**The Try Guys fired a coworker for sexual workplace misconduct. Why is the internet harassing them?**

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Two weeks ago, the internet was abuzz with a new controversy: Ned from the Try Guys cheated on his wife with an employee and was fired from the company. Saturday Night Live recently aired a brutal sketch satirizing their decision to fire Ned.

**The internet, at first supportive of them, started to turn on the Try Guys. The firestorm over this scandal betrays a disturbing lack of empathy in mass media.**

If you somehow managed to avoid the story, the Try Guys are a group of YouTubers - Keith Hapersberger, Zach Kornfeld, Eugene Lee Yang, and Ned Fulmer - who release weekly videos where they try new things (Tapp 2022).

Fulmer was photographed kissing an employee. The photo went viral on Reddit and TikTok (Mendez II 2022), and soon after the Try Guys announced that Fulmer was no longer working with them (Try Guys 2022). In a social media statement, the other Try Guys confirmed that they were alerted to the situation by multiple fans on Labor Day weekend. The Try Guys reached out to Fulmer and the employee, and Fulmer confirmed that the relationship had been going on for “quite some time” (The Try Guys 2022).

Despite this seemingly cut-and-dry case, SNL found a way to put the blame on the Try Guys for firing Fulmer. The skit depicted this decision as trivial, possibly even unfair.

In the skit, a news broadcast is interrupted for an interview with the Try Guys. The news anchor asks why the story was such a scandal and if the affair was non-consensual. In the skit, Zach responded: “No, worse. He committed the heinous act of having a consensual kiss, and not telling us, his friends” (Saturday Night Live 2022).

The skit also mocks the significance of Fulmer and the employee’s relationship to each other. The anchor on the ground says: “Well, you have to remember the power dynamics at play here, Laura. He’s a Try Guy and she’s a Food Baby” (Saturday Night Live 2022). Food Babies is a spinoff show on the Try Guys’ platform (Stintson 2022).

Fulmer’s actions have devastating implications for the company. The company is in the process of editing him out of pre-filmed videos and ~~has~~ decided not to air videos where that editing would be impossible (The Try Guys 2022). This is a timely and costly process, and the effects go beyond the hurt of merely “not telling his friends.”

Fulmer also opened up the company to a potential lawsuit, as he was a manager and the employee he was in a relationship with was a subordinate (Mendez II 2022). The power dynamics that SNL chose to mock are very real, silly names notwithstanding. Just because Fulmer said the affair was a “consensual workplace relationship” doesn’t make it true (Fulmer 2022).

SNL’s take on the situation is symptomatic of a larger problem. The skit chose to satirize the victims instead of the perpetrator. It shows that it’s still socially acceptable to mock men for holding other men accountable for their sexual misconduct.

Indeed, SNL’s skit demonstrates that using the word “victim” to describe the other Try Guys is controversial. Some social media users posted criticisms of the Try Guy’s podcast response, where Kornfeld said: “We processed this almost like a trauma” (Tapp 2022).

Articles that covered the scandal included reader comments. One poster accused them of “using this to make more money.” Another said: “‘Emotional Toll’?! ROFL….these dudes take themselves way too seriously” (Tapp 2022).

One Twitter user tweeted: “the try guys describing their coworker cheating on his wife as their “trauma” is a great example of how the internet has taken important therapy language and bastardized it into silly little nothings.” As of **Oct. 13**, the tweet had over 107 thousand likes (Stringfield 2022).

The claim that Fulmer’s actions cannot be traumatic to his coworkers is reductive and cruel. Trauma describes “an emotional response to a terrible event” that can present emotional and physical symptoms (APA 2022).

In under one month, the Try Guys lost their friend of over 10 years; had their business threatened; navigated the waters of potential lawsuits fromFulmer or the employee; and kept it private from everyone, including their staff. Hapersberger compared it to a breakup. Kornfeld said he hadn’t had time to emotionally process it, but he quipped that his “stress poops have been out of control” (Stephan 2022). If that’s not a textbook definition of trauma, then I don’t know what is.

By reasonable moral standards, the Try Guys did everything right. They investigated the sexual misconduct, ousted their former friend, and released information mindfully. Before this, they were known as “undramatic” (Stephan 2022). Yet, a mainstream show felt comfortable making light of workplace sexual misconduct. Regular viewers were emboldened to make light of genuine trauma because it was the meme-of-the-week.

People tout the progress of movements such as #MeToo and feel that we’ve come a long way toward treating our peers with respect, but the evidence says otherwise. Mass media has an empathy problem, and no one is immune.

The Try Guys will recover from this, once the internet moves on to the next big thing. Unfortunately, most people don’t have the platform that the Try Guys do. And on the internet, everyone is a public figure. When the spotlight inevitably shifts, are any of us ready to be at the media’s mercy?

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