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Insulting Chuck Lorre, Not Abuse, Gets Sheen Sidelined

By **DAVID CARR**

As more and more women have come into the work force, corporate America has made significant, if agonizingly slow, progress in making sure its attitudes and the conduct of its leadership reflect those changes. It's no longer a "Mad Men" world where women are expected to fetch coffee and whiskey and service their bosses in other ways.

But it may still be a "Two and a Half Men" world.

For eight very successful seasons, [Charlie Sheen](#) has been the star of "Two and a Half Men" which is produced by [Warner Brothers](#) and which is owned by [Time Warner](#), and broadcast by [CBS](#). Let's ignore the mountains of cocaine that Mr. Sheen has admitted doing along the way — CBS and Warner Brothers certainly did.

In addition to wreaking all manner of havoc on himself with drugs and alcohol that has put him in the hospital and the show on hiatus, Mr. Sheen has done a lot of damage to the people around him, women in particular.

In 2006, his wife at the time, Denise Richards, filed a restraining order, charging that Mr. Sheen had pushed her down, thrown chairs at her and threatened to kill her in person and on the phone. The couple eventually divorced.

Mr. Sheen then had a series of very public relationships with sex film stars, which is certainly his prerogative — talent is as talent does — but he also continued to exhibit a pattern of violence toward women.

Mr. Sheen was charged with a felony for an incident on Christmas Day in 2009 in which he threatened to kill his wife, Brooke Mueller, while holding a knife to her throat. According to the police report, Mr. Sheen "started to strangle Mueller then he pulled out a knife he always carries on his person and held the knife to Mueller's neck and threatened, 'You better be in fear. If you tell anybody I'll kill you.' "

Last fall, Mr. Sheen went on a rampage in [the Plaza Hotel](#) in New York. A hired escort who had locked herself in the bathroom claimed he had put his hands around her neck and threatened her while his former wife Ms. Richards and his children slept down the hall.

Yet none of these incidents got Mr. Sheen fired from his lucrative day job as a sitcom star, not

even suspended. What did? He insulted his boss.

Last week, while vacationing on the Bahamas, Mr. Sheen got on the phone with a radio show host and called his boss, the executive producer Chuck Lorre, “a clown” and then went on to make what many saw as an attempt at a slur, calling Mr. Lorre “Chaim Levine.” Just in case people didn’t understand the true nature of his feelings, he told [TMZ](#) that “I violently hate Chaim Levine.”

CBS and Warner Brothers immediately pulled the plug on the season and issued a joint statement: “Based on the totality of Charlie Sheen’s statements, conduct and condition, CBS and Warner Brothers Television have decided to discontinue production of ‘Two and a Half Men’ for the remainder of the season.”

CBS executives said that a human calculus was underway, that both companies were concerned about Mr. Sheen’s survival, not their business interests. But the business interests — hundreds of millions in broadcast and syndication revenue will be lost if the show is gone for good — continued to prevail even as he terrorized the women in his life.

CBS officials will not come near to making any statements on the record because they are convinced, given the antagonisms in the air, that the matter will end in court. They did point out that for a guy who was supposedly ready and willing to go to work in a week, Mr. Sheen has a funny way of showing it.

In addition to attacking Mr. Lorre and generally acting like a megalomaniac to almost anyone with a microphone, Mr. Sheen said that recovery programs are for losers and said that he had somehow managed to cure himself of the scourge of addiction “with his mind.” That usually doesn’t work out too well in my experience.

“There’s lots of stars who have problems,” said Tony Angellotti, a veteran Hollywood publicist. “But when they walk back on that set, they are expected to pull it together because so much is at stake, and most of them pull it off. He said the kind of things that make it hard for him to work with the boss of the show.”

And that is the real human calculus here: the companies are being forced to pick sides between Mr. Sheen and Mr. Lorre. In a town that lives for hits and can’t seem to find them, Mr. Lorre has helped create not only “Two and a Half Men,” but “Grace Under Fire,” “Cybill,” “Dharma & Greg,” “The Big Bang Theory” and “Mike and Molly.”

So the message from CBS and Warner Brothers seems clear: abuse yourself and the women around you to your heart’s content, but do not attack the golden goose.

We can all nod and wink and say “it’s Hollywood, what do you expect?” CBS and Time Warner may be in the entertainment business, but they are both publicly traded companies with shareholders, corporate ethics policies and, one presumes, many female employees who don’t particularly care to see a highly paid employee (Mr. Sheen, between his share of syndication and a

salary of \$1.2 million per episode, makes enough to put him at the top of the food chain in most of corporate America) continually threaten to use women as punching bags.

Last year, [Mark Hurd](#), then chief executive [Hewlett-Packard](#), resigned after an investigation into allegations of sexual harassment made by a consultant to the company. True, Mr. Hurd received a nice fat package and became a co-president at Oracle almost immediately. But there were no allegations of assault and he was still held to account for what he described as failing to “live up to the standards and principles of trust, respect and integrity” he had set at the company.

In 2007, [Chris Albrecht](#), then chairman of [HBO](#), which is owned by Time Warner — yes, that Time Warner — was asked to resign after he was arrested and charged with assaulting a woman in a Las Vegas parking lot. Even though Mr. Albrecht had played a large role in developing the paid cable network and hits like “Sex and the City” and “The Sopranos,” his behavior, coupled with past incidents of domestic abuse, was deemed unacceptable.

Is Mr. Sheen excused because he manufactures laughs, not widgets, for a living? For years on the show, Mr. Sheen has been playing to type as a naughty boy in a man’s body: the result was often scabrous and funny and a hit in the ratings. It also fits another depressing pattern. From “Animal House” to [Howard Stern](#), from “Pretty Woman” to “The Hangover,” Hollywood has long had a soft spot for male misbehavior and, in claiming to parody childish misogyny, it seems to provide an excuse to indulge in it further.

Hollywood likes to pretend it has grown up and taken its seat in corporate America. But it hasn’t when it comes to violence toward women. Mr. Sheen may have gone off-script last week. But in his attitudes toward women both on and off screen, he’s right on message.

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