

Subject: Should Fred Savage, Bill Murray, and Frank Langella Be Cancelled for "Inappropriate Behavior"?
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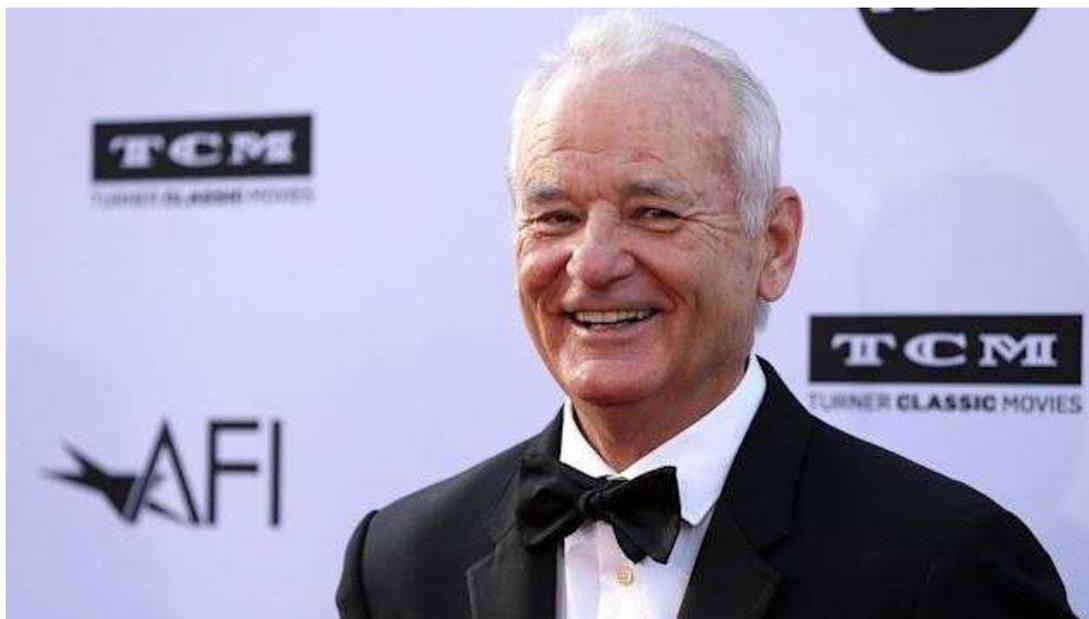
Should Fred Savage, Bill Murray, and Frank Langella Be Cancelled for "Inappropriate Behavior"?

Three celebrities are accused of on-set actions that have closed down movies and a TV show.



Kareem Abdul-Jabbar

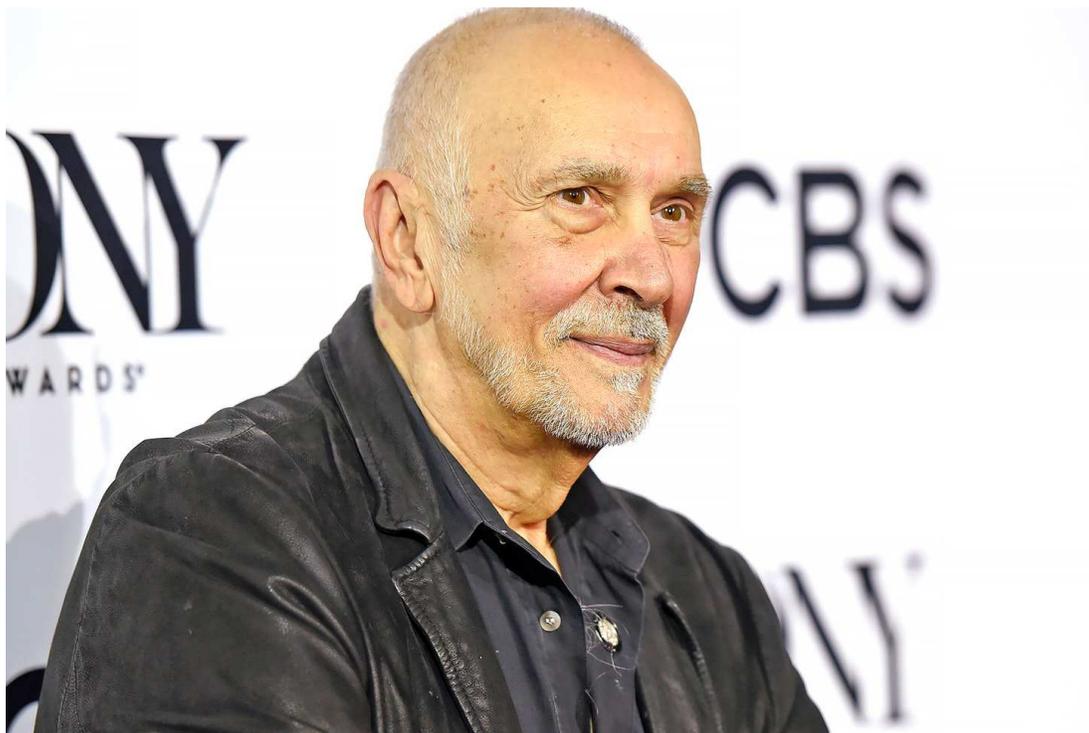
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Bill Murray

Bill Murray and Frank Langella are old guys. So am I. Which is why I can understand how they suddenly found themselves confused and dazed by accusations of inappropriate behavior. They've each been in show business for over 50 years, rose to stardom, and have been living in the rarified atmosphere of Celebritywood, where questionable actions are often overlooked, indulged, or explained away with a shrug and a wink.

I don't know Murray or Langella, but I am a great admirer of their work. They are true artists. Other than that, I don't know squat about them. But I do know the struggle sometimes to adjust to new social standards, new cultural consciousness. I was a teenager during the beginnings of the Women's Liberation Movement but it made me aware of the similarities with the Civil Rights Movement. As a result, I was a supporter of women who were over the age of eighteen not wanting men to call them "girls." The widespread use of the word diminished and disrespected them, reduced them to childlike status to be ruled by the adult men. At the time, men over 60 had trouble with this new social awareness because to them at their age, women in their thirties and forties seemed like girls. I remember scoffing at the lameness of their excuse. After all, old White men had claimed the same exemption about referring to Black men as boys or even Blacks as coloreds. *Better learn to change with the times, old man*, I thought.



Frank Langella

Now I'm 75 and sometimes I catch myself about to refer to women in their thirties as girls. "Bye, girls," I might say. Or, "How are you girls doing?" I catch myself because it's not about me or how hard it is to remember or even my good-natured intentions. It's not even about whether or not they would be offended. It's about the general perception and my responsibility to be aware that neither my age nor my celebrity excuses perpetuating diminishing women—or anyone—through the use of tainted language. I may slip up on occasion, but just because people might excuse

me because of my age or my outspokenness about equality, that doesn't mean I shouldn't be vigilant about not repeating my mistakes.

Sure, some of you are thinking, "What's the big deal? Girl or woman, what does it matter? More 'woke' b.s." Generally, that question only gets asked by people who haven't had to face relentless discrimination or by people who aren't aware how much they've been victims of it. Recently, Florida congressman Matt Gaetz, (yeah, the same guy currently under investigation for allegedly pursuing a sexual relationship with a 17-year-old girl and paying for her to travel with him in violation of federal sex trafficking laws) referred to women protesting the U.S. Supreme Court's apparent decision to overturn Roe v. Wade as "overeducated." Full quote: "How many of the women rallying against overturning Roe are over-educated, under-loved millennials who sadly return from protests to a lonely microwave dinner with their cats, and no Bumble matches?" Using the word "overeducated" (what does that even mean?) is his attempt to link educating women with personal relationship failure.

So, this article isn't about using the word "girl" per se—there are plenty of times when it's appropriate, even appreciated. We're looking at the larger context of when the word—and all the behavior associated with the entitlement to use it whenever and on whomever a male wants—become part of a larger pattern of suppression.

Have you heard of the Pink Tax? It's the amount of extra money women pay for the same products as men. The New York City Department of Consumer Affairs discovered that clothes, children's toys, and home care products cost women an average of 7% more, resulting in them paying \$1,351 more each year for the same products. The study revealed that a red scooter marketed to boys cost \$24.99 and an identical pink scooter marketed to girls costs \$49.

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How is that possible? How is it possible that women are about to have their reproductive rights taken away? How is it possible that the government can force a woman to unwillingly risk her life? How is it possible women can still be harrassed in the workplace? How is all that possible when they comprise 51.1% of the U.S. population? It's possible because we have a long history of paternalism, magnanimously granting rights and taking them away in the guise of "protecting" them. And a certain percentage of women are just fine with that. It's like a dark stain that, despite hundreds of washes, still haunts with its ghostly outline.

Referring to a woman as a girl may seem laughably small, but it isn't insignificant. It's part of the larger systemic web of behavior. Words, whether aggressive like then n-word or passive like girl, form a strong cold current under society that pulls us in a direction we may not be aware of until it's too late and we're tugged under the smooth surface. Calling a woman "honey," or "sweetheart," or "bitch" reduces them to powerlessness. The same as unwanted touching, which suggests they don't have control of their personal space. That perpetuates the idea that they are weaker and therefore worthy of exploitation.

What's this have to do with Bill Murray and Frank Langella? I wasn't present in either occasion that generated the complaint, so I have no opinion about the legitimacy of the accusations. Was there an inappropriate joke? Was there an egregious touch during an acting scene? Is that enough to close down the films both were working on? This is part of a conversation that's been going on for centuries, but with minimal progress.

I had just finished this article when news broke that Fred Savage had been fired as executive producer and director of ABC's revived *The Wonder Years* following an investigation into misconduct.



Fred Savage

No one gets a free pass based on celebrity. But I hope that the investigations are more than corporate ass-covering, because both parties—accuser and accused—in these cases deserve to be heard. Workplace standards have to be set and followed, even if it's difficult for old-timers or longtime celebrities. At the same time, unless there is a persistent and egregious flaunting of the rules, counseling and fines seem more appropriate than immediate firing for first-time offenders.

Moving forward, celebrities (and all people) of all ages need to be much more aware at what can and cannot be said and done. The familiar “I was just joking. That’s my sense of humor. I’m a hugger. You should smile more.” won’t cut it anymore. Nor should it. Words—even seemingly innocent ones—can perpetuate oppression, regardless of one’s intention. Rules have been put into place to protect the powerless from the powerful and we can’t be arrogant enough to think those rules don’t apply to us, especially when what we do carries so much weight with the public.

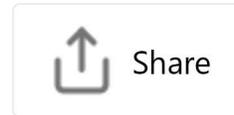
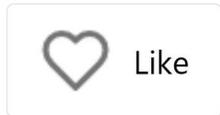
Each of our actions are like pebbles dropped in a pond, rippling outward until they either gently rock a smiling child floating on her back—or overturn a boat and dump us all into the unforgiving current.

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