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Most Offensive Things Said to Pregnant Women at Work

By [Ciara Larkin](#)

NEW YORK ([MainStreet](#)) — Pregnant women in the U.S. face considerable challenges. When President Obama held the Working Families Summit in Washington, D.C. this June, he highlighted the considerable deficiencies in benefits for American working mothers compared to those in other developed countries. In fact, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that just 12% of workers in private industry could access paid family leave. But one of the biggest obstacles for pregnant women in the workplace is [the perceived stigma of their condition](#).

While it is both unfortunate and unfair that a pregnant woman handling a full workload is looked at as inferior or weak compared to someone who is not pregnant, it stands to question how modern day society is still clashing with the traditional 1950s view on women in the workplace.

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Does a woman's pregnancy somehow stir up retro opinions that said pregnant woman should be home with a glass of iced tea in one hand and a vacuum in the other? Or, does it just mean that those who feel the need to tamper with that certain pregnant woman's emotions just have a serious lack of manners and sensitivity? Regardless of the reason, some of these real-life statements will be sure to shock you.

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"Do you think your morning sickness could all just be in your head?" Holly Rodriguez, communications professional and mother, was actually on the receiving end of this statement from a co-worker while pregnant. Rodriguez explains that, like many women, she was plagued with morning sickness and nausea. Yet her particular case was so intense that she had to be hospitalized and prescribed medication in order to get it under control.

Unfortunately, the company she worked for was a prime example of a company that does not sympathize with pregnant women, and her pregnancy and illness during such was outwardly frowned upon.

When her co-worker asked her if it could all just be in her head, Rodriguez took a stand for pregnant women everywhere by retorting with, "How about I punch you in your testicles, and then I'll ask you if the pain you're feeling is all in your head?"

If that didn't spell it out for him, there's a good chance that nothing would.

Relationship and etiquette expert April Masini brings up the subject of "pregnancy brain" and explains that a lot of negative implications come along with discussing the myth that women get more absent minded during pregnancy and suffer from "momnesia."

"Pregnancy brain' is not a thing," Masini says. "So don't refer to it if you're not pregnant." She compares it to the harmful emotional effects that stem from when a person tells an off-color joke, especially when the joke is being made by a person to which the punch line does not apply.

"If you're not pregnant, don't refer to 'pregnancy brain,' insinuating that because someone is pregnant, their brain is not working as well as it would be if they were not pregnant," Masini says.

Especially in the workplace, comments like this, though they may seem harmless and light-hearted, allude to a much larger issue and can definitely be grounds for contacting human resources.

Licensed clinical psychologist Dr. Ramani Durvasula shares a personal experience that she had during her pregnancy. While at work, a male co-worker commented to her, "Wow, you once had such nice legs!" and then compared her current pregnant body to that of a "Russian matron at a fish market." While this clearly offensive, the co-worker was clearly unaware of how common the condition edema plagues pregnant women by causing major swelling, primarily in the legs.

Whether with edema or another condition that affects the body, Durvasula's experience clearly teaches that comments relating to the comparison of the pregnant woman's pre-pregnancy physical appearance and her physical appearance while pregnant are not usually welcome.

Unfortunately, it is no longer the norm for one parent to be able to stay at home with kids while the other parent works to support the household. Modern day lives and necessities have grown to be so costly that both parents may need to work to maintain some level of comfort within the home. With the workplace protocols in place for maternity and paternity leave, this topic easily opens the floor for co-workers to comment on or inquire about the pregnant woman's family and childcare plans.

Janine Truitt, chief innovations officer for Talent Think Innovations, LLC, explains that statements to a pregnant woman who already has children, such as "Wow, you're pregnant again?" are made regularly, and they insinuate that, for whatever reason, being pregnant is irresponsible, unnecessary or inappropriate when it comes to having a job. Such statements can also imply that the pregnant woman is hindering her job by trying to build a family.

From another perspective, first-time parents need to make some big decisions, like which one of them is going to stay home with the baby and for how long. Sarah Sutton Fell, the [CEO](#) and Founder of FlexJobs, discusses how being a stay-at-home parent can be viewed condescendingly.

"Are you 'just' going to be a stay-at-home mom?" is a popular question when it comes to this. There are also a string of inappropriate comments that are directed toward those who cannot afford to have one parent out of work for an indefinite amount of time. Kathi Elster, co-author of *Mean Girls at Work* as well as other books regarding workplace struggles, brings up that parents in this situation are going to require either a day care or a nanny to care for the baby when the paid leave expires. Co-workers have been known to not-so-subtly share their opinions on this theme with questions like "Who's going to raise this kid, you or the nanny?" It goes without saying that questions like this are completely uncalled for, hurtful and, at the very least, can be a definite foundation for a co-worker quarrel.

Another awkward subject is the current standing of the pregnant woman's relationship with the child's [father](#). The fact that both science and society have come far enough now that it is no longer necessary for the woman to have intercourse with a man, let alone be in a relationship, in order to get pregnant should be enough to dissuade people from inquiring. However, what should be enough is never

actually enough.

Questions and comments about whether or not the pregnant woman is in a relationship are common, and while some are gutsy enough to take it to that level, others even go a step further by commenting on or about the person she may or may not be in that relationship with. Jonathan Segal, an attorney with Duane Morris, LLP based in Philadelphia, says he has heard hurtful questions like "Who is the unlucky man?" among other crude murmurs heard behind the pregnant woman's back.

James Angleton, president of AegisFS and father of two daughters, shares how he was just as mortified by over-hearing other highly-assuming, family-related statements, like, "Oh, you're pregnant? I didn't know you were married!" Just like society has moved out of the 1950s, [we have also moved out of the era where marriage is a necessity prior to having a child.](#)

Dealing with pregnancy in the workplace is a common challenge for working women, and while many employers and co-workers are caring, generous and sensitive toward the situation, others, as shown above, are not as easy to deal with. One can only hope that publicizing some of these careless comments will be just enough to teach a few of those insensitive ones to think before they speak.

--Written by Ciara Larkin for MainStreet

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