The Nature and Influencing Factors of Malevolent Creativity

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Abstract. Creativity can be divided into two sides, not only positive but also negative. Malicious creativity will bring great harm to society. This paper introduces the concept and background of malicious creativity, the causes of malicious creativity, and discusses the influence of individual factors (such as negative emotions, empathy and psychological resilience) and environmental factors (such as childhood trauma, parenting, approach-avoidance motivation and social exclusion) on malicious creativity. It reveals the complex mechanism behind the development of malicious creativity. Finally, it discusses how psychological intervention and social support measures can prevent and reduce the occurrence of malicious creativity and promote social harmony and stability. By systematically identifying and understanding the key factors affecting malicious creativity, we can take early preventive measures to reduce its negative social impact. This study provides a foundation for the healthy development of individual psychology and the establishment of a safer, more active and innovative social environment.

Keywords: Malevolent creativity, emotions, psychological trauma, social interactions.

1. Introduction

Creativity is the ability of individuals to produce novel and applicable products through flexible thinking and imagination [1]. It is regarded as a critical factor for personal development and organizational success, traditionally carrying positive connotations. However, creativity does not always result in positive outcomes; some specific creations can trigger negative, destructive consequences. In other words, it inherently possesses a "dark side". In 1993, McLaren proposed that "many creative behaviors serve malevolent purposes." For example, criminals and terrorists often leverage creativity to create chaos and gain profit [2][3]. Due to the characteristics of creativity, which include originality and novelty [4], responding to such events can be challenging. To address this issue, researchers have gradually focused on the psychological traits related to these abilities. This deliberate, premeditated ability to harm others or society is known as malevolent creativity [5]

2. Possible Factors Contributing to Malevolent Creativity

2.1. Personal Benefit

Pursuing personal gain significantly drives the development of malevolent creativity [3][5]. During the pursuit of personal interests, individuals often sacrifice morality and conscience. This phenomenon is particularly prominent in contemporary society. For instance, some unethical software developers promote their antivirus software by creating and spreading computer viruses. This behavior violates industry norms and causes significant harm and anxiety to users. The abuse of malevolent creativity not only undermines business ethics but also damages the reputation of the entire industry, affecting societal trust and sustainable development.

2.2. Group Effects

2.2.1 Conformity and Obedience

Individuals may exhibit malevolent creativity to adapt to group norms. From a social psychology perspective, individuals generally have a tendency to conform; they seek a sense of belonging in a group and gradually align their behavior or beliefs with the group [2]. For example, in cases of school

bullying, adolescents might engage in bullying or aggressive behaviors, not by their nature, but to establish connections with peers [6].

2.2.2 Group Innovation

More extreme examples include gangs, cults, and terrorist organizations. The 9/11 attacks are a case where a terrorist organization fully utilized malevolent creativity. According to research, terrorist organizations consider multiple factors when innovating, including formation time, historical success experiences, organizational structure and size, reward and punishment mechanisms, cooperation style and atmosphere, economic foundation, and external relationships [7].

2.3. Self-Realization

Individuals may use malevolent creativity to achieve personal goals or fulfill internal needs. Social media today is a prime example [3]. Influences use these platforms to gain attention by fabricating false stories or spreading misinformation to increase their followers. Although these actions might not be intentionally harmful, they can mislead others. Individuals exploit malevolent creativity unethically or fraudulently to achieve personal goals, disregarding potential negative impacts on others.

3. Influencing Factors

The individual-environment interaction model emphasizes that behavior is gradually formed and developed through the interaction between individuals and their environment [5]. Within this theoretical framework, when social and individual factors interact, negative stimuli, such as frustration or social pressure, may drive individuals to develop malevolent creativity.

3.1. Individual Factors

3.1.1 Negative Emotions

The development of malevolent creativity often involves interactions that harm others or groups, often triggered by anger [8]. Unexpected events can provoke dissatisfaction with the current state, leading to internal anger , which can stimulate creativity[7]. Therefore, although anger can enhance creative performance, it may also promote the development of malevolent creativity, resulting in intentional harm.

3.1.2 Empathy

Empathy is the ability to accurately perceive and understand others' emotional states and resonate with them emotionally [4]. People with high empathy are often more considerate in their interactions, reducing conflicts and disputes. Studies show a significant negative correlation between empathy and malevolent creativity [5].

3.1.3 Psychological Resilience

Psychological resilience is the ability to self-regulate and adapt quickly to changes in adversity [6]. Research indicates that empathy and psychological resilience influence the relationship with malevolent creativity. In a study, data analysis showed a significant positive correlation between empathy and psychological resilience and a significant negative correlation with malevolent creativity[7]. Further mediation analysis revealed that psychological resilience partially mediates the effect of empathy on malevolent creativity. Individuals with high psychological resilience can effectively self-regulate during unexpected events, resist external negative influences, and exhibit lower levels of malevolent creativity [5].

3.2. Environmental Factors

3.2.1 Childhood Trauma

Adverse life events before adulthood often leave psychological or physical scars, such as neglect or abuse [7]. Childhood trauma significantly affects psychological health [8]. Studies show that those with childhood abuse experiences are more likely to develop antisocial tendencies in adulthood [9]. Notably, uncontrolled antisocial personalities often exhibit stronger malevolent creativity [10]. Thus, childhood experiences may indirectly influence malevolent creativity.

3.2.2 Parenting

Parenting comprises three elements: parenting beliefs, actual behaviors, and emotional expressions toward children . Experiment show that these elements positively influence children's creative self-efficacy and creativity. In summary, children exposed to positive parenting exhibit lower levels of malevolent creativity than those subjected to hostile parenting. Therefore, a positive family environment helps reduce undesirable behavior and malevolent creativity [11].

3.3.3 Approach-Avoidance Motivation

Approach motivation is driven by the pursuit of positive outcomes [12]. Studies indicate that individuals with approach motivation are more willing to accept challenges and risks due to an optimistic attitude toward success. This adventurous mindset makes their thinking more exploratory, increasing the possibility of creative thinking [9][10]. However, if the goal of approach motivation is improper, such as overemphasizing achievement while neglecting ethics or consequences, individuals may engage in malevolent creativity. Conversely, those driven by avoidance motivation tend to avoid risks and negative outcomes, reducing the likelihood of malevolent creativity as they focus on avoiding adverse consequences [2]. In summary, the manifestation of malevolent creativity under negative conditions can be influenced by both approach and avoidance motivations.

3.3.4 Social Exclusion

When individuals feel excluded or marginalized, they may experience isolation, loss, and helplessness, negatively impacting cognition. Specifically, social exclusion may distort time perception, causing individuals to over focus on the present while neglecting the past and future and avoid recognizing personal flaws [12]. This state may prompt individuals to question social norms and values, leading them to take extreme actions to satisfy needs and desires, often through malevolent creativity to express dissatisfaction and anger [10].

4. Conclusion

When examining the factors influencing malevolent creativity, we find that multiple complex factors influence its expression. Negative emotions, such as anger, may stimulate the development of malevolent creativity, while empathy and psychological resilience may mitigate it. Simultaneously, environmental factors, such as childhood trauma, parenting styles, approach-avoidance motivation, and social exclusion, also shape and influence individual malevolent creative behaviors to varying degrees. Although considerable research has explored these factors, a comprehensive understanding of malevolent creativity requires further investigation.

Ensuring healthy interpersonal relationships and social support, along with strengthening education and psychological interventions, remains essential in future research. By delving into these areas, we can more effectively prevent and reduce the occurrence of malevolent creativity, promoting social harmony and stability.

Furthermore, the significance of this research lies not only in revealing the causes of malevolent creativity but also in providing targeted interventions for policymakers, educators, and mental health professionals. By systematically identifying and understanding key factors influencing malevolent creativity, early preventive measures can be implemented to reduce its negative societal impacts. This

approach benefits individual psychological health development and contributes to building a safer, more positive, and innovative social environment.

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