of these digital editing tools. For Kathleen Blake Yancey, remix is the "combining of ideas, narratives, sources" and as teachers and instructors, when "we create curricula we build on other curricula," we are remixing and

combining ideas and materials into a new version. As discussed, many times in this thesis, recomposition focuses on the potential for another composer to alter or adapt objects within an artifact. Yancey's concept of remix echoes that as teachers and instructors we are always recomposing and refashioning content for our classes to meet students where they are at. For The Try Guys, this remix takes on the form of recomposition as a textual practice used in a digital space to digitally edit and overwrite Fulmer, replacing him as an elephant. Albeit in different forms, Yancey's remix and 2nd Try, LLC.'s recomposition highlights the various rhetorical effects as recomposition impacts circulation, responds to audiences, and creates new opportunities of speaking or making meaning. So, when Fulmer is being replaced with an elephant or a dominatrix in video content, both objects hold different resonances and meaning for an audience, ultimately replacing the original intention and meaning of what Fulmer originally represented (the branded "wife guy"). Overall, this section aims to highlight how we need to begin considering the role recomposition plays in our students' lives, specifically digital removal.

As this thesis has discussed, recomposition, specifically digital removal practices, are so ingrained and weaved into the media we consume. For students, recomposition can take on many forms through their interactions with media. On a platform like Instagram, users can remove an ex-partner in a post to attempt to rewrite the past or they digitally edit their own profile by removing or archiving certain posts due to how future audiences, such as employers, may see them. As a result, students have the opportunity to know what digital erasure can mean for them and how it can change temporal constrictions and realities as it allows for users to digitally edit how they are viewed in a digital network. With the increased democratization of these digital tools to digitally remove, revise, and recompose, there is an increased chance for these recomposed versions to be considered the original versions. However, when considering this relationship with The Try Guys whose fan

base was able to co-construct meaning of these recompositions, the question of who actually owns or authors these recompositions is at play.

As I previously mentioned, we as creators, authors, writers, inventors, etc. must always consider rhetorical velocity when composing or creating and so should our students. With the increased public consumption of digital and social media, students are most likely familiar with digital removal and digital erasure, or at least some form of recomposition. Whether it be the viral recomposition of a meme or the option to add filters and revise selfies, the increased access to these digital editing tools allows for an everyday user to become a creator of recomposition. This section seeks to intersect Ridolfo and DeVoss' rhetorical velocity with Selber's critical literacy in order to prepare students to begin considering the implications of these recomposed practices for their roles as a user/consumer and creator/composer.

As users of digital media, students are most likely encountering social media posts that have been circulated across platforms before they even view it. As a result, these original compositions have mostly likely been recomposed, making it unclear if the original composition is still intact. Not only should students begin considering the implications for rhetorical velocity, but we as teachers, instructors, and mentors need to begin facilitating and encouraging them to cultivate literacies in their interactions with digital media. In Stuart Selber's pivotal *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age*, he maps out techniques and an exigency for the cultivation of functional, critical, and rhetorical literacy skills for teachers and students working with technology and digital environments in the classroom. Taking the concept of media literacy one step further, Selber explores how functional literacy seeks to help students become "effective users of technology" (30); critical literacy seeks to help students become "informed questioners of technology" (74); and rhetorical velocity seeks to help students become "reflective producers of technology" (135). Although each literacy is important step in the process of becoming effective and aware users and creators of digital environments, for the sake of

this thesis's focus on digital removal and recomposition, I want to zoom in on the importance of students cultivating these critical literacy skills as I view critical literacy as an important stepping stone for students to begin recognizing and interacting with recomposition.

Critical literacy not only “challenges the values of the status quo,” but it also asks students to begin reflecting on “popular representations that are implicated with technological regularization” (128). Although a full literature review of technological regularization is outside the scope of this thesis, this term focuses on how “designers invariably shape artifacts and activities in ways that affect the distribution of power in a social formation” (100). In digital environments users, i.e., our students, are faced with platforms that oftentimes have their own embedded ideologies, whether that be from the creators of these platforms or by the users who interact with them. As a result, it is important for users, especially students, to begin questioning and challenging the regularization of these digital interfaces and platforms they interact with daily. So, for example, when a post begins circulating on social media, users should begin questioning if they are seeing an original composition or one that has been recomposed. Users should begin to question the role power plays with respect to the circulation of recomposed artifacts: Who or what is being appropriated in this recomposition? How do these platforms aid in the creation and circulation of this recomposition? Who has access to these digital tools and the functional literacy to recompose?

For rhetorical velocity and critical literacy, the division between user and creator roles in digital environments are murky at best. Both roles require the cultivation and strengthening of critical literacy skills to begin questioning the media and artifacts they are consuming in digital environments. In order to build this literacy, though, users and creators must consider rhetorical velocity and the potential for their original compositions, posts, and works to be recomposed by any other users. This interaction students have with recomposition ultimately has the power to transfer across contexts as the power of circulation and velocity threatens any environment, digital or not.

Recomposition and digital removal practices are not going away anytime soon as circulation and velocity of these artifacts continues to run rampant; as a result, our pedagogical practices need to begin considering and reflecting on how these recomposed practices impact our students as it essentially has the power to shape how they compose and interact with compositions in digital networks.

Ethical Implications and Future Research

As the case of The Try Guys has demonstrated, digital removal can be used as a response to a participatory culture and parasocial fandom. However, other cases of recomposition such as September 11th and the *Obama Hope* image as I discussed in the Introduction, represent the potential for recomposition being used as a response to audiences and users. However, recomposition being utilized or even weaponized in order to respond to various rhetorical activity across digital networks should be considered in regard to an original author's intentions and the potential for appropriation (Ridolfo and DeVoss). Through these examples I mentioned earlier on in the thesis, I hope to highlight the nuances and potential ethical implications that accompany recomposition, its increased potential to circulate across digital networks, and the need for further research and discussion of these concepts.

The national tragedy of September 11th, 2001, resulted in a lot of media to recompose in response to a collective trauma. However, recomposition became more than a response to public sentiment, and instead, morphed into a rhetorical vehicle for companies, organizations, media, etc. to respond to a national tragedy that heavily impacted a nation. *Spider-Man's* recomposition upon first glance might seem like a way to avoid cancel culture, but it ultimately became a way to increase nationalistic pride in New York after the tragedy. Not only were The Twin Towers digitally removed to avoid emotional distress, but the digital revision and addition of scenes that focused on a collaboration and increased pride in a New York city hero made a branded image, Spider-Man,

become a vehicle and symbol of nationalism that showed a nation had the potential to heal after being attacked. These recompositions shortly after September 11th also marked a transition in digital removal and revision practices primarily being a practice for film and television companies and now, was a more accessible practice for any company. As a result, recompositions essentially entered the mainstream and became a widely accepted practice due to it being a response to a political tragedy, ultimately marking a shift in the practice being more democratized.

Not only do these recompositions after 9/11 signify a political response, but the rhetorical velocity of these recompositions also emphasizes how powerful they became; they have now effectively altered the cultural memory due to the wide circulatory effects of these recompositions becoming the known versions of these original texts and artifacts. As a result, the circulation of these recompositions across digital networks becomes the primary concern rather than the content itself; the rhetorical salience and what this act of recomposition stands for, (a response to national tragedy, political vehicle, etc.) is what primarily becomes the central focus rather than the original artifact. What does it mean when recomposition is used on such a wide scale and has the ability to impact industries all over the nation? If not all forms of digital removal and revision after 9/11 were used to completely remove any association with the tragedy, such as some media adding in terrorism plots (“List”), does that mean these recompositions are “bad” or negative appropriation (Ridolfo and DeVoss)?

The circulation and wide recomposition of the *Obama Hope* image emphasizes the circulatory effects of memes. The original composition by Mannie Garcia started off as a photograph for a presidential candidate and then became recomposed into an advertisement and vehicle for a presidential campaign. The rhetorical velocity only increased as *Obama Hope* became a meme appropriated by numerous users, and creators in digital environments and even physical ones, essentially shifting the overall meaning and intentions of the original photograph and its

recomposition that became more popular. I am less focused on all recompositions that occurred as Gries focused on, but rather, I am focused on the increased possibility for digital removal and recomposition practices to take on their own meaning and collectivity while circulated. With lines between users and creators continuing to be blurred, as discussed earlier in this chapter, what recompositions mean as compositions are directly impacted by who interacts with them. As a result, these compositions no longer belong to anyone but rather, take on a new rhetorical life of their own.

Recomposition can also perpetuate marginalization and stereotypes of minoritized communities. For example, one recomposition of *Obama Hope* featured Barack Obama, a Black man, being digitally removed and replaced by Steve Jobs, a white man. Although this example is not the only one that replaces Obama with a member of a dominant racial or ethnic group, it is important to recognize the potential for digitally removal as a new form of silencing a marginalized group with a dominant narrative. Similarly, the case of Lizzo and Beyoncé digitally revising their lyrics due to ableist slurs is an example of recomposition used to avoid backlash and cancel culture surrounding the marginalization of a minoritized group. This case of cancel culture and a negative audience response to music is not the first time to happen as many musicians such as Eminem were encouraged to digitally revise their lyrics but never did. As a result, this revision further emphasizes how Black women are held to a higher standard than their white, male counterparts. Overall, it is important to consider that when recomposition occurs what the power dynamics are at large: Who participated in this recomposition? What is this recomposition a response to? Who or what is being silenced in the process? What is the consequentiality of these recompositions on material bodies and affect (Gries 125)?

Finally, for The Try Guys, recomposition was used as a response to their public image as their curated identity within their media ecology was put at risk. In response, they digitally removed a public figure, Ned Fulmer, who had an affair with his employee and became synonymous with a

sense of betrayal for the audience. Not only was Fulmer recomposed in the video content on YouTube, but he was also recomposed from other social media platforms in an effort to rebrand the marketing of the company and usher in a new era after Fulmer's scandal. Due to the nature and construction of their media ecology, these recompositions not only gained media attention due to circulation from fans, but also many recompositions of Fulmer seemed designed *for* the fans. The digital removal of Fulmer serves a deeper purpose than acting as a sentiment regarding an emotional response from the fans' parasocial relationship, but it also served as a response to the rhetorical potential of cancel culture. If The Try Guys are able to remove a figure that evokes an emotional response and sense of betrayal from their fanbase, then they can also literally and figuratively remove themselves being associated with Fulmer's transgressions. Oftentimes, cancel culture can remove a company or figure from public existence and through recomposition, The Try Guys tried their best to avoid this outcome, especially as circulation of the affair brought in a larger audience not a part of The Try Guys media ecology. As a result, recomposition served as a band-aid or temporary fix for the public cancellation that might result from a scandal as public as his affair. With The Try Guys, recomposition became a vehicle to protect and maintain their branding and marketing as a media company.

Not all examples of recomposition are publicly disclosed. The examples I chose have been widely circulated and popularized cases due to media attention, but not all digital removal and revision practices are publicized or made clear. When we go on Instagram, it is not always clear whether or not someone has recomposed an image or video; when we encounter a circulated post from a government official, we do not always know if it has been digitally edited from its original form. With the influx of Artificial Intelligence running rampant on media platforms, it is important to consider that sometimes not all composers are human, which further complicates what these original compositions mean when circulated. Although AI was not weaved throughout this thesis,

the concept itself is important when considering the further potential for recomposition and needs to be examined in the future as the field has created an exigent need to further examine AI for the future of our practices. Overall, rhetorical velocity and the lack of disclosures and transparency for recomposition requires that we critically examine circulated texts and question whether they have been recomposed or not. Just because we can recompose and digitally remove artifacts, does that mean we should? What are the implications when we circulate a recomposed artifact without a disclosure? Whose intentions are displaced in the process? As users and creators, we should always be wary of the circulation of recomposition, which is why it is important that we instill these questions into our students who are also embedded within these digital networks.

As mentioned throughout this thesis, digital removal is a process that seeks to erase, delete, deflect, exclude, reconstitute, remediate, and/or revise a human or non-human object in a digital space. When paired with Ridolfo and DeVoss' rhetorical velocity, digital removal practices have the potential to influence digital network composing practices. With the intersection of an increasing participatory culture and democratization of digital editing tools, the relationship between an audience and author is further blurred and develops an increased need for strategic composing (Ridolfo and DeVoss). Digital removal and other forms of recomposition happen almost every day on digital media platforms, but not every composer or recomposer is disclosing these adaptations. As composers, authors, writers, users, creators, inventors, teachers, etc., we need to critically examine the influence of recomposition, specifically digital removal practices, and its potential for rhetorical velocity and circulation as this intersection has ramifications for how we compose, interact, and circulate our work in digital networks.

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