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Creativity Through the Eyes of Professional Artists in Cuba, Germany, and Russia

C. Dominik Güß1,2, Ma. Teresa Tuason1, Noemi Göltenboth2, and Anastasia Mironova2

Abstract
Creativity plays an important role in the advancement of all societies around the world, yet the role of cultural influences on creativity is still unclear. Following systems theory, activity theory, and ecocultural theory, semistructured interviews with 30 renowned artists (writers, composers, and visual artists) from Cuba, Germany, and Russia were conducted to explore the complexity of the creative process and potential cultural differences. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using consensual qualitative research methodology. The following eight main domains resulted from the interviews: How I became an artist, What being an artist means to me, Creating as a cognitive process, Creating as an emotional process, Creating as a motivational process, Fostering factors of creativity, Hindering factors, and The role of culture in creating. Artists in the three countries similarly talked about creativity being a fluid process where ideas change, and elaborated on the role of intuition and the unconscious when creating art. Meaningful cross-cultural differences were seen among the artists of three cultural backgrounds in terms of attitudes about financial instability, in how they perceive themselves, in their art’s societal function, in the cognitive and in the emotional process of creating, and in terms of social connectedness. Results highlight (a) the complexity of the creative process going beyond cognitive factors and including motivational, emotional, and sociocultural factors, and (b) the cultural differences in the creative process. Results are beneficial for further developing a comprehensive theory of the creative process taking cultural differences into consideration.

Keywords
creative process, innovation, art, composing, writing, painting, visual art, culture, cross-cultural, consensual qualitative research methodology

Kreativität—Wenn man in ihr drin ist, dann ist sie ein Tier: ein sehr schönes, angenehmes, warmes, freundliches Tier in einem drin (Creativity—if you are in it [the creative process] then it is an animal: a very beautiful, pleasant, warm, friendly animal inside of you, German composer)

Todo es creatividad! (Everything is creativity, Cuban visual artist)

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Creativity is the driving force of innovation in many fields of human life, for example, technological inventions, science, and the arts. Creativity involves thinking in unorthodox ways, and coming up with something new and useful or appropriate (e.g., Funke, 2008; Guilford, 1968; Runco, 2007; Sternberg, 1999)—although “useful or appropriate” are not as suitable to the field of art as they are to other domains1 in life such as business, for example. Creativity is not confined to a few talented geniuses, but it can be regarded as an ability of all, of ordinary men and women who can generate novel ideas (Weisberg, 2006). In the arts (such as composing, painting, and literature/writing), creative expression has become synonymous to producing art.

From a cognitive perspective, creativity can be regarded as a form of problem solving. Therefore, the steps of the creative process are closely related to those of the problem-solving process (e.g., Dörner, 1996; Güss, Tuason, & Gerhard, 2010; Mumford, Mobley, Reiter-Palmon, Uhlman, & Doares, 1991; Wallas, 1926). Examples of creative thought include developing specific and unique goals, seeing a problem where most people do not, or coming up with novel and useful solutions. Another view, the sociocultural approach, describes creativity as a result of internalized and real social interactions. Because the individual and culture are intimately intertwined, only focus on both the individuals and their sociocultural environment together can lead to a more complete understanding of an artist’s creative process (e.g., Glăveanu, 2010; Vygotsky, 1997). Both approaches, which seek to explain different aspects of creativity, are necessary to develop a comprehensive theory of creativity (e.g., Silvia, 2007). Thus, the goal of the current study in combining both cognitive and sociocultural approaches is to investigate cultural differences in the complex creative process of artists (writers/poets, composers, and visual artists) in Cuba, Germany, and Russia. By interviewing renowned artists on their creative processes, we hope to understand the impact of culture as we examine the differences between the three countries.

Creativity in Componential and Systems Theory

Creativity research has primarily focused on the individual, and attempted to explain creative products through individual difference variables such as certain personality traits, intelligence, or cognitive styles (e.g., Batey & Furnham, 2006). The social aspect of creativity, the social environment, has become part of the componential theory of creativity (Amabile, 1996; Amabile & Pillemer, 2012) along with the following individual components: domain-relevant skills, creativity-relevant processes, and intrinsic task motivation. Creativity can also be understood more broadly from an integrated systems view, as a result of the interaction between the individual person, society, and the cultural domain/audiences that judge creative products (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Thus, creating occurs in the tension field between an individual’s mind in a social environment, the environmental stimulation, and evaluations of the environment (e.g., Miron-Spektor, Paletz, & Lin, 2015).

From both componential and systems perspectives of creativity, we postulate that the individual and culture are intimately intertwined, and such focus on both the individual and sociocultural environment together can lead to a more robust understanding of the creative process. The need to study creativity across cultures was also expressed by other researchers, for example, by Westwood and Low (2003) who summarized existing research: “Clearly personality and cognitive factors impact creativity and account for individual differences, but when it comes to differences across cultures the picture is far from clear” (p. 253). Although advances have been made (see, for example, Leung & Wang, 2015) still today, “the influence of culture on creativity is, however, relatively understudied” (Rinne, Steel, & Fairweather, 2013, p. 129). As the cultural side of creativity is less understood, the current study’s focus is especially on the potential
influence of culture on creativity. The main goal of this article was to investigate the complexity of the creative process focusing on motivation, emotion, and cognition in German-, Russian-, and Cuban-renowned artists.

Creativity and Culture

Culture can be defined as “the software of the mind” (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010), as the knowledge base used to cope with the world and each other, shared by a group of people and transmitted from generation to generation (e.g., Güss et al., 2010; Smith, Bond, & Kagitcibasi, 2006). This cultural knowledge encompasses values, norms, rituals, and behaviors which are highly influenced by historic, political, and economic societal forces.

Although culture can limit creativity, such as when members are required to adhere to certain standards and norms, culture can also supply the materials and artifacts that are used to create new ideas or objects (Cohen, 2012), and provide the social context in which creativity happens (Glăveanu, 2010, 2014; Rudowicz, 2003). Research has shown that exposure to other cultures provides additional material for the individual, which is associated with an increase in creative performance and creativity-supporting cognitive processes (Leung & Chiu, 2010; Leung, Maddux, Galinsky, & Chiu, 2008; Maddux & Galinsky, 2009). Exposure to other cultures can also facilitate a switching of language mind-set in bilinguals (Bialystok & Viswanathan, 2009).

Members of a culture are often encouraged to improve certain domains (e.g., professional organizations, science, or art), and thus create change through new and useful ideas. Therefore, creativity often occurs in the tension/stress field between adhering to standards and norms, maintaining safety and the cultural status quo, and having the vision, courage, and sense for the right timing to change parts of this cultural context.

Cultural Beliefs and Creativity

Following the definition of culture above, one can expect cultural differences in creativity. First, various cultures could highlight and value different aspects of creativity, and could potentially magnify different conceptualizations and beliefs about creativity (e.g., Kaufman & Sternberg, 2006; Lubart, 1990). For example, in the Chinese culture, appropriateness of ideas and acceptance of the environment have been crucial for understanding creativity. In the U.S. culture, the view of creativity has traditionally been of individuals coming up with novel ideas (e.g., Niu & Kaufman, 2013). Culturally unique beliefs and conceptualizations of creativity have been shown in some countries (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2006), such as in India (Misra, Srivastava, & Misra, 2006) and Zimbabwe (Ngara & Porath, 2007). In addition, Mpofu, Myambo, Mogaji, Mashego, and Khaleefa (2006) found no consistent conceptualizations of creativity: “None of the other twenty-seven languages of Africa that we sampled had a word equivalent in meaning to creativity with back translation” (p. 465). Such cultural idiosyncrasies in regard to creativity call for culturally sensitive and emic studies of creativity because they question the equivalence of the construct to be studied. Such construct equivalence is the prerequisite for possible cross-cultural comparisons (van de Vijver & Tanzer, 2004).

Cultural Values and Creativity

Second, cultural values could influence creativity. Cultural values can be defined as abstract transsituational goals (e.g., Hofstede, 2001) that may act as guiding principles for the selection of specific behaviors. Individualistic cultures often stress individual autonomy as a prerequisite for creativity, whereas collectivistic cultures emphasize the importance of the group when developing creative solutions (e.g., Dollinger, Burke, & Gump, 2007). Erez and Nouri (2010) argued that
individualistic cultures would show a higher level of novelty in idea generation while collectivistic cultures would elaborate more on the usefulness of the new ideas (see also Leung & Wang, 2015; Morris & Leung, 2010).

Besides individualism-collectivism, the cultural value of low power distance, stressing equality and deemphasizing strong hierarchies, is expected to be positively related to creativity. Low power distance would transfer more responsibility and freedom to think and act to the individual. Shane (1992), who compared invention patents per capita in more than 30 countries, showed that individualism and low power distance were related to cultural differences in innovation even after controlling for economic factors such as income. Moreover, Hoegl, Parboteeah, and Muethel (2012) showed that low levels of power distance on the national level predicted managers’ creativity promoting values. Güss (2011) showed that the cultural values of vertical and horizontal individualism and collectivism influenced complex problem-solving strategies in five countries.

**Culture, Creativity, and the Ecocultural Theory**

A third possible influence on creativity could be the dominant socioeconomic-political system, a frame in which behavior occurs. In his Ecocultural Framework, Berry (1999) conceptualized that both the ecological context and the sociopolitical context influence biological and cultural adaptation, which in turn influence individuals’ behaviors and thoughts. Thus, he formalized the relationship between ecology, culture, and individual behavior. Empirical research comparing more than 100 countries (Georgas, van de Vijver, & Berry, 2004) confirmed parts of this ecocultural model, in which psychological variables (defined as values and well-being) differed according to ecosocial indices (defined as economy, ecology, mass communication, education, population, and religion). Regarding sociopolitical context, researchers using the historiometric approach, that is, combining historic and individual data, could show that, for example, political instability was negatively related with creativity, and war had a close to zero relationship with creativity across cultures (Simonton & Ting, 2010). However, the processes that mediate between the context and the psychological variables are less understood.

Some answers to the question of which processes mediate between context and individual can be found in activity theory. Its origins go back to the Russian researchers Vygotsky, Luria, and Leontiev at the beginning of the 20th century. According to Vygotsky (1997), human action is never merely directly caused by the environment or by inborn reflexes alone. Human action is a process situated in and influenced by a specific context. It is a result of the interaction between the individual, artifacts, and other individuals in a specific historic time and situation (see also Boesch, 1991; Leontiev, 1978; Wertsch, 1998). Artifacts are both ideas (e.g., language, norms, worldview) and objects (e.g., cars, books, paintings, laptops) produced by individuals, and are characteristic of a specific culture. They mediate the interaction between individuals and their environment (Engström, Miettinen, & Punamäki, 1999). The tools individuals use to reach goals are culturally-mediated artifacts.

On a societal level, cultures allow people to be creative and create artifacts in certain domains (e.g., developing new art products), and not in other domains (e.g., strictly following orders given by a supervisor; Westwood & Low, 2003). As mentioned previously, creative ideas and products are evaluated by an audience, and cultures dictate where creativity is allowed and which ideas and innovations will be accepted and valued. For example, Oral, Kaufman, and Sexton (2004) showed that in Turkey before and after the revolution in 1920, various creative work was evaluated differently. Before 1920, poets received fewer awards than fiction writers. After 1920, poets received more awards than fiction writers.

To further elaborate, Westwood and Low (2003) referred to Vietnam as an example of how creativity can be inhibited on a societal level. As Vietnam’s government centrally controls the Internet and does not provide open access, such regulations can result in low incentives to develop
innovations with regard to the Internet. Following the arguments of Westwood and Low (2003) and elaborations on creativity and political systems of Dunphy, Herbig, and Palumbo (1997), one can hypothesize that capitalism would, by its nature, demand and foster creativity and innovation in the marketplace, and authoritarian systems and communism would limit creativity. Thus, the political-economic system such as capitalist economy, social market economy, and planned, socialist economy could directly influence individuals’ engagement in creative activities.

**Goals of the Current Study**

Although creativity is a deeply social and cultural process (Sawyer, 2006) that occurs in a socio-economic-political system, heavily influenced by cultural beliefs and values, it has been rarely studied in non-Western countries. The current study investigates the creative process in three real-world contexts: one Western-industrialized country, Germany; one former communist country, Russia; and Cuba, which has a socialist government; thus countries with different cultural values and norms. The current study is a response to the need for more research focusing on non-WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic; Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010) people and the richness of their cultural backgrounds.

Because creativity is multifaceted, the current study addresses the need to investigate the complexities of the creative process following componential, systems, ecocultural, and activity theories while employing both emic and etic approaches as reliable means for understanding different aspects of creativity. The current study systematically compares renowned artists (artists who won awards or fellowships) from Cuba, Germany, and Russia. While recognizing the artists’ ecological contexts, the research team interviewed artists about their lives and creative activities in their workplace. The interviews will add to our understanding of the intricacies of creativity as cognitive, motivational, and emotional processes that extant research on culture and creativity has not captured. In the following sections, a very brief background is presented on societal conditions relevant to the field of art in the three countries.

**Sociopolitical Conditions in Cuba, Germany, and Russia**

**Relevant to the Arts**

**Cuba.** Cuba, a Spanish-speaking island, is geographically situated less than 200 miles south of the southeastern U.S. border in Florida. The contrast of relative political and economic isolation and very low GDP (Villanueva in Font & Riobó, 2013) with having one of the best educational systems in Latin America is as striking. Despite having a restrictive political system of state socialism (Alzugaray & Noreiga in Font & Riobó, 2013), there are many possibilities for artists and creative people to realize their work and get institutional support. The state tries to explicitly foster young artists in their development, and censorship is not as strict as in other nondemocratic countries (Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematograficos).

**Germany.** Germany is a social market economy and one of the wealthiest Western-industrialized nations. Populations of wealthier countries typically enjoy a higher quality of life than those in poorer countries, for example, in terms of average salary, average life expectancy, and subjective well-being (e.g., Diener & Suh, 2000). According to Fritsch and Stuetzer (2008), there are many more creative people such as scientists, bohemians, and artists in larger, more populous German cities than in less populous areas. The educational system fosters creativity by offering free education. In addition, larger cities offer artists the opportunity to show their work to the public. Although the art of hundreds of thousands of German artists was controlled during the Third Reich by the Reich Chamber of Culture (Steinweis, 1993), artists nowadays are completely free in their expression.
Russia. Russia is the largest country in the world, and includes a multitude of different ethnic and religious groups that influence the Russian cultural identity. The country is a bridge between the West and the East, and integrates both Western and Eastern culture and values (Rzhevsky, 2012). Not surprisingly, the Soviet’s psychological view of creativity differs in perspective from the classic individual-centered Western view (e.g., Stepanossova & Grigorenko, 2006). Despite its difficult history in the 20th century, most authors emphasize that Russia has become one of the most rapidly developing countries in the world (Karnaukhova, 2015; Kharkhurin & Motalleebi, 2008).

### Method

#### Participants

A sample of world famous artists who won awards, or prizes or fellowships ($N = 30, 10$ from Germany, $10$ from Russia, $10$ from Cuba) voluntarily participated in exploring the creative processes and the impact of culture in creating art. The age of the participants ranged from 25 to 80 (Overall $M = 46.33, SD = 14.23$; Germany $M = 50.80, SD = 13.24$; Russia $M = 41.60, SD = 11.29$; Cuba $M = 46.60, SD = 17.40$). In each country, six participants were male and four were female. Of the 30 artists, five were composers, 15 were visual artists, and the other 10 were writers and poets. For the German sample, two were composers, six were visual artists, and two were writers/poets. For the Russian sample, two were composers, four were visual artists, and four were writers/poets. For the Cuban sample, one was a composer, five were visual artists, and four were writers/poets (see Table 1 for more details).

The sample was purposively selected, as all participants are highly renowned in their field and in their respective countries. As interviews from each country were conducted, the researchers deemed that there was satiation of themes that a $n = 10$ from each group was adequate and optimal. For in-depth interviews and qualitative analyses, 30 participants are regarded as high number (see Mason, 2010; recommendations based on an analysis of sample sizes in 560 qualitative studies).

Most of the German and Russian professional artists (16 of 20) who participated in the study had received prestigious fellowships awarded by the Bavarian Ministry for Science, Research, and Art to reside in the International House of Artists Villa Concordia, in Bamberg, Germany. The other four artists were recruited through the snowball technique. Such extremely competitive fellowships for 12 artists are awarded annually to six German artists and another six to artists from any European country. In the year this study was conducted, the six non-German artists were selected from Russia. All of the German artists were interviewed in Bamberg, Germany. Six of the Russian artists were interviewed in Bamberg, Germany (by the first and second author), and the other four were interviewed in Russia by the fourth author. Ten renowned Cuban artists

### Table 1. Domain, Gender, and Age of the Artists From the Three Countries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cuba ($n = 10$)</th>
<th>Germany ($n = 10$)</th>
<th>Russia ($n = 10$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Composers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1 (age 25)</td>
<td>1 (age 50)</td>
<td>1 (age 28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1 (age 41)</td>
<td>1 (age 31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Visual artists</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1 (age 50)</td>
<td>3 (ages 60, 67, 72)</td>
<td>1 (age 32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4 (ages 31, 32, 33, 47)</td>
<td>3 (ages 36, 44, 56)</td>
<td>3 (ages 34, 36, 61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writers/poets</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2 (ages 68, 80)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2 (ages 41, 48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2 (ages 48, 52)</td>
<td>2 (ages 31, 51)</td>
<td>2 (ages 50, 55)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
were interviewed in the capital city of Havana by the third author. Of the 10, seven had lived abroad for more than 6 weeks on international fellowships and awards, which enabled them to compare different cultural settings. Like the German and Russian artists, the Cuban artists were chosen from different domains, such as literature (four people), composition (one person), and painting (five people), to have a variety of work contexts and to represent the most common artistic fields. All of the Cuban artists were members of the National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba [UNEAC])—a social, cultural, and professional organization to which 83% of all Cuban artists of different genres belong.

Purposive Sampling

The first group of participants was recruited at Villa Concordia, Bamberg, Germany, where the artists were contacted directly through a written letter, followed by e-mail, and then by telephone. The second group of participants, German and Russian artists not in residence, were contacted through word of mouth and the snowball technique, asking a participant to identify another renowned artist. The third group of participants was recruited in Havana, Cuba, also through the snowball technique by e-mail and telephone. Although recruitment occurred in three different waves, all were contacted and informed of the study within a span of 6 months. Once they agreed to participate, a face-to-face interview session of an hour to 2 hours was scheduled. All 31 invited to participate in the study agreed to do so, although the data of one participant could not be analyzed as the tape was inaudible due to loud background noise and could not be transcribed, leaving a purposive sample of 30 participants. All participants in the study were given a 20 Euro gift card for a restaurant or art supplies to acknowledge the value of their contribution and their time.

Procedure

All participant interviews were face to face, lasting between 30 and 105 min each, and were conducted in quiet and private places convenient to the participants, mostly their home or workplace. All interviews were digitally recorded, and then transcribed. The interviews were conducted in German with the German artists, in either German or English or Russian with the Russian artists, and in Spanish with the Cuban artists (some of the Russian artists had lived in Germany for several years). The interviews were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed consistently in the specific language used. As the research team was proficient in these languages, specific members consistently conducted all the German, Russian, and Cuban interviews to control for confounding variables, as described by Hill et al. (2005).

All interviews were transcribed verbatim by the interviewer and members of the research team, which means that each word was written down, except for dialect, emphasis, or pauses. Transcripts were then verified for accuracy by another member of the research team. In addition, for Groups 1 and 2, e-mail correspondence was used to verify some of the transcripts and invite participants for follow-up interviews. For Group 3, transcript verification was not conducted as it was difficult to gain access to these participants a second time. After analyzing the data, only the core categories and subcategories were translated into English, and then back-translated for accuracy (Brislin, 1970).

Instruments

The interview protocol was developed from the existing literature on the process of creative people (e.g., Botella et al., 2013). Specific questions on the discovery of one’s desire to be an artist, the meaning of their art to them, and their creativity as experienced in different cultures were developed, and then pilot tested on three interviewees from Group 1. Also, the authors and
the members of the research team reviewed the interview protocol’s content coverage. The same questions were translated into German for the first group of interviewees, into Russian for some of the second group of participants, and into Spanish for the third group, and were modified accordingly after pilot testing on three participants from the first group. For instance, instead of being asked about the impact of culture on their artwork, they were asked to elaborate on experiences they had when they mentioned culture or countries where they had lived. Also, instead of asking about their difficulties or obstacles in the creative process, they were asked to talk about the art pieces they had struggled with the most.

In the semistructured interviews, all participants were asked to elaborate on three main areas: (a) their personal history, (b) the creative process, and (c) the role of culture in the creative process. In terms of personal history, participants were asked to talk about their artistic education and family background in questions, such as “When did you first want to become an artist?” In addition, we asked the artists to give us some insight into their work in general, which often led to a small tour through their studio or a showcase of their artwork. The second part of the interview consisted of questions concerning the creative process, the development of their ideas, the work process, their strategies for creative work, coping with obstacles, and the reactions they received after having finished an artwork. Participants were asked specifically,

Please talk about one of the pieces/art works you consider one of your most creative. Please talk about one of the pieces/art works that was the hardest for you to do. How would you describe creativity in your own words?

The last set of questions concerned possible cultural differences in creativity and the power of culture to influence creative work and its success. Participants were asked, “How, in your experience, does culture/the cultural environment influence your creativity and your success as an artist? How have your experiences of creativity been in different cultures?” These questions were especially valuable when an artist had been to a foreign country, as they could compare their own work experiences in different contexts very well. The complete interview protocol, including the main questions and the follow-up questions, is shown in the appendix. The interviewer actively listened, gave empathic responses, and asked follow-up questions when necessary.

Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed using consensual qualitative research (CQR) methodology (Hill et al., 2005; Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997) an inductive analytic process in which cases are studied intensively (Hill et al., 1997; Mayring, 2002). Hill points out that “this approach is especially useful in the early stages of research on previously unexplored topics” (Hill et al., 1997, p. 518) as “qualitative researchers do not begin with preconceived hypotheses but seek to ‘discover’ them in the course of data collection and analysis” (p. 518). As the topics of creativity and culture have not been optimally addressed, this methodology was deemed most suitable for this purpose.

The CQR method recommends gathering data using open-ended questions “in order not to constrain the response of the participants” (Hill et al., 1997, p. 522) and taking the context into consideration when analyzing. Three general steps are central to CQR: Responses are divided into domains, from which core ideas are constructed for each individual case. Categories are developed through cross-analysis of the different cases. This last step is important to describe consistency of the core ideas (Hill et al., 1997).

The 30 digitally recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. On average (i.e., depending on how quickly participants spoke), a 1-hr interview transcript resulted in about 15 single-spaced Word document pages (about 450 pages in total for 30 interviews). Initially, a set of seven
interviews was read independently by four different research team members. Each of the team members identified meaningful units from the interview and labeled the categories. The two first authors then reviewed these categories, discussed the findings, and developed a list of domains and categories. After the authors developed this initial list of meaningful units from the interview content, these yields of the analyses were presented to the research team. This derived list was used for further coding but was revised and modified by consensus of the team members. This list was then used to code all interviews with each of the four research teams (we had different teams: one that spoke Spanish for Cuba, one that spoke Russian for interviews in Russia, and one for the German/English interviews) coding the 30 transcripts independently. The research team met regularly to compare their coding for about two to four transcripts at a time. This process of comparison, called cross-analysis, involves a discussion of the differences occurring in the coding until consensus is reached. Through reaching consensus, an integral and vital part of CQR (Hill et al., 2005; Hill et al., 1997), domains, categories, and subcategories were further identified, renamed, and abstracted from the transcripts, and codes were then finalized. When five new categories came up as the interviews were analyzed, they were added to the list under the appropriate domain and category. The interviews that were previously analyzed were revisited and potentially recoded with the new domain or category.

Through seven research group discussions, core categories and subcategories were validated, modified, and further refined. Moreover, constant comparisons guided the data analyses, and hypotheses about the relationships between the domains and categories were continuously identified. The last step consisted of counting the categories to see how often they were mentioned across all 30 cases. Using Elliott’s (1989) convention, the categories were classified according to the frequency with which they were mentioned: Rare represents one to six people (mentioned by only one to two people from each group), Variant represents seven to 15 people (mentioned occasionally in only up to 30% of the cases or three to five people from each group), Typical represents 16 to 23 people (more than half of the cases or six to seven people from each group), and General represents 24 to 30 people (all or almost all of the cases, or eight to 10 people from each group). To protect confidentiality, pseudonyms were used in lieu of participants’ names.

Furthermore, an auditor, one of the research team members who did not analyze the interviews, verified the categories and domains. The auditor reviewed the core categories and subcategories assigned to verify how well the constructed categories had abstracted the raw data. The auditor also checked the recurrence of core categories and the subcategories within them, then worked with the other authors to integrate the findings. This serves to ensure that data analysis was conducted as accurately as possible, and that the domains and categories reflect the raw data as closely as possible.

Using the rigorous analysis prescribed, the procedures of CQR enabled the development of eight domains and four to 11 categories for each domain that provided a comprehensive description and explanation of the steps in the creative process, the steps in being a creative person, and the influence of one’s cultural context. The goal of qualitative research is not to present those themes but to let the experts, that is, the artists, speak. The scientist learns from the experts, as the common themes from their interviews were extracted.

Research Team

The research team was composed of one male German professor, one female Filipino professor, five female German undergraduate students, one female Russian undergraduate student, one male Russian graduate student, and one female German graduate student. As noted earlier, all team members who worked on the interviews conducted in Russian, German, or Spanish were prolific in the respective languages.
Trustworthiness

In establishing trustworthiness (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993), several methods were employed in the study. To ascertain credibility, the researcher used engagement and persistent observation, such as attending artists’ performances, surveying through their websites, and watching/reading their work. It is this substantial amount of time and observation that provided contextual understanding (Erlandson et al., 1993) of the artists, their creation, and the creative processes. Between-method triangulation through audiotaped interviews and observations was also used to increase credibility. Member checks were obtained by verifying the interview and the transcript, and when feasible, follow-up interviews to verify interpretations and initial core categories and subcategories. For the second and third groups, where follow-up interviews were not feasible, member checks were conducted at the end of the interview by immediately clarifying parts of the participants’ responses when unclear. The research team provided a check for dependability (i.e., verification of the processes used by checking interview notes, transcripts, and translations; Erlandson et al., 1993) and confirmability (i.e., verification of the yields of the data analyses, through cross-analysis and auditing; Erlandson et al., 1993). To institute transferability, the authors employed a thick description from a purposive sample.

Results

The data provide rich description of the artists’ experiences of becoming an artist, of the creative process, and of their understanding of the impact of culture in their creative processes. The yields of the interview analyses show similarities and differences between the artists from Cuba, Germany, and Russia in these eight domains resulting from the interviews: How I became an artist, What being an artist means to me, Creating as a cognitive process, Creating as an emotional process, Creating as a motivational process, Factors that facilitate creativity, Factors that hinder creativity, and The role of culture in creating. Table 2 illustrates the domains, categories, and frequencies of the categories within the domains of all three groups together. When discussing the categories in each domain, we describe the most frequent to the least frequent, while rare categories will only be discussed if they show cross-cultural differences. We will provide quotes to substantiate the investigators’ interpretations, and then proceed to describe the categories that are meaningfully different among the subsamples. In comparing subsamples, we used the guidelines as outlined in the CQR update (Hill et al., 2005). Subsamples are considered meaningfully different when findings are discrepant by at least two frequency categories (Hill et al., 2005; for example, Rare-Typical, Variant-General; see Table 2).

How I Became an Artist

The first domain refers to memories of how the participant/interviewee became an artist. It refers to life events, influential people, and skills acquired. Almost all artists from Cuba, Germany, and Russia described a positive experience in their childhood or adolescence that made it clear to them that they wanted to pursue art. It was a crucial life event that one artist said, “Was always inside of me, it was always there, I had to do it.” One Cuban artist explained,

At the age of about 3 or 4, they asked me, “What do you want to be?” I had an uncle who said, “What do you want to be when you’re an adult?” And I said, “Artist,” and he says, “But what kind of artist?” And I answered, “I don’t know—artist.” I want to say that in some intuitive way I knew that it was my vocation.

Another artist from Russia narrated,
Table 2. Eight Domains and Related Categories Derived From the 30 Interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Total/overall</th>
<th>Cuba</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Russia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. How I became an artist</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1. Because of a proud and happy experience, I knew as a young child</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or adolescent that I wanted to become an artist and nothing else.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2. Someone in my family also had an interest in creating art and</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>involved me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3. When I was starting, someone regarded as an expert confirmed that</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have talent and would be good at it.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4. As a child/adolescent, I learned the basics in my field from</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>formal/traditional art education.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A5. As a child, I learned the basics in my field through playing,</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td><strong>General</strong></td>
<td><strong>Variant</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>joining groups, and enjoyed the activities in my field.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B. What being an artist means to me</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1. Being an artist means being financially insecure, needing to sell</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my work, or doing something else on the side to survive.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2. Being an artist means to find continuity in your work, your own</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>own hand writing, style.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B3. Being an artist can be a burden and can mean complete self-</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Rare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exploitation, absolutely uneconomical.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>B43. Being an artist means not to isolate myself, but to work within</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td><strong>Typical</strong></td>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>Rare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and from the middle of society.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B5. Being an artist is my profession and my life; my freedom and the</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>realization of my dream.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B6. Being an artist means to use my work to continue to grow as a</td>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Rare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>person.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**C. Creating as a cognitive process: How do I go about making</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>something?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1. I try to create something unusual, to improvise, entering a new</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>world.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2. I work on different parts at different times, play around with</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td><strong>General</strong></td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td><strong>Variant</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>them, and then put everything together. (centrifugal)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3. I have an idea/plan, I sketch it, and then I work on it. (</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>centripetal)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C4. To create means channeling the energy in my body and brain,</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>including my intuition, unconscious, and my dreams.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C5. Creativity involves times where I do nothing and times that are</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>very intense and I don’t stop working.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C6. Creativity is a fluid process, things change, and ideas develop</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and mature.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C7. Creativity is a process of listening to the environment (</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communicating with people, books, exhibits, movies, and friends).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C8. Creativity is like smart problem solving also under the most</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td><strong>Typical</strong></td>
<td>Rare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>difficult conditions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C9. Creativity means also critiquing my own work and myself—Self-</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td><strong>General</strong></td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>critique.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
Table 2. (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>D. Creating as an emotional process</th>
<th>Total/overall</th>
<th>Cuba</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Russia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D1. Creating can be a difficult, exhausting, and frustrating process.</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D2. I feel enthusiasm and joy when I start and euphoria when I successfully complete my work.</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D3. Present: Creativity is experiencing every millisecond of the present moment with an enormous awareness of the mind.</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D4. My emotions (joy) help me determine whether an idea is worth pursuing or not, or to determine whether a work is done or not.</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E. Creating as a motivational process</th>
<th>Cuba</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Russia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E1. Being creative is natural to being a human being.</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2. Creating is something very personal, related to my personality and myself.</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E3. Creativity comes out of aggression, conflict, or anger.</td>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E4. Creativity is like taking care of the wild animal in oneself. It is an obsession.</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E5. Creativity is persistence and hard work.</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E6. Creating is very intense. It gives me the feeling of enormous power and satisfaction; it feels like when God created the world.</td>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E7. My work is an advocacy to do something for others.</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E8. My work has to have an effect: Shock, irritate, or create surprise</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>F. What facilitates creativity?</th>
<th>Cuba</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Russia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F1. To do creative work, you have to master your tools.</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2. When blocked, I take a break and do something completely different (incubation). When I feel empty, I need breaks.</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F3. When blocked, I try to work it through, sit it out</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F4. Collaborating with someone else.</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F5. Having a daily regular routine.</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F6. I need my quiet, familiar, space and simple life.</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F7. I need to have deadlines.</td>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F8. I need deep meaningful relationships with other people and artists, and often ask for their feedback.</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F9. I am aware of my own strengths and use them, but I am also aware of my limits.</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>G. What hinders creativity?</th>
<th>Cuba</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Russia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G1. Exhaustion blocked my ideas.</td>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G2. Time pressure leads to pure desperation and blocks my work.</td>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Rare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G3. My own knowledge in the domain of expertise hinders creativity.</td>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G4. When I am not emotionally in my piece/work, then I cannot do it well.</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Variant</td>
<td>Rare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G5. Other people said something that held me back.</td>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On January 30, 1970 . . . I wrote a poem . . . It was not my first one, but I was 11 years old. Luckily the poem got lost, but the date, I remember and became part of my biography. Actually, I never wanted to do anything else . . . I was very proud of myself.

Typically, all artists from the three countries learned the basic tools as children or adolescents not only through formal education but also through informal activities such as playing and joining groups they enjoyed. A Russian visual artist described,

And during the last year, there was a project . . . and they chose whatever they want . . . throughout the whole year. And they work with two community members, two faculty members, and two student members . . . and they can have group meetings every so often to discuss the progress . . . I did mine on drawing . . . Somehow out of the blue I wanted to draw . . . And it got to be an intense project and I really got involved in it and I really developed fast and I remember it as a moment . . . I was looking at whatever was around me at that time . . . how I was looking at things . . . And my perception, something changed, like my perception changed of how I look at things. So, I would look at anything differently from that on. It was really kind of a “klick,” you know? And I think it was from this point on, and I really knew I was on the right path of doing something.
Occasionally, the artists had a family member who was interested in art and involved the former to be an artist. Also occasionally, at the start of their careers, artists met an expert in the field who confirmed that they had talent and would be good at it.

One difference between the countries was learning about art in a playful way. Whereas almost every German artist and most Cuban artists stated that this had occurred, such was not often the case for Russian artists. One German composer said,

I did not have parents who were particularly musically educated and music was not their profession, but my mother was extremely musical. She did things quite naturally that nowadays are described and operationalized as early musical education. She had an instinct how to sing with a child, how to move with a child . . . These things just happened, just like that, without us talking about it . . . It was quite normal for me as a child to invent songs, to invent a second voice to a song. My mother and I often made games: I sing a song and you sing the second voice or I sing a song, stop in the middle, and you continue singing something completely different and come up with another ending. These were normal things in the car, while driving.

What Being an Artist Means to Me

The second domain refers to interviewees’ image of themselves as artists, along with the meaning and purpose they put to it. For almost all artists from Cuba, Germany, and Russia being artists was their vocation, their profession, and their life. They stated that it was through their art that they felt truly free, and that they were able to come to the realization of their dreams. A visual artist who was born in Russia described being an artist:

It’s just a way of going through life, trying to understand the world, trying to understand people, trying to connect to people. It’s really not so necessary to be an artist, it’s more like . . . it’s more interesting to find your own sort of passion of something and then trying to fit it in into the large society.

Typically, however, being an artist meant financial instability, to feel the constant pressure of having to sell their work or working another job to financially survive. A female Russian composer said in the interview when asked what being an artist meant to her:

It means to lead an unstable and uncertain life. My work will not provide for us. I will always have to do other work, so that I can afford creating my music pieces. This [creating music] is what I really like.

A male German writer elaborated on this financial need:

The domain of money plays an important role—and also in my book there is a chapter on that—there are the people who say you have to suffer to be creative. A satisfied person cannot write. You need to have misery/hardship to really be able to produce and this will lead to great art. In my view this is wrong. Sure there are examples for both, but many colleagues simply do not have the money to write, paint, or compose.

Occasionally, artists reported that being an artist means engaging in self-exploitation. One German visual artist elaborated,

No normal person is doing something like that. You stand there and work for a month for free . . . That is obvious, for the rest of society, that is completely uneconomical, that is out of proportion, total self-exploitation, you don’t receive a single penny for it, and sometimes you are even called names . . . This self-exploitation is permanently present, and for no one else in society it is like that. Everybody else is paid for their work.
When participants talked about their work, they occasionally indicated that being an artist to them meant to find continuity in their work, to imprint their own hand writing, and to navigate their own style. Occasionally, they mentioned that being an artist meant not isolating themselves, but working within and from the middle of the society. A Cuban poet stated, “You create by taking what life shows you. Nobody can be ignorant of what happens around you, because if you are ignorant, you can’t create.”

In this domain, there are two cross-cultural differences: First, the category referring to financial instability was mentioned by all German artists, but only occasionally by Russian artists and also occasionally by Cuban artists. The second cross-cultural difference refers to the category about working as an artist within and from the middle of the society. This point about the artist working in the context of society was almost never mentioned by Russian and German artists but typically mentioned by Cuban artists.

**Creating as a Cognitive Process**

The third domain refers to the cognitive aspect of creating, specifically to goals, thoughts, strategies, and sources of new ideas. All artists from Cuba, Germany, and Russia mentioned that they try to create something unusual, to improvise, and thereby to enter a new world. A Cuban artist conveyed,

> Creativity is simply how you make from something that already exists . . . like an artistic tradition, for example, the portrait or the landscape . . . But creativity always resides in the way you turn those things that already have a history.

A Russian visual artist specified,

> Sometimes it’s just purely intuitive, you just walk down the road and something just really like grabs your attention and then it’s like: there’s something there, what is it? What’s there? Think about that. And then it connects . . . Everything connects to different things, so that connects to something else and you start to bring those connections together and out of this kind of mess of different things, something emerges. And you sort of build on whatever is emerging . . . It is like some sculpture metaphor, it’s like if you’re trying to chisel out whatever the sculpture is, but you don’t really know, what exactly it is. You are just kind of following the stone.

Generally, artists mentioned that they had a plan, a sketch of their work, and then they pursued it and continued to work on it, similar to a centripetal fashion. A German composer stated,

> A composer can have a complete, abstract, and remote idea of the whole piece, but actually finished in his mind, before he even starts writing down the first note . . . The process of composing is really a reconstruction of the idea of the piece . . . And that is how I work.

At the same time, all of the artists described creativity as a fluid process, stating that things change, and ideas develop and mature over time. A Russian visual artist articulated,

> You know, for me it’s play. It’s not the final product, it’s the process. It’s allowing the process to happen and kind of opening up different environments, different connections, it’s having the ability to say “yes” to whatever happens.

All of the artists expressed that coming up with new ideas meant channeling the energy in their bodies and brains, listening to their intuition, and acknowledging their unconscious as it was conveyed in their dreams. Creativity, according to all of the artists, is a process of listening
to the environment. New ideas came in their everyday activities such as when communicating with people and friends, reading books, or going to exhibits. A Russian composer expressed, “Ideas come sometimes before I sleep, sometimes when I am walking, sometimes while I watch movies.”

Typically, artists remark that creativity involves times where artists do nothing and times that are very intense and when they do not stop working. A Russian writer said,

My best time was evening for the poem. And now I write early in the morning. I get up rather early between 7 and 9, depends on the day. And I don’t eat something, I drink water and I write so many hours I have ‘til afternoon . . . And then I read and write, and it’s very intensive. And in this phase I can work 10 hours a day, 14 hours a day . . . The last 3 or 4 months are very intensive. I feel the novel, a chaos, I’m in this chaos. And then, if I see the end, it’s very difficult to get out . . . Indeed, I feel the world changed while I wrote, the world changed, and I have to meet the world again.

Typically, artists described that they worked on different parts at different times, played around with these parts, and then put everything together, following a centrifugal method. Also, typically, artists stated that creativity meant critiquing their own work and themselves. A Russian visual artist claimed,

One always wants to make things as good as possible and I think that I see my mistakes better than anybody else, so even when I have a very, very, very good response and applause from people, what happens sometimes is that I couldn’t believe it, because I know that there is a lot of pitfalls in my work.

Occasionally, artists reported that creativity was viewed as smart problem solving under the most difficult conditions. A German visual artist said,

Damn it, I do not have anything [materials], I have no more money, only a small pile of cloth. During that time, I made these hats. Actually, I wanted to make sculptures, but have no space, no money, only the pile of cloth, so, well, then I make these hats, and this way, I implement my concept of sculptures. If I had had money, I probably would have made big sculptures.

While we found many commonalities among the artists in all three countries with regard to categories under the domain Creating as a cognitive process, there were a few cross-cultural differences. The centrifugal way of working on art, such as working on different parts at different times and playing with these parts, was mentioned by all Cuban artists. Russian and German artists, however, stated this creating process only occasionally. Instead, all Russian and German artists talked about following a concrete plan. Another noteworthy cross-cultural difference is that German artists typically referred to creativity as smart problem solving under the most difficult conditions, while Russian artists rarely mentioned the creating process to be so. A third cross-cultural difference is that German artists generally expressed that creativity involved self-critique, while Russian artists only occasionally described creativity to include critiquing one’s work and one’s self.

Creating as an Emotional Process

The fourth domain refers to not only interviewees’ emotions during the creative process, the ups and downs, but also the role of emotions to continue their work and to judge the quality of their work. Artists from Cuba, Germany, and Russia typically agreed, and expressed that creating can be a difficult, exhausting, and frustrating process. One German composer stated,
Desperation grows, when you see that day by day passes. I worked, permanently worked. I don’t know how many times I have started in panic composing this piece, and no new start lead anywhere, no start let me inside this piece.

However, they also typically conveyed that they felt enthusiasm and joy when they began a project and euphoria upon successfully completing their work. A Cuban painter described this feeling:

And I am very amused by what I do. If you discover these stories you suddenly say, “Ah!” If you reason it and ponder and if you are concentrated on the concept of what you want and how you want it. But I am always positively surprised by the final solution.

Moreover, artists typically said that their emotions helped them determine whether an idea was worth pursuing, or whether a work was finished. In this regard, emotions helped the artists make decisions regarding their work. Occasionally, the interviewees elaborated that during the creative process, they experienced every second of the present moment with enormous awareness.

One cross-cultural difference in this domain is the role of emotions in guiding the artists to pursue or finish their work. Whereas almost all of the German and Cuban artists expressed that their emotions helped them determine whether an idea was worth pursuing, or whether a work was complete, Russian artists only occasionally expressed this role of their emotions.

**Creating as a Motivational Process**

The fifth domain highlights the role of motivation in the creative process, especially providing answers to questions regarding where creativity comes from and what keeps artists going. Typically among Cuban, German, and Russian artists, creativity was likened to an obsession or an addiction. One German composer expressed,

If you are in it [the creative process], then it is an animal. A very beautiful, pleasant, warm, friendly animal inside of you, which needs to be permanently addressed, needs oxygen, needs permanent food . . . Of course, success helps . . . It helps for the next success and it helps to feed the wild animal, because wild animals like world premieres.

Typically, artists reported that creativity was persistence and hard work. They expressed that their creation was due to many long days, nights, and hours, where they just kept at it. In addition, they typically disclosed that their work must have an effect on their audience, such as to shock, irritate, or create surprise.

Occasionally, the artists conveyed that creativity is natural to human beings, and that creating is something very personal. As a Cuban writer said,

Not everyone expresses his creativity through art. But every person has got creativity. Because an office worker also has creativity for organizing things, for writing letters and in order to work in an organized way and in a creative way . . . creativity is innate in the human being.

They described the process as revealing their personality and who they were inside. In addition, the artists occasionally articulated that their work was an advocacy, an intentional avenue to give something or to do something for others. It was very rarely the artists voiced that their creativity was an expression of their aggression, conflict, or anger.

The main cross-cultural difference in this domain has to do with creativity coming out of aggressive, conflicted, or angry emotions. German artists articulated this to be true to their experience occasionally, while creating out of anger, conflict, and anger was rarely experienced by
Cuban artists, and never mentioned by Russian artists. Another cross-cultural difference is related to creativity as hard work. Whereas all German artists described creativity as a product of persistence and hard work, Cuban artists only occasionally saw creativity that way. Another cross-cultural difference is that Cuban artists typically saw their work as an advocacy—something to serve others, while Russian artists rarely expressed such an advocacy in their creation. Another cross-cultural difference in the motivational process is that all German artists expressed that their work must have an effect, such as to incite shock, irritation, or surprise in the audience, while Russian and Cuban artists mentioned this motivational goal only occasionally.

What Facilitates Creativity?

The sixth domain describes the factors that facilitate creativity. What helped the artists come up with new ideas and fostered their work with these ideas? There was no general category in this domain, only two typical categories, both of which had to do with the artists’ social connections. For the entire sample, artists typically articulated that creativity was facilitated by collaborating with someone else, such as another artist or an expert in another field. A Russian visual artist gave an example:

I ask a curator, a brilliant woman to help me with this exhibition, she said to me: “I don’t know how to help you, because I’m sure that you will . . . you can do everything by yourself.” But I insisted and in fact she gave some very small advices, but which were her impressions for this exhibition. Sometimes it is necessary to have somebody who has a different view and can build this concept, this advice, which would never have come to my mind.

Artists also typically stated that their deep meaningful relationships with other people in their lives, artists or nonartists, provided them with feedback that facilitated creativity. A Russian visual artist said,

There are people whose opinion is really very important for me and of course I’m really glad when people, who are not professionals and it happens, and it is really astonishing that people who are not professionals sometimes can find the most important points in art.

Artists occasionally identified each of the following factors to foster creativity: having mastery of their tools, having a regular daily routine or schedule, and having a quiet, familiar space and a simple life. One German visual artist stated, “Already at the academy I could not work if someone was walking behind me. I am easily distracted. I need to lose myself . . . I need to be alone.” A Cuban writer said, “I think tranquility is what helps me most.”

Another facilitating factor that was also occasionally mentioned was being aware of their own strengths, while being aware of their limitations. Occasionally, when blocked, artists either tried to work it through and sit it out, or they took a break and did something completely different.

Cross-cultural differences exist in the domain of factors that facilitate creativity. All or almost all of the German artists talked about the importance of mastering their tools in fostering creativity in their work, while Russian and Cuban artists expressed this only occasionally. While all or almost all German artists took a break from creating and engaged in something completely different when they were blocked, Russian and Cuban artists only occasionally expressed this as something that facilitated their creativity. Another cross-cultural difference had to do with collaborating with someone else. Whereas German artists typically stated that working with someone else facilitated their creativity, none of the Cuban artists identified collaboration such as fostering their creativity. Similarly, while almost all Russian artists acknowledged the importance of deep meaningful relationships with others to facilitate creativity, Cuban artists only occasionally mentioned this.
What Hinders Creativity?

On the flipside of the factors that facilitate creativity, the seventh domain describes the factors that hinder creativity. This domain, compared with other domains, was mentioned only a few times during the interviews. Of course, one way to see factors that hinder creativity is to mention the opposite of factors that facilitate creativity. Thus, although the frequencies of the categories in this domain are low, they are presented here to be faithful to the responses of the participants and to stay as close to their words as possible. All categories in this domain were mentioned rarely by all artists, except one which was mentioned occasionally. Occasionally, artists conveyed that their creative work was hindered when they were not emotionally invested in their piece. This means that some artists needed to identify with their work and feel connected to it. A German visual artist expressed, “When I have worries, when I often think about something and pondered. This can be so strong that I cannot loosen up(resolve it and then I cannot draw.”

Despite the low frequencies of categories in this domain, there are meaningful cross-cultural differences worth noting. Whereas German artists occasionally disclosed that being exhausted hindered their creativity, Russian artists never mentioned exhaustion as blocking their ideas. Similarly, as German artists occasionally expressed that their own knowledge of their domain or expertise was a factor that blocked their creativity, neither Russian nor Cuban artists mentioned this. A German visual artist said, “I need to become empty. Sometimes meditation helps me to get my mind free. What inhibits me is mostly my head/mind.” Also, as German artists occasionally disclosed that something that other people told them, a criticism, a comment, a reaction served to hold them back and thus hindered their creativity, neither Russian nor Cuban artists mentioned this as limiting their creativity.

The Role of Culture in Creating

The eighth and final domain describes the influence of culture on the creative process. Artists grow up, live, and work in specific sociocultural environments, and the interviewees describe how culture influences their creativity. All artists from Cuba, Germany, and Russia communicated the significance of culture to them personally; they expressed that culture left an imprint that stayed with them for a very long time or for their lifetime. One German artist elaborated that “culture is the blood in my veins that flows into my creative work.” In that sense, their products are cultural products. A Cuban writer stated,

I think the cultures determine simply the way we do things . . . And they are places that oblige you to be creative if you want to build for example a toy or a car . . . This level, this sense of arbitrariness I think is creative in a way and it has something to do with the Cuban culture.

Moreover, all artists from Russia, Germany, and Cuba discussed that some cultures and societies, more than others, appreciate and value art. Such valuing and esteem for art are seen in the support for artists, for example, through scholarships, contracts, or awards, which all artists identified. Generally, also the interviewees all verbalized the features (big or small) of cultural experiences that provide stimulating experiences for their creative work such as the simple sound of a foreign language, gazing at a painting, enjoying nature, or meeting people from different cultures and different walks of life. A Russian visual artist stated,

For instance, I don’t know whether my works made in Bamberg are very different from what I’m doing in Moscow or in some other places, but personally I am feeling that I am influenced by what I see, what I am around with, and of course the fact that I don’t speak German makes some influence also because I am in a linguistic atmosphere which is rather strange for me . . . I am feeling a stranger here. But it is not bad for me, because I like to be a stranger.
A male German visual artist described,

And what was also interesting was to experience the foreign; especially immigrants or people - who knows from where they come -, but to experience them being here, and observing the environment with them, which has changed my view completely. That walking with these people through the world, I learn something of their viewpoints.

Typically, artists from the three countries mentioned that the culture of the audience influenced the reaction to their work. Artists had experienced different reactions to the same work from audiences of different cultural backgrounds. Artists also typically stated that it is more important for them to do what they wanted than what others, for example, the audience or critics, wanted. A Russian visual artist described it this way:

Yeah, they [others’ reactions] affect me and I think about the reaction and I think about my own reactions to work, I try to make it for myself. Because I can’t really make it for anybody else, I mean, of course, I want an audience, I want to be part of something, but first of all it’s for me somehow.

Occasionally, artists expressed that in some cultures, there was no support or valuing of artists in the forms of financial grants, study fellowships, mentoring opportunities, or even simply providing resources and information. Moreover, in terms of the cultural evaluation of their work, artists occasionally stated that they did not see society’s evaluation of what was successful or unsuccessful as necessarily reflecting the quality of their work. Artists from all three countries occasionally expressed that not only their comfort and familiarity with a culture but also the chaos and melancholia in another culture deeply influenced their work. Cultural experiences in whatever form, including political, religious, or civic elements, influenced their work. A Russian composer elaborated on the political culture:

And it is a very bad political situation, you know. But because of this condition you try to change something, you use your potential more, because you try to do some things for change. For example, here [in Germany] you need nothing . . . You have everything. Very beautiful view, garden, money. And it’s a little bit difficult to create something here.

The only cross-cultural difference found in this domain refers to the category on societal evaluation. Whereas German artists typically asserted that they did not see society’s evaluation of what was successful or unsuccessful as necessarily reflecting the quality of their work, Russian artists have almost never made this same assertion.

**Discussion**

This study was conducted to investigate creative processes using the systems and activity theories across three cultures in their ecological contexts: Germany can be characterized as Western industrialized, Cuba as a communist country, and Russia as a former communist country now a federation. Specifically, the findings illustrate the meaningful differences between three cultural groups of renowned artists. Notably, by identifying salient cross-cultural differences in each domain and specific to the category, as gleaned from the results, we have examined the impact of culture, not just on what they verbalized to be different (the last domain: the role of culture in creating) but most especially on the entire process of creating, from start to finish, across all domains.

There are numerous aspects of the creative process that the three cultures share in common. Two notable similarities articulated by all artists in all three cultures can be found in the “creating as a cognitive process” domain: First, creativity is regarded as fluid—ideas change and
develop—rather than static. Regarding creativity as a process is consistent with previous findings (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Simonton, 2003). Second, creativity is the avenue used to channel their energies, both physical and mental, which includes their intuition, dreams, and unconscious. This is consistent with previous research. The similarities between the cultures show the role of cognition in creating art (e.g., Guilford, 1968; Sternberg, 1999) and the role of intuition in creativity (e.g., in laboratory studies, Eubanks, Murphy, & Mumford, 2010; Raidl & Lubart, 2001; as well as in real-world studies, Stierand & Dörfler, 2016).

Cross-Cultural Differences in the Creative Process

Notably, the three cultural groups of artists showed differences in domains and categories, even in areas neglected in existing creativity research, such as the motivational and emotional components. What follows here is a discussion of these meaningful differences. All German artists elaborated that being an artist necessarily meant that they were financially unstable. German artists experienced having to work another job to eke out a living and support their creative work. Although all German artists expressed the uncertainty in their financial future and had to promote their work (also something reported by engineers and technicians; see Miron, Erez, & Naveh, 2004), this concern was only occasionally identified by Cuban and Russian artists. In Cuba, being an artist is an accepted and well-respected profession by society and the government. Financial support (which might be regarded as considerable from a foreign perspective) is made available, much like to everyone else in society. Families often visit museums on the weekends as a common leisure time activity. In Russia, being an artist is a way of living and expressing oneself. Often, artists had an additional job in which they also tried to be creative.

Cuban artists perceived themselves as working their art within and from the middle of the society. Such societal and contextual rootedness of the artistic identity was typically seen only among Cuban artists and rarely among German or Russian artists. Our findings contradict the assertion that capitalism and democratic regimes would foster, and communism and totalitarian regimes would hinder creativity (Dunphy et al., 1997)—at least in the field of art. It seems that the feeling of being part of society, as mentioned by the Cuban artists, fosters creativity. Potentially, the socialist structure offers financial and organizational support to artists, something that is less common in capitalist countries.

Along the same line, Cuban artists typically used their work to advocate for others, to express a societal concern, or to be a voice for others, while Russian artists rarely expressed such an advocacy in their creation, and German artists only did so on occasion. Such societal and contextual rootedness of Cuban artistic identity can be due to what Glăveanu (2010) discussed as the sociocultural perspective—where literary and artistic work has connected to very large, less specialized audiences, as opposed to just specialized and small communities. In a way, art in Cuba is made for the “average” person, and art is easily accessible by everyone.

One possible explanation for not using art primarily as an advocacy tool in Russia could be the fear of potential consequences. One open question, though, is why such an expression of concerns is possible in Cuba and not in Russia. Potentially, censorship is stricter in Russia than in Cuba. In Cuba, especially in visual arts, an artist is quite free to express critical opinions. A historic perspective shows that Russian artists and their subcultures were not “forces for revolutionary change, or natural loci of opposition to the state” (Kveberg, 2015, p. 1).

A cross-cultural difference worth highlighting is the cognitive process in creating. Cuban artists generally prefer a centrifugal way of working on art, being playful and working on different parts at different times. Russian and German artists generally prefer a concrete plan to follow in their creative work. This is supported in extant literature about the cognitive processes of Germans and Russians. Germans have been labeled “well-oiled machines” (Hofstede, 1997, p. 141; Hofstede, 2001, p. 375), and have shown in cross-cultural studies on planning more wide-ranging
and detailed plans than participants from other countries (Güss, 2000; Strohschneider & Güss, 1998). The preference of making a plan by the Russian artists could mirror their preference for a holistic view. Russians, similar to other Eastern cultures, tend to prefer a holistic cognitive style (Arutyunova, Alexandrov, Žnakov, & Hauser, 2013; Varnum, Grossmann, Kitayama, & Nisbett, 2010). The Cuban playful and centrifugal way of approaching artwork is in accordance with the more flexible and living-in-the-present life approach often ascribed to people from Latin American countries (e.g., spontaneous behaviors, Levine, Norenzayan, & Philbrick, 2001).

A particularly noteworthy difference is seen in the emotional process of creating. German and Cuban artists generally used their emotions to guide them in pursuing, stopping, changing, or finishing their work, but Russian artists only occasionally expressed using their emotions in making these determinations of their art. In the same vein in the role of emotions, German artists occasionally referred to their art as an expression of their aggressive, conflicted, or angry feelings, while such motivation for art was rarely expressed by Cuban artists and never mentioned by Russian artists. The dominant feeling of anger has also been shown in other cross-cultural studies, for example, when Germans and Brazilians were given problem scenarios from daily life (Strohschneider & Güss, 1998). German participants expressed anger (33%) as their first reaction to the problem scenarios more frequently than Brazilian participants (10%). The role of negative emotions in creative work among German artists contradicts findings from a meta-analysis on the relationship between mood and creativity that showed that positive emotions were the best predictors of creativity (Baas, De Dreu, & Nijstad, 2008). Yet, the creativity literature has started to recognize the value of negative emotions in promoting creativity. For example, research has suggested that positive emotions benefit creativity by encouraging flexible and divergent thinking (e.g., Amabile, Barsade, Mueller, & Staw, 2005; Baas et al., 2008; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2002; Isen, 1999), whereas negative emotions benefit creativity by encouraging analytical thinking and expenditure of greater effort (e.g., George & Zhou, 2007; Kaufmann, 2003; Kaufmann & Vosburg, 1997; Martin & Stoner, 1996).

**Limitations**

Participants were successful artists from three countries. Their view of creating might be different from the view of artists who are less successful, and certainly their view of creating might be different from the view of other professionals. Although having interviewed professional and successful artists is a clear strength of our study, this may potentially pose a limitation to the homogeneity of our sample. Another limitation of this study might be related to the method. During the interviews, it could be that some artists might not have wanted to share their “secrets” of the trade, either how their “special” creativity helped them become successful or their personal secrets. That said, it was our impression that all participants were very open and willing to share their thoughts and experiences. Sometimes, the interviews we projected to take less than an hour took over 90 min.

**Conclusion**

The current study is innovative, as it investigated cultural differences among famous artists from Cuba, Germany, and Russia, including different groups of artists. The semistructured interviews revealed eight different themes related to creativity: How I became an artist, What being an artist means to me, Creating as a cognitive process, Creating as an emotional process, Creating as a motivational process, Fostering factors of creativity, Hindering factors, and The role of culture in creating.

Whereas most artists experienced similar creative stages involving coming up with an idea, execution of an idea, self-doubts during the process, fostering and hindering factors to creativity,
relief or satisfaction with the final product, we also found themes highlighting the influence of the artists’ cultural background as well as the influence of the cultural recipients and audience. The influence of culture was certainly shown in the differences among Cuban, German, and Russian artists related to the cognitive, emotional, economic, and societal aspects of the creative process.

One of the shortcomings of current theories on creativity is their focus on cognitive aspects. Although some researchers stress a systems-oriented and more holistic approach (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 1996), and the inclusion of the social context (e.g., Amabile & Pillemer, 2012; Nouri et al., 2015), the current study’s findings extend previous research highlighting first the role of other psychological processes such as motivation (see also Nijstad, De Dreu, Rietzschel, & Baas, 2010) and emotion in the creative process, and second the role of culture in the creative process. The holistic approach we employed shows the complexities of the creative process as interaction between motivation, cognition, and emotion in a sociocultural environment (see also Dörner & Güss, 2013; Glăveanu, Gillespie, & Valsiner, 2015). Such a holistic approach is useful for further developing a comprehensive theory of the creative process taking cultural differences into consideration.

The role of culture in creativity has been a neglected research area but has gained considerable importance over the last decade (e.g., Badibanga, Shah, & Güss, 2013; Glăveanu et al., 2015; Leung et al., 2008; Leung & Wang, 2015; Paletz & Peng, 2008; Tsai, 2012; Westwood & Low, 2003). Yet, this is an important area, considering worldwide developments of migration, refugee movements, globalization of the international marketplace, multinational work teams, and international help organizations. In the creative process, both individual and culture are two sides of the same coin. Looking at only one side only reveals half of the truth. Or in the words of one artist who puts the two together, “Culture is the blood in my veins that flows into my creative work.”

**Appendix**

**Open-Ended Interview Questions**

1. When did you first realize that you wanted to become an artist/writer/musician?
   a. Did you have a formal education in art?
   b. How many years of experience do you have?
   c. What kind of artistic work do you mainly produce?
2. What does being an artist/writer/musician mean to you?
3. Please talk about one of the pieces/artwork you consider being one of your most creative ones.
   a. How did you get the idea?
   b. How was the process of creating it?
   c. How did you feel after you completed it?
   d. What/how were the reactions of other people?
   e. How did their reactions affect you?
4. Please talk about one of the pieces/artwork that was the hardest for you to do.
   a. How did you get the idea?
   b. How was the process of creating it?
   c. How did you feel after you completed it?
   d. What/how were the reactions of other people?
   e. How did their reactions affect you?
5. What is creativity for you? How would you describe creativity in your own words?
6. What do you do to become creative, or how do you access your creativity? From where do you get your inspiration? What inspires you?
7. How, in your experience, does culture/the cultural environment influence your creativity and your success as an artist? What influence has your culture/country on you as an artist?
8. How have your experiences of creativity been in different cultures?
9. Demographics (age, gender, nationality, staying abroad)

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Notes
1. We are aware that the term domain is used differently in consensual qualitative research (CQR) methodology and in creativity research. Domain is a specific term used in CQR and refers to key areas emerging from interview data, from which categories and subcategories emerge. In the field of creativity, domain often refers to thematic areas of life/content, and to the discussion of creativity being domain-general or domain-specific. We wanted to address the potential confusion that the same term has different meanings and usage, but we did not want to create a new term for either of the two fields.
2. Many interviewed artists did not like the term “What is your most creative work?” stating that it is not up to them but to others to judge their work as creative or not. We therefore reworded the question and asked, “Please talk about one of the pieces/art work you consider being one of your most creative ones.”

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