Research on the Subjective Mental Health of Artists from the Perspective of Grounded Theory

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This research adopts qualitative research methods to explore the susceptibility and experiences concerning mental health of domestic artists, with a view to constructing the grounded theory model related to the subjective mental health of domestic artists.

Methodology: Intensive sampling and comprehensive sampling strategies were utilized to obtain sample data related to five artists, while in-depth interviews were adopted to collect data totaling about 118,000 words. Based on grounded theory, this research further performed three-level coding processing on the foregoing data.

Findings: Based on the establishment of 374 reference points, this research acquired 5 tree nodes, which could be divided into 5 categories, including intrinsic health (cognitive and emotional health), language efficacy, individualism, recognized mental health and process orientation in accordance with the quantity of reference points.

Conclusion: The subjective mental health of artists mainly involves 5 cultural factors, including the cognition of "recognized mental health", the intrinsic health experienced (cognitive and emotional health), language efficacy, individualism and process orientation, which in turn generate significant impacts on the subjective mental health of artists.

Keywords: Subjective Mental Health; Rule Consciousness; Grounded Theory; Artists

1. INTRODUCTION

Conceptually, "art" was defined as the general term of various technologies and skills, while talented people who possessed technologies were typically called the "artisans". For example, Han Yu recorded in the Exploration on the Origin of Imputation that a person who was proficient in a specific thing was qualified to be called a talented artist [1]. In the contemporary context of the west, "artist" has progressively evolved from the initial generalization of craftsmen and artisans to the current workers engaged in creative artistic activities [2]. In addition, a myriad of stories have depicted artists as crazy geniuses since time immemorial, such as Bo Ya, a music master who ruined his piano because of the death of his intimate, Ni Zan, a painter who was suffering from a morbid fear of getting dirty, and Ruan Ji, a poet who was still regaling himself with wine after his mother's death. Likewise, the West also presents a long-standing image construction of crazy artists. For example, Aristotle once said, "No great mind has ever existed without a touch of madness." Plato even contended that

originally ungifted poets acquired inspirations from God's instructions, which simply appeared under the circumstances that they lost consciousness or were affected by mental illness [3]. In ancient Greece, "madness" was regarded as a passion state exclusive to genius [4]. During the Renaissance, in view of the fact that the words represented by "depression" and "madness" were frequently utilized to describe "talented artists", the expression of melancholy even evolved into a trend of the times[5]. In substance, populace's pursuit of "madness" and stories related to "crazy artists" not only imply that artists are different from ordinary people psychologically, but also further make the public realize that artists' mental health level is worse than ordinary people[6]. Within such context, the academic circles conduct a wide range of researches concerning mental illness and mental health of artists [7-16], the vast majority of which verifies the archaic conjecture that the mental state of artists is different from that of ordinary people, with the foregoing abnormality generally being regarded as a pathological manifestation[6]. Nonetheless, recent researches have demonstrated that there is fairly faint psychological difference between artists and ordinary people, which is

far less significant than the previous research results [16-17].

On the other hand, creativity has been proved to be somewhat associated with mental illness. For example, Zou Hong et al. (2014) classified the influencing factors between creativity and mental illness into three types, including genetic factors, cognitive neurological factors, personality and social factors[18]. Among them, genetic factors mainly include neuregulins (NRGs), gene polymorphism of dopamine system and serotonin (5-HT) system related gene, while cognitive neural factors mainly include latent inhibition level[19] and nerve hyperconnection[20]. Additionally, personality and social factors include flexible thinking, motivation, stereotype and growth through adversity.

Subjective mental health, also known as self-rated mental health (SRMH), reflects people's perception of socially recognized "mental health" and self-mental state [21]. Different from mental health, subjective mental health is typically evaluated based on a specific question, instead of a scale. This question requires individuals to estimate their mental health through comparison with others or direct self-evaluation, utilizing Likert scale from excellent to poor, for example, "Which of the following situations do you think your mental health is compared with others?" "Please comment on your mental health" and so on. Basically, subjective mental health can not only provide a positive prediction for an individual's satisfaction with a series of factors including mental health, subjective health, life span, socio-economic status, and mental health services, but also be regarded as one of the important indicators to examine individual mental health[21-22]. Consequently, this research defines subjective mental health as an individual's cognition and experience of "mental health" and "mental health status of himself or herself and others".

The focus of prior researches on artists can almost be summarized as the verification of the mental health of artists and the differences between them and non-artists, or the pursuit of a certain sort of connection between artistic creativity and mental illness. Nevertheless, the so-called "mental health" and "mental illness" are regarded as psychological or medical concepts. Therefore, the research utilizing this kind of concept to describe artists belongs to the typical etic research based on the perspective outside the artist group. Few researchers understand "mental health" in artists' unique language. In other words, the emic research related to artists' mental health is relatively scarce. Etic research typically interprets the research object from the researcher's perspective with the researcher's preferential concepts, with the process and conclusion rooted in the culture of the researcher, which further leads to the dictatorship of one culture and the silence of another. Assuredly, partial scholars contend that the subjects of mental health shall not be excluded from the study of mental health[23]. As

the subject of research concerning artists' mental health, artists should enjoy the corresponding discourse power. Hence, with adopting qualitative research methods, this research suspends the researcher's existing concepts to the greatest extent during the process of data collection. Based on the interview data, this research further realizes the relevant theoretical construction in a bottom-up manner. Moreover, as an emic research from the artist's perspective, this research is not only beneficial for ordinary people to build a deep understanding of artists' group culture but also beneficial for artists to express their own unique views. Simply put, it reflects the recognition of cultural diversity and the liberation of mental health subjects.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

On the whole, this research belongs to the category of qualitative research in nature, adopting in-depth interviews to collect data and grounded theory to analyze relevant data. Qualitative research is defined as a research method in which researchers themselves, as research tools, adopt diversified data collection methods in natural scenarios to explore social phenomena as a whole [24].

In accordance with the qualitative research report standard proposed by APA, this research will report the data source, data collection process and data analysis strategy in proper sequence [25].

2.1 Source: Interviewees and Researcher

2.1.1 Description of Interviewees

This research involved 5 interviewees, including 2 interviewees with master's education background, 2 interviewees with undergraduate education background and 1 interviewee with primary-school education background. Regarding the background information of the interviewees, the age distribution of the interviewees ranged from 26 to 35 years old. Their majors covered painting (1), photography (2), ceramics (1) and drama (1), with their occupations incorporating art teacher (2), photographer (2) and artistic director of opera troupe (1). Among them, 2 art teachers are from public school and private school, while 2 photographers are from state-owned enterprise and private enterprise. The artistic director comes from a non-profit opera troupe. Furthermore, this research coded 5 interviewees in accordance with the initial letter of their assumed name, including LX, LH, SY, WA and CW in order of interview.

2.1.2 Researcher

The researcher, as the current postgraduate student majoring in mental health education, possesses 11 years of artistic learning background, graduating from LuXun Academy of Fine Arts. In the first half of 2021 academic year, the researcher completed the data collection and

analysis related to preliminary research as well as curriculum paper in the course of *Qualitative Research Methods in Psychology* offered by Yang Liping, a teacher of Nanjing Normal University. Meanwhile, the researcher also holds the National Third-level Psychological Counselor Certificate issued by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of the People's Republic of China, accumulating more than 200 hours of experience in terms of case consultation and group supervision.

2.2 Data Collection Process

2.2.1 Sampling Standard

In view of the fact that the expected "samples" collected by qualitative research can provide "all potential information related to the research topic", rather than "all individuals in the population" in quantitative investigation, qualitative research sampling is actually aimed at finding people who can answer the research questions. In the interest of increasing the total informational capacity, the key factor to locate suitable interviewees lies in the abundance of information related to them, instead of the number of interviewees themselves [26].

In summary, this research intends to establish the following 2 sampling standards: a) interviewees argue that they have engaged in or are engaged in artistic activities (which shows interviewees' identification with artists), and; b) interviewees have received a certain degree of education, reflecting on their own artistic activities and life (which reflects that interviewees possess a certain information density).

2.2.2 Sampling Strategy

With conforming to the principle of intensive sampling, this research intends to select the case with the highest information density and intensity [24], specifically adopting comprehensive sampling strategies including "chance sampling", "convenience sampling" and "snowball sampling".

2.2.3 Interview Outline

During the initial interview, the researcher simply required the interviewees to express some opinions about themselves, society and art based on their personal experiences, such as the questions including "Why did you agree to participate in this interview?" "Please talk about your experience when you first came into contact with art" and "How do you define mental health?" and so on. In the stage of preliminary research, the researcher conducted a second interview with 4 of the interviewees and made an outline of the second interview based on the content of the first interview, which not only required the researcher to ask the interviewees deeply about the

unclear questions in the first interview, but also needed to further focus on the theme of "subjective mental health", such as the questions including "You mentioned that going with the flow is a healthy state last time, can you give an example related to this?" "Last time you mentioned that sometimes you could notice that you were suffered from psychological problems, and how did you notice that?" and so on. These efforts have laid a solid foundation for building a further grounded theoretical model (see Appendix 1 for the outline of the first interview with the interviewees).

2.2.4 Interview

A total of 9 interviews were conducted in this research, each of which lasted between 40 and 90 minutes. During this process, 4 interviewees including LX, LH, WA and CW received 2 interviews respectively, while SY simply received 1 interview. The reason why the researcher decided to conduct several rounds of interviews with the aforementioned interviewees was due to the consideration of the following two factors: a) whether the coding in the materials collected by the interviews cover enough reference points, namely, whether the coding are saturated, and; b) whether the researcher and interviewees accept the "end of the interview" or think that "there is no valuable information to share". With the consent of the interviewees, this research recorded the interview process.

2.3 Data Analysis Strategy

2.3.1 Data Transcription and Numbering

After the completion of each interview, the researcher turned the recorded materials into text materials. Specifically, the researcher utilized the "AI Rapid Transcription" function of iFLYTek Transcription Online Platform to process the collected recorded materials in a phonetic-text-oriented manner. Meanwhile, the manual proofreading in the data analysis stage also laid the foundation for further data analysis. In the preliminary stage, a total of 9 interviews were conducted, with the data collected amounting to 118,000 words. The numbering adopted in this research was consistent with the rule of "code of interviewee-interview times of interviewee-page number-line number". For example, LX10101 indicates that the cited materials are from the first interview of the interviewee with code LX, while the relevant information corresponds to the position of the first line of page 1 of the transcribed materials.

2.3.2 Data Analysis Based on Grounded Theory

This research is mainly based on the grounded theory to conduct data collection, analysis and corresponding theoretical construction [27], in which data analysis includes preliminary analysis and categorization analysis.

To put it concretely, the preliminary analysis includes logging in the original data and one-level coding, while the categorization analysis includes focused coding and axial coding based on the preliminary analysis of the original data. Bottom-up theoretical construction is regarded as the further development and promotion of categorization analysis [28].

(1) Preliminary Analysis: Login and Open Coding (Primary Coding)

First of all, each interviewee was set with a corresponding serial number consisting of two parts (such as LX1, LX2...WY2), including the first two initial letters of the assumed name provided by the interviewee and the number of interviews. LX1, for example, represents the first interview of the interviewee "Lao Xian Sheng". This operation can effectively avoid the possible confusion between the interview materials provided by the interviewees in the subsequent data analysis process, thus establishing a sound foundation for data analysis[24].

Secondly, the researcher manually proofread the written materials formed by transcribed recorded materials, adopting a "submissive" attitude to read the materials.

Thirdly, the prior initial coding (primary coding) was further implemented [27]. With applying Nvivo12, the researcher, on the one hand, carefully considered the contents involved in every word, sentence and paragraph in the imported original materials, searching the recurring meaning units from the materials with an "inclusive"

attitude. On the other hand, the researcher also set the extracted contents that the interviewees and researcher think was meaningful as reference points and formed free nodes on the basis of summarizing the reference points, which were the most basic analysis units in data analysis.

In view of the fact that the aforementioned process aims at achieving more refined transcription of the interviewee's language, it typically uses the "indigenous concept" of interviewees for encoding to ensure that the information related to the interviewee is retained to the greatest extent, with less subjective participation of the researcher.

(2) Categorization Analysis: Focused Coding (Two-level Coding) and Axial Coding (Three-level Coding)

Nvivo12.0 qualitative analysis software was applied to perform the categorization analysis [27] covering focused coding and axial coding (three-level coding) of data. Among them, focused coding, as the second main stage of coding operation, aims to form a more directional, selective and conceptual coding based on the original primary coding. The main purpose of this step is to compare, screen and sum up the scattered meaning units in the primary coding, thereby condensing them into codes with a higher degree of subsumtion and representativeness. Categorization analysis mainly adopts a series of comparison methods including homogeneous comparison, heterogeneous comparison, horizontal comparison and vertical comparison [28]. The codes of categorization analysis are shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1 From Focused Coding (Two-level Coding) to Axial Coding (Three-level Coding)

Axial Coding (Three-level Coding)	From Focused Coding (Two-level Coding)	Quantity of Reference Points
Subjective mental health of Artists	Intrinsic health (cognitive and emotional health)	127
	Language efficacy	74
	Individualism	63
	Recognized mental health	48
	Process orientation	36

(3) Theoretical Construction

Compared with the macro, universal and abstract "grand theories" in traditional social sciences, grounded theory is devoted to constructing a "micro theory", which reflects the regional characteristics of a specific group or individual as the research object, with a lower degree of abstraction. Qualitative research scholars contend that this theory can typically provide more effective guidance for practice [29]. From the perspective of grounded theory, this research first integrated the meaning units obtained

from categorization analysis to construct a theory with internal consistency. Secondly, on the premise of restoring the theory to the data, this research further revised the theory based on the original data, thus forming the interaction between the data and the theory. In the end, referring to the scores of interviewees and experts, this research ultimately constructed a theoretical model with relative explanatory power and practical significance.

On the basis of 6 focused coding obtained from

categorization analysis, this research formed an axial coding with higher generality and subsumtion, namely, the subjective mental health of artists. By virtue of restoring 6 focused coding to the data, it is indicated that the subjective mental health of artists mainly consists of the experienced intrinsic mental health and the cognition of "recognized mental health". In addition, process orientation, language efficacy and individualism are the three pivotal factors that affect the social adaptation of artists.
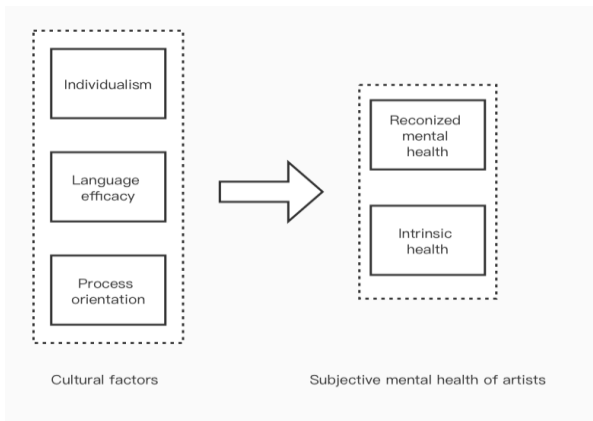

Figure 1. Theoretical Model Construction

2.3.3 Subject Saturation Test

The establishment of subject saturation table usually occurs in the stage of data analysis. As a kind of reference, it aims to prompt researchers whether they need to collect new materials or generate new interview outlines. As a matter of fact, partial domestic scholars have utilized the subject saturation table in exploring the visualization related to data saturation in qualitative research. If the new subject does not renewedly appear from the beginning of an interview, it means that the data has reached the state of saturation, and the subject involved refers to two-level coding. The reason lies in that the latest data analysis is still in the initial stage when researchers judge whether the data is saturated. In the subject saturation table, the columns present all the primary coding that appear in the codes, while the rows present different number of times of interview. They are respectively composed of the serial number of the interviewees and their interview times. For instance, CW1 represents the first interview between the researcher and the interviewee CW. Specific marks (such as "*") are adopted to mark the position where the subject initially appears.

Terminal row presents the total number of subjects that initially appeared in different interviews (see **Table 2** for details). **Table 2** demonstrates that the brand-new meaning unit has not appeared in the collected data since the second interview of interviewee WA, which proves that the collected data has reached the saturation state.

Table 2 Subjects Saturation Test

Serial Number	Subjects	LX1	LH1	SY1	LX2	LH2	WA1	CW1	WA2	CW2
1	Acceptance and patience		*							
2	Cycle of cognition and reflection	*								
3	Meditation	*								
4	Completeness		*							
5	To feel		*							
6	To be moved	*								
7	Cognitive habits					*				
8	Importance of rationality								*	
9	Language is negative	*								
10	Declarative knowledge of the artists		*							
11	Rules hindering artistic activities		*							
12	Examples of randomness	*								
13	Definition is relative	*								
14	The bottom line of health is not to affect other lives.	*								
15	Health is subjective	*								

16	Damage to one's own body			*		
17	Being healthy is happiness			*		
18	Economic base			*		
19	Different groups have different cultures		*			
20	Art is similar to a sharp sword					*
21	Materialism			*		
22	Process orientation	*				

3. FINDINGS

3.1 Intrinsic Health (Cognitive and Emotional Health)

All the artists interviewed described their own cognitive process during each interview (the total number of reference points was 127, accounting for 15.4%). Almost all descriptions of cognition include descriptions of emotions, which reflect a kind of "hot cognition" based on emotions or attitudes [30]. This finding is consistent with the research of brain science, namely, the relationship between emotion and cognition is a dynamic interaction rather than a dichotomy. A large number of components of the brain structure possess both cognitive and emotional functions [31].

"I feel that when a person has the consciousness of reflection … I feel that **I seem to become more sensitive and particularly impressionable.**" (LX)

"This kind of moving is not only based on empathy, but also includes reflective moving, that is, moving to an event and my own reflection on this matter. If this incident makes me moving, **this process seems to mean a touch to me.** " (LX)

Experiencing emotions different from others and gaining ideas different from others give artists a sense of superiority.

"That sense of gain may make me narcissistic and **make me feel different**. Then, it may also **give me some ideas or feelings that I think others cannot think of**… **when you are touched by something, event or situation**, you will also acquire some valuable insights. In fact, it can also be said that this is another touch and **a sense of accomplishment** for me. " (LX)

The "hot cognition" not only urges artists to identify with their own identities, but also is considered as the "threshold" of artists and the "symbol" of mutual identification.

"In my opinion, anyone with a cycle of cognition and reflection can be called an artist."

"I think … **to feel is the soul of an artist**." (LX)

"As **a real artist in the field of film industry**, **I found a commonality**. Taking what I just said as an example, you feel the same way, or you are happy to feel it. " (LX)

"For example, I will put myself in a relatively confined space (during the process of creation), or listen to some sad music to mobilize my emotions. After all, artists' emotions are generally **more sensitive than others**. " (WA)

Artists need to mobilize their emotions in their creation. Nevertheless, they also have their own unique ways to control their emotions.

"Sometimes, I shut myself up in a room to listen to music or draw some blue pictures. After a long time, I will feel a little nauseous. However, after the end of creation, I will adjust myself to a normal state. Until the next time I enter this room, I will return to that world again. " (WA)

To sum up, the description of artists' self-health basically focuses on cognitive and emotional aspects, which is also regarded as a kind of artistic creation capability that enables artists to generate self-identity. In addition, the latest empirical aesthetic research confirms that negative emotions are an important driving force and resource for artistic creation and appreciation [32]. Therefore, from the perspective of the outside world, the "emotional states" of artists are necessary for their professional development.

On the other hand, intrinsic mental health includes two categories, including special memory preference and synaesthesia ability, which belong to "characteristics" rather than "abilities" in the eyes of ordinary people. Nevertheless, with regard to the artists interviewed, the aforementioned "characteristics" are not only beneficial to artistic creation, but also can be improved through continuous training. Consequently, they are essentially

some kinds of "abilities". Mastering these "abilities" furnishes them with a higher self-identity as artists.

"**The reason why I came into contact with movies lies in that** ... I remember very clearly what happened when I was a child, including the air temperature at that time. What is the temperature of the air? Is it soft or dry? Until now, **I can still clearly recall that kind of touch.**"

"I simply **cannot remember some written knowledge in textbooks**, including some English words. However, **I remember some things related to people, plants or animals that happened before very clearly**. Moreover, I can describe them quite accurately, because these things are extremely clear in my memory. Even though those things have passed for decades, they are still vivid in my mind. Nevertheless, I **cannot remember some knowledge points in the textbook at all.**"

"I have a lot of clear pictures in my mind, such as the tube-shaped apartment, the old outdated pots and pans in the corridor, the gas stove, the old objects in use, the wall skin on the wall, the watermark, the polished luster reflected from the handle of the stairs, the window paper, or the oil smoke stains stuck on the glass, etc. **I think these scenes in my memory are like a moving song, or like the lyrics in a song that moves you...** I think listening to music is an enjoyable thing. For this reason, when I recall the touching scene that has experienced the test of a long time, I feel very enjoyable."

3.2 Language Efficacy

Trust in rules refers to the artists' degree of trust in the positive role played by rules in their creation and life. The foregoing rules include not only the basic words and languages but also the superior structure composed of language represented by law and knowledge. In accordance with the collected interview data, the artists interviewed believe in feelings more than language and randomness more than certainty.

"This process (which refers to artistic creation) **cannot be predicted or described.**"

"**The more books you read, the more ignorant you will feel.** I think this truth just coincides with this subject." (LX)

"I always think that painting cannot be described by words. Taking **many artistic comments as example, I think they go too far.** Art critics will quote Nietzsche's or Schopenhauer's views from a philosophical perspective … but I do not think they can ever make a correct evaluation of painting. It can also be said that there may be no so-called correct answer. Considering that painting is an existing art, it is impossible to evaluate this art thoroughly."

"Painting pursues a state of expression … this expression **cannot be expressed in a direct and straightforward way, otherwise it is wrong.**" (WA)

"**Some people actually see a label when they see a work, rather than the real work itself.** In other words, when you see this thing and walk past it, it directly corresponds to a specific label or a word. For example, when you see such an abstract painting, **it does not correspond to your feelings, but to a word.** That is to say, **this painting does not bring a special feeling to the viewer**… However, the works that can impress me will definitely bring me a special feeling, **which cannot be described in a term or a few words.** Classic works of art always show such characteristics. In other words, **there is essentially no direct or one-to-one correspondence between feeling and language. However, some people directly associate art to a term.** In fact, works of art can reflect diverse feelings, such as abstract, emotional, depressed, angry and cynical feelings… I think such works are effective. In short, after getting rid of the shackles of types, real works of art will bring a fancy feeling to the audience, thereby arousing their thinking." (CW)

"I used to try to carry out artistic creation **according to the principle of regularity. Later, I found that this did not work.**" (LH1)

"After **classifying it, the process of feeling will disappear.** This person (the person who appreciates art) will ignore it directly." (CW2)

In addition, the reason why artists break away from rules and language lies in that it is conducive to artistic creation.

"For example, *99 Cent* (an artistic photograph), **if you describe it to others in words, the listener will not feel its charm at all.** However, when you stand in front of the photo, it will give you a strong sense of impact… you may not be as specific as you think. Perhaps the audience will not think so specifically, considering issues such as social division of labor, commercial supply or global trade and so on. However, people will feel a kind of pure shock. **Maybe he has not used words to describe that feeling, which he must have experienced so deeply.**" (CW2)

"In the process of painting, you will definitely experience some random situations, such as the color of paint different from what you expected. This is the random factor, which in many cases represents **an opportunity rather than a bad thing**. **You can control it through subjective initiative… to keep its randomness**, similar to surprise. Art is also similar to this. **For example, when doing something, you'd better not say it completely. Good things may contain some hidden parts, which leave space for others to imagine.**" (WA)

"There is a large separate compartment in the middle, which is similar to a conference room. That is to say, it has a door for air to circulate naturally, but no window. The air only circulates through its door, with the room surrounded by walls. Then, there is an easel made of wood frames inside it. In this confined space, I would play some favorite music at that time, **which would stimulate my senses** and protect me from outside influences. Regarding the selections of music, I will mainly play some songs that I cannot quite understand. Therefore, **I generally do not listen to Chinese songs that I can understand. I mainly listen to the music works with strong musicality, performance-based style or experimental style,** which will remind me of many things and then inspire me." (WA1)

In the actual creative process, artists constantly use learning through practice, experience, feeling, image and sensation as the media to understand the world, instead of the diagrams necessary for ordinary people to know the world represented by language, definition, description, rules and reason.

Language and rules, as the outcomes of society, are regarded as the indispensable tools of social division of labor and production. Everything in human society needs the description of language and the framework of rules to be realized. It is worth acknowledging that artists' pursuit of randomness and perceptibility indeed beneficial to their artistic creation activities. However, it also makes it more difficult for them to communicate with the outside world, and even less willing to learn social rules and participate in social cooperation, thus aggravating the separation between artists and society.

"I do not **communicate with people frequently**, because I do not like chatting with others all day, especially with insignificant people. Relatively speaking, I **prefer to see things in the outside world that interest me, such as natural plants, state and phenomena, which I am more willing to pay attention to.**" (WA2)

"Then I made such an attempt … I could not get married … because I think they really do not get along with each other (they refer to girlfriend and mother of the interviewee) … why did this happen? The reason lies in **the established rules that define how good or bad what you do.**" (LH1)

3.3 Individualism

In general, artists regard "not influencing others" as the basic principle of mental health. Also, it means that they set themselves against others, regarding themselves as a bounded being.

"But when you do this, your behavior, whether physically or mentally, really hurts others… I think **your expression is inappropriate if it really hurts others.**" (LH)

"Health" is essentially a relative concept. Different cultures involve different concepts of "health".

"Maybe I cannot accept things that are relatively eccentric or extravagant. **Nonetheless, the unacceptability of these things does not mean that they are abnormal or unhealthy… In the same educational environment, it is actually difficult to make a reasonable judgment on whether an artist is healthy or not.** In my opinion, the reason lies in the differences between the education system, education level and reading quantity. As I just said, the reason why we find it difficult to accept his works may lie in **our differences in education, ideas and reading quantity.**" (LX1)

"For example, I have a friend who used to study in Spain and majored in fine arts. Later, after returning to China, he made a living by his own artistic creation. In his opinion, he can take all his clothes off in the street at any time if he wants to. However, others will probably say that he is a lunatic. In our country, in the face of this kind of behavior, people's most direct view is that he is an abnormal lunatic. Nonetheless, he did not actually do anything too radical. According to his story, when he is abroad, if he wants to take off his clothes in a certain place, such as in the wilderness or in a deserted street, this is actually a normal thing, provided that it does not pose a threat to others. **For painters or people engaged in painting-related work like him, nudity may not be a big surprise.** Moreover, he thinks that taking off his clothes in the wilderness can make him more truly integrate with nature. However, after witnessing this situation, people in our country generally think that this person is a complete lunatic… **After all, the values between countries are different**… Imagine that if passers-by in our country saw him naked, **they would certainly dare not look at him.** They will only describe him as a lunatic." (LH2)

3.4 Recognized Mental Health

When considering mental health, artists set a basic bottom line, that is, do not affect or hurt others. Likewise, the aforementioned "others" also includes those non-human lives.

"I just want to feel the action of **taking a knife to kill an insect**, or" to kill ". I want to find out my own inner feelings in the process. When seeing the knife hurting a real life, some people will witness the struggle reflected in this life or have other feelings… some people once agreed with such a kind of idea. However, if this person really chooses to do so... I would be unbelievable about this." (LH1)

"Supposing there is an artist who thinks that the premise of artistic creation is that **some lives must be hurt, for example, only by killing 100 chickens can he**

find inspiration. Do you think his idea is healthy? I think this is an unhealthy idea." (LH2)

Moreover, artists believe that as long as their own actions do not interfere with other lives, they should not be constrained.

"With regard to these people, they may not be willing to come into contact with others, and they are willing to stay in their own space, **or live in the world they have constructed. I think this is acceptable**, after all, they did not hurt others." (LH)

Nevertheless, this freedom also follows such a bottom line, that is, it does not harm one's own body.

"I usually attach great importance to my inner thoughts. However, I will not experience this kind of physical pain, such as staying in an excessively cold or excessively hot space. " (WA2)

It is impossible to stimulate artistic creation by many ways that harm the body such as smoking, drinking, self-destructing, etc.

"Taking Van Gogh who cut off his ears as an example, in my opinion, he thinks that if he wants to create outstanding paintings, he has to cut off his ears. Regarding this type of people, I think they may not be very smart, without accurate grasp of the connection between things... He views the real world from the same perspective as witchcraft. Besides, isn't there any connection between things, such as cutting off the ear and painting? Although there is some connection between them, it is extremely weak. However, he regards this connection as an emphasized strong connection and an important way to lead him to create outstanding works. Perhaps it is precisely because of his inaccurate judgment of various connections in the world that he chose a path that is not so correct." (CW2)

"You **do not have to drink to create art.** For example, if you lose your mobility when you are drunk, how can you create art better? In this case, drunkenness is of no help to artistic creation. Drinking is just a pastime." (SY)

Some interviewed artists also mentioned that negative emotions are the precondition of some artistic creation activities, and that the process of appreciating art also includes the enjoyment of negative emotions. This is consistent with the results of empirical aesthetics researches, that is, negative emotions are the important resources of all artistic creations [32], rather than simply being confined to the art represented by "tragedy".

"As I said before, for example, I like to put myself in a relatively confined space, or **listen to some sad music to mobilize my emotions**... In my opinion, if I suddenly want to conduct art creation, I will try to mobilize my emotions to a state that is not particularly exciting. Assuredly, I sometimes feel different. When developing this kind of artistic creation, I will not put myself in a particularly passionate or excited state. On the contrary, I will become relatively calm, although it is not a complete calm. Maybe, I will get a little depressed. However, this depression is controllable, without causing too serious influence on me. That's probably what I was like."

"I think it is also valuable to be in such a depressed state sometimes. Some negative emotions that make me feel uncomfortable will inspire some inspiration, for example, that kind of feeling or state that is similar to writing a popular love song only when the music creator is in the lovelorn state." (WA1)

"In particular, **music or painting is often presented more sincerely when the creator is in a negative state of unhappiness.** The reason lies in that in that kind of state, you will have a special desire to make changes, to become better, or to transfer your emotions to a normal state again. Therefore, the creator will create more sincere works in that state. For example, **if you keep a happy mood in a happy life, artistic creation may become boring for you.**" (WA2)

"In fact, many songs pleasant to hear are full of sad tones in essence. When listening to this kind of song, you will become moved. This kind of moving is what this song brings to you. However, I really enjoy this kind of moving. Even if it is sad, I will enjoy it especially. **I really enjoy this sadness.** I do not know if you feel this way. Anyway, I have felt this way since I was a child. I like listening to songs since I was a child, and **I also enjoy this sad feeling.**"

Nevertheless, artists will proactively control their negative emotions so that normal life will not be affected.

"You can be sad, but you cannot be too sad, just as you can feel happy, but you cannot become too happy. Similarly, you can be depressed, but you cannot be too depressed. You are the most inspired in this kind of state which is very hard to come by." (WA)

"Although you feel uncomfortable, you realize that you can get better. Yes, **you can control this negative emotion in most cases.** However, in some cases, for example, when you look at blue artwork… you will also feel a little depressed. Assuredly, I will have the consciousness that I know I can effectively control my emotions. Just like acting, it does not mean that I cannot return to reality after acting. I think I can return to normal state from that negative emotion. This may be because of the rationality in my mind, which encouraged me to turn from the sad state at that time to the real reality. Or, **I can force myself to return to the normal state** through diversified adjustment methods, such as eating delicious food and watching some videos during the rest. I am usually in such a state." (WA20216)

In addition, artists argue that health has nothing to do with art, defining health as happiness like ordinary people.

"People who die too early must be unhealthy, while healthy people must be happy people who live longer." (CW2)

"Question: So, have you ever met this mentally unhealthy art artist?

CW: I have met many such people. For example, there is a person who may have taken 6 or 7 postgraduate entrance exams, always thinking that the whole world is unfair to him.

Research: Could you describe this person in detail?

CW: To put it concretely, he always looks at everything from the perspective of conspiracy theory. He has experienced too many failures, and he is conditioned to thinking about seemingly profound theories or philosophical things. Assuredly, it cannot be said that he is divorced from real life, because those theories are closely related to reality. However, given that he has been influenced by this circle for too long, some valuable things have deteriorated in his mind. In other words, he stayed in the same state for too long. Therefore, when he saw that the children of his friends around him had grown up gradually, and almost everyone around him had entered the next stage of his life, he became lonelier than before. For example, if she is a girl, she may be easily addicted to it as long as a boy shows a little care for her. Or, if he is a boy, maybe as long as a girl shows him a slight concern or kindness, he will probably put too much expectation on this feeling. Actually, it cannot be said that his thoughts are unhealthy. More specifically, he may just be emotionally unstable, easily become furious, or suddenly fall into a very depressed mood. **I do not think these may have anything to do with art.**" (CW)

3.5 Process Orientation

In the face of creation and life, artists uphold an attitude based on "process orientation".

"Painting is a state of expression."

"Contemporary art belongs to an artistic style that is more inclined to **emphasize experience**. Therefore, the artistic works are not created to be hung on the wall or put in the museum."

"Strictly speaking, I cannot accurately describe what I want to say. Maybe, I generally expect to express my emotions or **a state of that time through art**. Moreover, I usually do not create art with too fixed themes. That is to say, I won't deliberately search for a theme, and then finish my painting according to or revolving around this theme. I prefer that kind of state, **without fixed order to rely on**." (WA1)

"If we create a work of art, no matter what level or quality it reaches, we should take this work seriously and see **what happened in the whole creative process.**" (LH2)

"In my opinion, **fishing does not have to aim at catching the fish.** I think I **enjoy the process of fishing very much**… maybe this process occasionally involves some uncertainties, such as the hooked fish. I believe everyone who goes fishing already enjoys this feeling at this time… Then, this state will also inspire artists, right? In other words, the so-called inspiration actually originates from this kind of enjoyable state." (WA1)

As mentioned above, this "process orientation", as a prevailing culture among artists, is opposite to the "purpose-oriented" culture.

"I think this is a kind of feeling. For example, if you draw a few lines on the drawing board, **you won't think about their purpose,** will you? In fact, **they really did not point to any purpose.** Nevertheless, others will think that they have a purpose. In other words, they will wonder why you did it. In fact, this is just **a state of perception.**" (WA1)

"Taking the novelty seeking I mentioned earlier as an example, as for artists **who seek novelty for the sake of novelty seeking**, I think their hearts must be unhealthy." (LH1)

"In our view, **their extreme stubbornness is more like a performance of being possessed by the Devil.** For example, **some people think they have to be admitted by the Academy of Fine Arts.** Not being admitted to the Academy of Fine Arts is an unacceptable failure. Therefore, they feel that they must be admitted to the Academy of Fine Arts." (WA2)

"You can express your feelings about life through the works of art you create. In this way, you will endow your work with a stronger degree of storytelling and melodramatic nature, **instead of simply creating a work or achieving a purpose.**" (SY1)

In accordance with the foregoing materials, process orientation not only refers to the understanding of the creative process as an important part of art works, but also refers to a positive attitude that advocates living in the present, being immersed in the flow and integrating with the world. Meanwhile, it is also the opposition to the behavior of achieving a certain purpose through art, as well as the "purposiveness", "alienation", "materialization" and "compulsive behavior".

4. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

As outlined, in prior researches related to mental health or mental illness of artists, researchers tend to evaluate artists from the perspective of external groups based on a certain mental health evaluation standard, with lacking attention to the construction of group subjective mental health and the influence of group culture on mental health. By virtue of systematic interviews and data analysis, this research found that the artist's subjective mental health includes the cognition of

"recognized mental health" and the experienced intrinsic mental health, while individualism, process orientation and language efficacy, as three important cultural factors, have exerted significant influence on the artist's subjective mental health. Consequently, these cultural factors should be fully considered in terms of the psychological intervention of artists.

In addition, this research inevitably involves partial limitations. Specifically, first of all, this research lacks the sample of female artists in the interview stage, with all 5 artists interviewed in this research of male. Secondly, the saturation of interview materials and coding needs to be tested in a more rigorous manner.

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