

The Problem with #MeToo Responses

By Ashley Boren • UCSB Contributor • Originally published in Her Campus

We all know the cycle by now. A woman, or often several women, accuse a man of sexual harassment. The man releases an official statement in response to the allegations. He either denies the claims completely or admits the allegations are true, but there's always a catch.

The men who admit the claims are true downplay their wrongdoings. Les Moonves, Aziz Ansari, and Louis C.K. are three examples of men who never mention the words "assault" or "harassment" in their responses to #MeToo allegations. Les Moonves calls it "making advances," while Ansari and CK do not succinctly refer to their actions.

In his response to six women's accusations, former CBS chairman and C.E.O. Les Moonves does not take full responsibility for his actions from decades earlier. Moonves said, "I recognize that there were times decades ago when I may have made some women uncomfortable by making advances." Hold up... did he just say "may have"? There are six women who have accused him of assault and all he can believe is that he "may have" made them uncomfortable.

Moonves doesn't seem to want to fully acknowledge the impact his actions have had on these women. Four of the women recount times when Moonves forcibly touched or kissed them in a business meeting. Of course, in a professional meeting, forcible sexual advances would make anyone uncomfortable. Moonves should have realized the far reaching extent of his actions. Because yes, unwelcome sexual advances in a work environment would make anyone feel uncomfortable.

Comedian and actor Aziz Ansari somewhat admitted to wrongdoing in his statement. Ansari said, "We ended up engaging in sexual activity, which by all indications was completely consensual." However, the woman who spoke out about Ansari describes him constantly asking her *where* she wanted to have sex, not even asking *if* she wanted to have sex, after she had said no repeatedly. Consent entails taking the first "no" for a final answer and not continually pressuring someone. "No means no" is not enough, as people also need to hear an affirmative yes from their partners, which Ansari did not receive.

In his statement, Ansari should have explained that he did not understand consent well enough at the time. When he finally “took her words to heart,” he realized the experience was not consensual and a lesson to learn from.

Ansari emphasizes that what led up to the sexual activity was just a normal date, which suggests Ansari thinks this allegation is not too serious. Ansari explains, "I met a woman at a party," "we exchanged numbers," and "we went out to dinner." The story up until that point is relatable. Ansari tries to place the focus on the situation rather than on his own actions after dinner. Sexual assault, however, can happen anywhere, even on dates. Ansari's statement does not show that he knows this.

By downplaying the allegations, Ansari separates himself from the rest of the #MeToo movement. He ends his statement with, "I continue to support the movement that is happening in our culture. It is necessary and long overdue." Ansari pretends he is involved in this movement as a supporter, not as part of the problem.

Louis C.K. wrote a 494 word response to sexual assault allegations made by six women. He finally takes responsibility for his actions three paragraphs in, but can barely identify the sexual harassment as a "situation that [he] caused."

C.K. shows more sympathy for his family and friends than the women he sexually harassed. In his statement, C.K. describes the "pain" he brought to his family, but left a "task" with the women he assaulted. Does he mean the task of healing? The task of coming forward and telling their stories? The task of seeing the man who harassed them rise up in power and hurt more women? When C.K. elaborates on the women's pain, he frames their pain around his own by saying, "The hardest regret to live with is what you've done to hurt someone else. And I can hardly wrap my head around the scope of hurt I brought on them."

Many sexual harassers do not receive the national attention that Moonves, Ansari, and C.K. did due to their status in the entertainment industry. These public responses have power to change how society views consent, especially because of their visibility to the public eye. Unfortunately, these three men focused more on defending themselves and avoiding consequences than educating the masses on consent, which they probably still don't understand themselves.