

Charlie Sheen and the state of the union: part I

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Yes, yes. There is winning, and then there is also winning.

But then, there is also winning at great cost. There is winning at great cost to the self - a Pyrrhic victory as they say - which, I dare say, may be indistinguishable from losing in some cases (as we are seeing). There is winning at great cost to others. Which is also what we are seeing.

The question, as far as I am concerned, is not at all whether Sheen is unstable, or going insane, or bipolar, or any of those other things that are doing the rounds. The question is this: if he is indeed on the verge of a meltdown, or in fact melting down as I write this, should this be so obsessively covered, and by the news media, no less? There is a streak in current journalism to behave as if there are some great lessons to be learned from all this, through observation or something, which is perhaps true. But there is also something to be learned inasmuch as how non-empathetic people can be. Particularly, those people who are in charge of something that is supposed to inform us and make us more aware. When such an institution (if it can be called an institution) is behaving in this manner, I think there is a general lack of credibility. And not only because what they are doing is immoral, and against what we purport to be our better natures as a race - to not enjoy (or be entertained by) another person's unraveling - it is a lack of credibility also because at the end of the day, these people in the media also make one incredulous. How can they look on with a straight face, claiming that after all, everyone has a right to their side of the story? They behave as, for example, on the CBS inter-

view, that the things taking place are somehow all normal. The interviewer is well-trained, yes. I would say well-trained in deception. This is not what is meant by unbiased journalism.

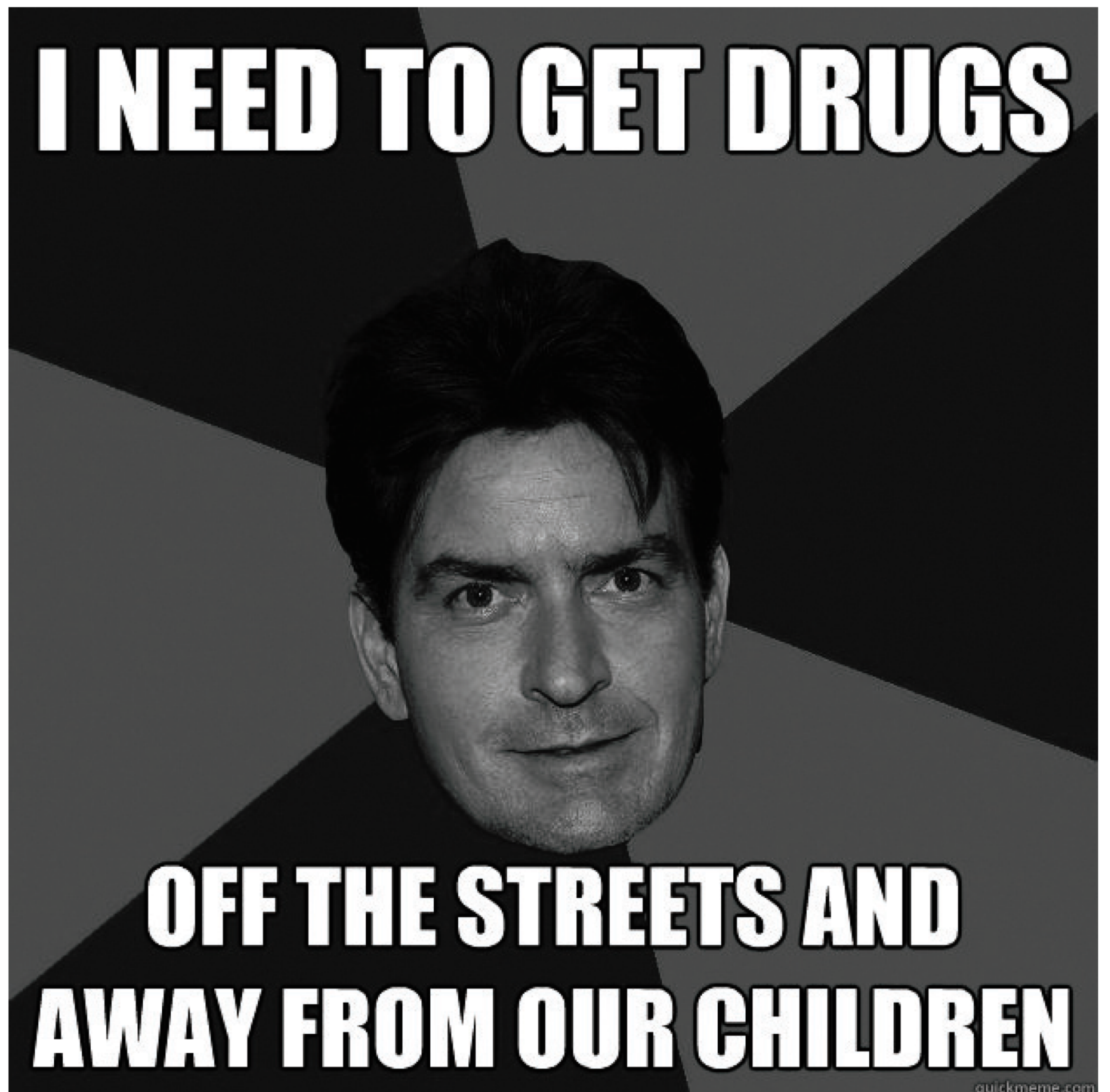
Regardless of what kind of person Charlie Sheen is, or what his past has been, his situation should not be made the means of entertainment. This happened in the case of many other celebrities, as well, and it is sad that not a lot seems to have changed. A change, if any, has only been towards deriving more mileage from such a situation. And as this is progressing, it also seems that the media has come out and raised the bar somewhat: there had been some hint of incredulity in the cases of the likes of Spears or LiLo. But this time it seems they are simply looking on.

Bob Garfield, of NPR's "On the Media" wrote recently*:

"The question is, just because someone is a celebrity, are the media absolved of the responsibility not to exploit his illness for the sake of audience? Rhetorical question there. The answer is, when someone is coming mentally unhinged, it is ethically abhorrent to egg him on."

Nicely captures that, doesn't it?

* Bob Garfield wrote this in an email to CNN, which was quoted in a CNN article by Lisa Respers France.



Clean Sheen! (Image courtesy Simon Brauer)

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