

On Louis CK, excuses, and the messy road to redemption

Written in response to Louis CK's surprise set at the Comedy Cellar, one year after the rise of the #MeToo movement. (8/28/18)

There's been a lot of conversation on the old Internet today. A lot of think-pieces and questionable takes and smart arguments made by very smart people.

Good.

It's comforting to know that the next phase of one of the largest cultural reckonings in history won't be met with complete ambivalence. Comforting to know that the people who fought so hard almost a year ago are not done fighting.

Today's was an important conversation, and it's crucial that it doesn't fade. Because the #MeToo movement wasn't just the cleaning house of a few highly visible industries. It didn't round up all the bad guys and leave the rest of us frolicking in some abuser-free utopia for all eternity. And it certainly didn't come with an instruction manual for what's supposed to happen next.

Instead, over the past year, we have seen time and time again just how insidious the culture of abuse and coverup is in every fabric of our society. And we have seen the acrobatic absurdity with which allowances continue to be made for powerful men who do terrible things.

Because he seemed like such a nice guy. Because he called himself a man of God. Because we liked the jokes he told or the art he made. Sure, he did a bad thing, but he was a part of our lives, and his victims often had no faces or names.

After news broke about Louis CK's unannounced set last Sunday night, another comic asked what the road back to public acceptance *should* look like. Whether abusers should be banished from civilized society for good. It's a complicated question, and a valid one. But what that question doesn't do is put the onus on the person who caused harm in the first place. They who did wrong should be responsible for making it right, and their victims should get to decide what "right" looks like.

So I don't know what the answer is, but let's make one thing very clear: **Time alone does not equal absolution.**

You don't get to lay low for a few measly months, after harassing and intimidating women for years, and assume that if enough time has passed people will just forget. You don't get to hop onstage and claim that you've changed, when there's

been no public evidence to support your evolution. And you don't get to play a martyr for suffering the barest minimum of consequences for the lifetime of pain you inflicted on others in your wake.

Personally, I don't "miss" Louis CK. Or Matt Lauer or Mario Batali or any of the other fellas starting to creep back in from the sidelines. I miss the work that could have come from people whose names we will never know. Because every time an abuser hints at a "comeback," especially one he did nothing to earn, the message to those who have been victimized is clear: You Still Don't Matter. Or, you matter less than the team doctor, the CEO, the comedic genius. And the world won't let you forget it.

I don't want to believe that anyone is beyond redemption. But forgiveness is granted; redemption is earned. Because all of those nameless, faceless people do matter. (You, you reading this: you matter.) They deserve, if nothing else, the respect of an earnest attempt at atonement for their pain. So, if any of these men want to return to the celebrated public lives they enjoyed before, they need to work for it. We need to make them work for it.