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# CAUTION: MEN AT WORK

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## I. BACKGROUND

Seven years ago, as a student in England, I was always amused by how much road work went on in the day time on the streets of Central London.

As you approach a busy intersection, you are almost sure to see warning signs shouting out at you "Road Works Ahead," "Caution: Men at Work." Every so often, there would be a female engineer working alongside the men and I always wondered if she noticed that the warning signs did not seem to acknowledge her efforts.

A few weeks ago I was taken back in time to those days in London. I was in one of my law school classes trying to pay attention to what the professor was saying and at the same time thinking about what title to give to a paper I was working on. I had been given one week to submit a title for the paper and, at first, I thought one week was a long time. But as the deadline closed in, I began to think otherwise.

I struggled to participate in my present class, but kept drifting to the road signs I had seen in London all those years ago. Out of nowhere, it hit me; I had the title for my paper, "Caution: Men at Work!" Then I heard the professor say my name. Apparently, she had directed a question to me. I nearly jumped out of my seat. How did she know that I was daydreaming? I made a mental note of looking less expressive in the future. I heard myself come up with a response that I hoped was related to her question. Her nodding was reassuring.

This paper is drawn from something I experienced not too long ago. I had decided I would specialize in the area of business law once I graduated from law school. To help me gain some insight in that area, I began working for a law firm that practiced business law.

## II. "WORK EXPERIENCE"

Ten months into the job, I began to feel very ill. The symptoms I felt

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were familiar to me: flu symptoms. I was not worried until two weeks later, when the symptoms got worse. I would wake up tired no matter how much sleep I had. I went to the doctor who prescribed x-rays, flu medication and blood tests. They all came out negative. By this time, I became confused. What on earth could be wrong with me?

My contract with my employers stated that I would work thirty hours a week, Monday through Thursday. When my health began to fail me, I informed my employers of my desire to work Fridays in addition to make up for any tardiness during the week. I got the go-ahead.

### III. DIAGNOSIS

I finally saw a doctor. The unexpected diagnosis - I was two and a half months pregnant! The doctor said the fatigue and dizziness would stop by the end of the third month of the pregnancy. With some apprehension, I shared my good news with my boss. I then proceeded to inform him that the doctor said all I needed was a couple of more weeks and I would feel my normal self again. I thought that this additional bit of positive information would be received with a favorable response.

My boss congratulated me on my pregnancy, but also added that he could not wait "forever" for me to feel better because he had "other mouths to feed." He reminded me that in a couple of months, my law school finals would begin and so he expected me to ask for time off for that as well. I quickly reminded him that a couple of weeks were all that I was asking and that I would not be pregnant "forever." You could almost touch the long silence that followed.

Was he insinuating that I would remain pregnant forever? Or was my being a woman synonymous to pregnancy, which in some people's minds is a constant, or a thing to be expected for as long as one is a woman?

What did he mean by "cope with pregnancy?" From what I understand, pregnancy is a process that entails nine months, after which, the birth of a child ensues, which is usually considered a happy occasion. People cope with bad news, ill health and the like, but surely not pregnancy.

Prior to announcing my pregnancy, my boss knew I attended law school after work and never made a mention of his concerns, so why now? Perhaps he saw my pregnancy as an illness, something that reminded him of my gender - female. That group of people who in their natural state (or so it is presumed) are mothers thanks to pregnancy. So, maybe in his mind I was supposed to give up my job and go back to my natural state, the home, and continue my natural process of being pregnant!

#### IV. THE WORKPLACE

The workplace could no longer be my environment because I would be unable to cope. After all, little girls are raised differently from their brothers. They get Barbie dolls as presents and begin playing house and learn at a very early age, how to run a home. They become so accustomed to it, it becomes a natural surrounding.

Boys, on the other hand, are brought up to believe that as men, they must show no emotions; they have to learn a skill so that one day they can provide for their wife and the children she will bear him.

Many women have experienced some form of harassment or the other for the mere fact that they are not just women, but pregnant working women. Some have even lost their jobs due to their condition of being pregnant. Due to many financial obligations and sometimes being the sole breadwinner of their family, some pregnant women have to keep working until the very end of their pregnancy. A woman who has to work because of these needs in her life, should be commended. Knowing that she has these obligations it is unlikely that she would not take her job seriously. Because she needs the job, chances are she would do it even better in order to retain it.



## PROFESSOR COMMENTARIES

