Complaint

Summary

- The colleague has made a malicious complaint about the nature and content of our conversation.

- The colleague has invented remarks not attributable to me nor represents me or my views. I do not recognise any claims made within the complaint.

The conversation

The conversation started when the colleague was complaining about her weight and her issues in reducing her consumption of sugary drinks and foods. For context, philosophy and psychology books have been an interest of mine for the last year* and I find great interest in how it applies to our decision-making, whether on a personal or society-wide level. I have found this to be a great benefit to my life, and so has my family with my brother losing over 10kg by applying the same ideas. The colleague has also complained to me about private counselling being expensive, and her lack of success with the Cognitive Behavioural Therapy programme worksheets provided by the NHS. I believed that the colleague could find guidance in the same books and ideas. When the colleague mentioned a voice of reason in her head, which orders her to consume less sugar and to generally live better, I likened this voice to some Greek myths; namely, to a mythical titaness called Metis who resides within Zeus's head, known for her calm rationality and good balance to Zeus's sometimes boisterous personality. I think this myth contains within it some powerful ideas which I won't go into detail about here, but it forms the basis of lots of Western philosophy and has been supported by recent psychological studies. This is just something which interests me. I also made another comment about there being much value in myths and stories. Because religious stories evolve through the ages, they likely reflect intimately the psychology of the society which had created them. I said that it was through the religious stories of the past that moral teachings were delivered to next generations. Note I am not a religious person myself, nor have I ever been. I am however interested in the vast opinions that people have and enjoy talking about them when discussing psychology, sociology, or politics.

The colleague then brought up children; that they should be left to make up their own minds regarding issues of philosophy and morality until adulthood. I politely disagreed and said that children usually require socialisation to learn right from wrong, meaning that some form of moral teachings are simply unavoidable, either through school, parents, or wherever. I said that children can't exist outside of a framework of morality for the entirety of their childhood, no matter what that framework might be. I was trying to get through to her that if, for example, she was running the education system in this country, that her proposed policy position of completely isolating children from any interactions with philosophy + morality was simply untenable. I can discuss further about any of the ideas I brought up during our conversation. I can assure that I did not say that "children should be brought up into the Christian religion". This is not something I believe. I did not mention Christianity at any time up to this point in the conversation. In fact, we had both explicitly agreed that people should be free to bring up their own children how they see fit. Additionally, I did not at any time attempt to imprint my own sense of values onto the conversation, I just enjoy discussing interesting ideas. Throughout the conversation, the colleague sought to move the conversation away from discussing ideas towards events and controversy.

The topic then abruptly turned to paedophilia within the Catholic church. The colleague pivoted the conversation, suggesting that catholic priests sexually assault children more than the general populace. Taken aback by this suggestion, I mentioned that perhaps the rates of assault could be the same, but controversial

cover-ups within the church and the subsequent media coverage was likely to generate an impression of such a disparity. Although I don't know and said as such.

I am not opposed to discussing such ideas although the workplace is not an appropriate setting for colleagues to bring these conversations to me. I have gone through the academic process and can discuss these topics with the sensitivity and nuance that they require.

The colleague then raised the issue of homosexuality. I didn't know why this issue was being raised at the time, but I engaged in the conversation anyway. I now realise that by this point in the conversation the colleague had done two things: she had reduced the complexity of the conversation in her own mind to very black-and-white; and 2, she was now misattributing these warped views to myself. With this myopic view of things (and probably some strong emotion to boot) she continued. She asked how some strongly religious conservative groups could be against homosexuality. This reminded me of the social psychology book "The Righteous Mind" by Jonathan Haidt which I had recently read. The book is about how seemingly ordinary people can come to vastly different + mutually unintelligible political stances on a range of issues. It attempts to teach to progressively minded / liberal people why conservatives have the opinions they do, and the cognitive + biological underpinnings for some of these beliefs. I won't talk about the book much further; simply that it introduces the idea of moral foundations theory, and that conservative/religious people tend to have additional sensitivities to concepts such as loyalty/purity/liberty that temperamentally liberal-minded people sometimes have difficulty in understanding. I thought I had some clout to give the question a good shot. I suggested that in the past, earlier societies dealt with threats that we either don't contend with nowadays or at least are not existential to our society; things such as wars between tribes for example. The colleague also correctly raised disease as a threat. I contended that perhaps societies had suppressed homosexuality to ensure more children available for work, and to further the community. In discussing views of the religious and conservative Right of politics, I referred the colleague to some views held by that group by referencing the family research council which often gets brought up by those on the Right. I believe that this information was what the colleague was asking for. I did not comment on the work's validity, nor did I suggest that they were my own views - only that they are some of the views on the religious Right and that she would need to engage with information like that if she wanted to further her interest in that specific viewpoint. The FRC is looked upon as a reliable source of information by US conservatives, and as such, I believed that this was just the source that the colleague was asking for. I did not mean to cause offence or intend to make the colleague feel uncomfortable.

There is also the suggestion in the claim that the colleague complained to me about feeling uncomfortable and that such things should not be said at work, but this is untrue. She started to continue with work in the chiller and became avoidant in discussing further. Through her body language, I believed her interest in the conversation to be waning. There were no suggestions that she would take away the conclusions from the conversation that were made within the claim. I understand that it may have been short-sighted to entertain such controversial and political viewpoints at work when asked about such views but the claims made in the complaint about how I allegedly said that "being gay is wrong" or "being gay is wrong because they can't produce children" and that "gays are more likely to molest children and I have to facts to back it up" are incorrect. No objectively minded onlooker would come to such conclusions which is why I believe the claims made amount to an act of malice. The colleague has shown a lack of integrity in leading such a discussion towards controversy and then reporting another colleague in bad faith.

Other notes

- The colleague has stated that she hates people in general and has wished death upon people with whom she disagrees. She continually complains to me and to other colleagues of numerous personal problems and has a downtrodden attitude at work. This outlook has me concerned for her mental well-being.

- Could the colleague have mistaken me for a political opponent that she may wish death upon? – and could this justify the misstatements made within the claim?

- The colleague may have felt uncomfortable within the conversation but required embellishments and misstatements within her complaint to 'get it over the line' so to speak.

- The colleague routinely complains of anti-vaccine people which I took as her interest in discussing odd views.

- My hyper-agreeable traits may have ignored the red flags (these being the colleague's misunderstanding of multivariate statistics and its ability to control for variables, and that she said that she reads academic journals and papers but not books when such a process is highly inefficient and is highly prone to confirmation bias, factual errors like insisting the USSR was catholic instead of state-atheistic). My hyper-agreeable traits may have allowed her to pivot to controversy without me realising what she was doing.

- The colleague brought up racial crime statistics and does not seem to understand the same claim of bringing up controversial viewpoints can be levied at her, and that one could easily misinterpret her words to bring about a complaint in bad faith in the same manner that she has done. "black people commit more crime" is directly lifted from her speech.

- The colleague has told me that she suffers with bipolar type 3, and I believe that this disorder may have contributed to her misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the conversation.

- No colleague should be subject to false complaints about what they have supposedly said, and this situation has caused me a great deal of stress.

* Books

- "The Chimp Paradox" by *Prof Steve Peters*,
- "Enlightenment Now" by *Steven Pinker*,
- "The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion" by *Jonathon Haidt*,
- "Meditations" by *Marcus Aurelius*,
- "Ancient Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction" by *Julia Annas*,
- "Waking Up" by *Sam Harris*,
- "Maps of Meaning" by *Jordon Peterson*,
- "The Idiot Brain" by *Dean Burnett*,
- "The Silent Guides" by *Prof Steve Peters*,
- "Mythos" by *Stephen Fry*,
- "The Coddling of the American Mind" by *Jonathon Haidt* & *Greg Lukianoff*,
- "The Parasitic Mind" by *Gaad Saad*.

Conclusion and going forward.

I will avoid entertaining such topics at work to avoid similar situations. I will attempt to shut down discussions when asked about viewpoints that may cause offence, even if they are hypothetical viewpoints.

There are concerns I have for the mental well-being of the colleague, as well as concern for the lack of integrity shown by reporting another colleague in bad faith. I believe the colleague should refrain from adding controversial topics into discussions if it is likely to cause her to take offence. The controversial topics brought up in our conversation were brought up by her, and I wasn't particularly eager to discuss such topics.

I am not satisfied that this situation couldn't have been diffused by the colleague informally, combined with the misstatements within the claim, I believe that the formal complaints procedure was undertook with malicious intent.

I believe that every colleague should feel safe at work which is why I would like reassurance that this colleague would refrain from making similar malicious complaints going forward.

I would like the reassurance that if the colleague were to make further malicious complaints, then they would be handled appropriately.

Does the colleague have a history of making malicious complaints? Either way, a log should be kept in case a pattern of behaviour can be established and to protect other colleagues.

Is the grievance process appropriate to gain the reassurances above? What is the grievance process and how does it differ from the complaints procedure undertook by the colleague?