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This artifact analysis of a randomly selected set of Peanuts comic strips from the year 1950 to 1999, 250 comic strips, was investigated. The results demonstrated an important connection between institutions and practices in shaping culture where political, economic and social factors influence the American cultural orientation.

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An Artifact Analysis on American Culture through Peanuts Comic Strips (1950 - 1999)

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ABSTRACT

According to Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952), culture consists of explicit and implicit patterns of historically derived and selected ideas, as well as their embodiments in institutions, practices and artifacts; cultural patterns, on the one hand, may be considered as products of action, and on the other, as conditioning elements for further action. Cultural psychologists believe that cultural content and its participating psyches are co-constructed and mutually constitute one another (Shweder, 1991). Recent works by various authors have supported these views and started to focus their analyses on the artifacts. Morling and Lamoreaux (2008) look at the tangible public representations of culture, such as advertising or popular text, as artifacts. The study found that these cultural artifacts reflect degrees of individualism and collectivism, which differ across Western and Eastern countries.

In another study investigating contemporary cultural aesthetic preferences, Masuda et al. (2008) demonstrated that the degrees of collectivism and individualism influenced preference towards the inclusion and exclusion of context in drawing and photographing tasks. Specifically, participants from collectivist cultures preferred holistic patterns of attention, resulting in the inclusion of context, while the participants from individualist cultures preferred analytic patterns of attention, resulting in the exclusion of the context (Masuda et al., 2008). Thus, the comparative study between art works from different cultures demonstrated that collectivist cultures prefer paintings that depict field information more than individualist cultures do (Masuda et al., 2008).

Another highly relevant study by Cohn et al. (2012) focuses on the framing of attention in Japanese and American comics. The results demonstrated that Americans tend to focus more on focal objects of a scene, while Asians tend to focus on the surrounding environment (Cohn et al., 2012). Hence, according to the results from these previous studies, an analysis of comic strips should enable us to reveal changes in American culture during the second half of the twentieth century. In addition, the analysis should specifically reveal the evolution of individualist and collectivist values within American culture during the second half of the twentieth century as well.

METHODOLOGY

This particular study focuses on analyzing a randomly selected set of Peanuts comic strips from the year 1950 to 1999. Five strips from each will be randomly selected as the sample of analysis, resulting in 250 comic strips being investigated.

Scope of Investigation and Analysis

The scope of the investigation and analysis can be divided into three major elements. The first element of the analysis focuses on the camera shot, which comprises the psychological distance, attention to categories, and scene type. The second element of the analysis focuses on the cultural theme, which comprises the specific cultural theme, individualism – collectivism and artifacts that appeared within strips. The third element of analysis focuses on how the comic strips, as cultural artifacts, reflect the events that occurred during the second half of twentieth century.

First Element: Camera Shot and Scene Type Analysis

Psychological distance of shot type was investigated and coded as close up, medium distance, wide view or panorama view. The method of investigation and coding was adopted from Bang et al. (under review). Their research shows that the type of camera shot converges with psychological distance. A closer shot type would result in psychological closeness; while a further shot, type is psychologically distant. Psychological distance is related to the concept of construal level theory (Trope et al., 2007): Individuals construe objects that are psychologically near using low-level, detailed and contextualized features, while at a distance, individuals would construe objects using high-level, abstract and stable characteristics. The construal level can be induced using different modes of psychological distance, including temporal distance, social distance, spatial distance, and probability distance. In addition, recent research also shows that high construal levels or abstractness relates to holistic thinking style, which is a characteristic of collectivist culture, while low construal level or concreteness relates to analytic thinking style, which is a characteristic of individualism (Hong and Lee, 2010).

Attention to categories was coded as macro, mono, micro, or amorphic. The method of investigation and coding was adopted from Cohn et al. (2012). The number of shots in each attention category type per strip was counted and computed to reveal the proportion of each attention category type per strip. Each type of attention category is explained below:

Macro: Depict multiple active entities

Mono: Depict single active entities

Micro: Depict less than one active entity (as in a close up)

Amorphic: Depict no active entities (i.e., only inactive entities)

Scene type was investigated and coded based on the location where the story in the strips took place. The investigation of scene type should enable us to better understand the significance of each environment that shaped American children over the past 50 years.

Second Element: Cultural Theme Analysis

Specific cultural theme was investigated based on the study of hermeneutics. According to the Hermeneutic model, texts are interpreted and reinterpreted in relation to the developing sense of the “whole” or to gain “holistic understanding” (Thompson et al., 1994). Language can provide meaningful perspectives on one’s cultural and personal history (Johnson, 1987). Hence, in this case, extracting the specific cultural theme emerging from text and scene in the strips should enable us to capture the sense of American culture during each period. The cultural themes investigated in this research cover cultural aspects such as the value of time and being success driven, caring, and expressive.

The individualism–collectivism dimension was also investigated. However, in this case, the investigation of the overall cultural theme of individualism and collectivism was derived from the analysis of the camera shots as well as the reinterpretation of the emergent cultural themes. Hence, individualism, in this case, should be portrayed through the “mono” attention to category, while collectivism should be portrayed through the “macro” attention to category. In addition, the specific cultural themes were reinterpreted as either individualism or collectivism based on Oyserman et al. (2002)’s definition. Thus, individualism would cover dimensions such as in-

dependence, individual goals, competition, uniqueness, privacy, and self-knowledge, while collectivism would cover dimensions such as relatedness, belonging, duty, harmony, adapting to context, and group work preference.

Artifacts in the strips were also investigated, since the artifacts that were presented in the strip itself should capture the cultural dimensions during that period. These cultural dimensions were derived from objects representing lifestyle values and preferences (Levy, 1981).

Third Element: Mapping Artifacts with Events

The third element focused on the fact that cultural artifacts are the result of the cultural psyche (Morling & Lamoreaux, 2008). Hence, comic strips should capture the history of significant events in American history. This will enable us to understand the dynamics between the political, economic and social environments in shaping American culture at each particular period.

RESULTS

First Element: Camera Shot and Scene Type Analysis

Psychological distance of shot type. No close-up shots were presented in this case. A majority of the scenes were at a medium view (68.8%), followed by a wide view (30.4%) and panorama view (0.8%). Hence, the results are in line with our hypothesis that American culture, which has an orientation towards individualism, prefers the exclusion of context. This result is shown in the prominence of the medium view. Further ANOVA analysis demonstrated that year had an influence on shot types ($F_{4,245} = 8.072, p = .000$). Thus, in this case, the composition of shot types during the 1950s was significantly different from those of the 1970s and marginally different from the 1980s. The shot types during the 1960s were also significantly different from those of the 1970s and 1980s. The shot types during the 1990s were also marginally different from the 1970s. Table 1 clearly shows that the proportion of medium shots was highest during the 1970s and 1980s, while the proportion of wide shots was most prominent during the 1960s. Thus, the results of the shot type analysis suggest that orientation towards psychologically closeness, discrete concepts, and analytic thinking style were at their peak during the 1970s and 1980s. In contrast, during the 1960s, the orientation towards psychological distance, abstract concepts, and holistic thinking style was more prominent.

Table 1 Psychological Distance Across Five Decades

	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s
Medium	62%	44%	90%	82%	66%
Wide	34%	56%	10%	18%	34%
Panorama	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Attention to categories. The attention to category analysis shows that, over the past 50 years, the proportion of macro scene type or multiple entities was 64.8%, while the mono type or single entities occupied 34.3% of the scenes in each strip, on average. Thus, the results of attention to categories do not depict American culture as being strongly individualistic, as was expected. Hence, if the culture is highly individualistic, then there should be more mono-type scenes, with a proportion of strips greater than 50%.

Nevertheless, the comparison across the five studied decades shows that the degree of individualism varied ($F_{4,245} = 11.056, p = .000$). Further analysis shows that the degree of individualism reached its peaks in the 1970s. The degree of individualism in the 1970s was significantly higher than the degree of individualism dur-

ing the 1950s and marginally higher than the degree of individualism during the 1960s and 1990s. Hence, the results are quite congruent with the previous analysis on psychological distance. The detailed proportions of attention to categories for each decade are depicted in Table 2 below.

Table 2 Attention to Categories Across Five Decades

Scene Proportion	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s
Mono	28%	27%	57%	41%	12%
Macro	74%	61%	43%	59%	88%

However, the interpretations of both psychological distance as well as attention to categories across the five decades of Peanuts comic strips should be approached with caution. The peak of the macro scenes and wide shots in the 1990s partly resulted from the health condition of the cartoonist Charles M. Schulz, who had suffered from Parkinson’s disease since 1988.

Scene type. The scene type analysis shows that the majority of scenes in the strips took place in the back or front yards (39.6%), followed by inside a home (22.4%), on a sidewalk (10.8%), at school (8.0%), and on a baseball field (7.2%). When comparing scene types across five decades, the proportions of different scene types are not significantly different, except for the back and front yard scene type, which was significantly more prevalent in the 1960s than in the 1980s (62% vs. 30%). Thus, the significance of backyards and front yards of the house for American children seems to have declined.

Second Element: Cultural Theme Analysis

Specific cultural themes. The specific cultural themes that emerge from this study across 5 decades are shown in Figure 1. In Figure 1, the graph only captures the cultural themes that emerged in 5% or more strips. The most prominent cultural themes in this case were caring (18%), expressiveness (18%), directness (17%), sharing (13%), and control (11%). The prominence of these cultural themes shows the mix of both individualist and collectivist values. While caring and sharing represent collectivist themes, expressiveness, directness, and control represent individualist themes. The more interesting results came from the analysis across the five decades, which seems to reflect the evolution of American culture from the 1950s until the end of the twentieth century, as depicted in Figure 2. Thus, in this case, the results demonstrate that the shifts in American culture may be the result of changes in the political, economic and social conditions in American society.

Figure 1 Overall specific cultural theme.

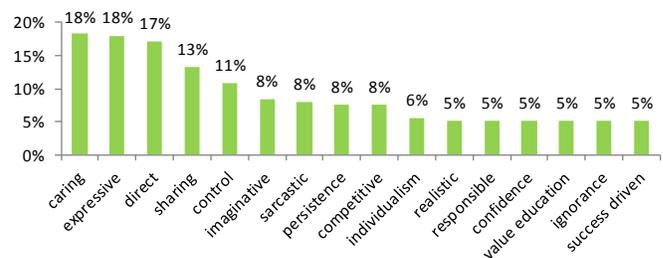
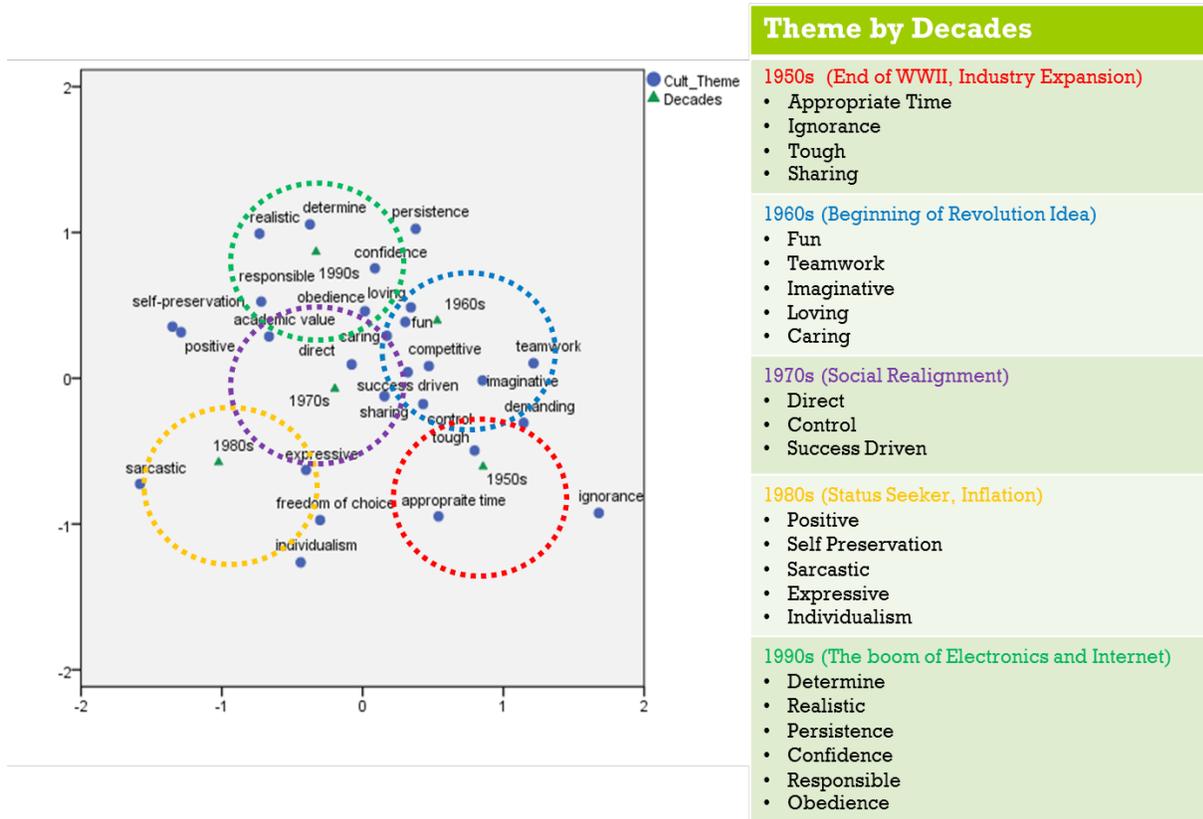


Figure 2 Specific cultural theme by decade via correspondence analysis.



Specific cultural themes in the 1950s. In the period after WWII, the political conflict between the US and USSR was highly salient. Americans were bombarded with the concept of the Cold War. During this period, American soldiers were sent to help South Korea from communist North Korea's invasion. The 1950s also captures the period of baby boomers, more than 76.4 million of whom were born between 1946 and 1964. During this time where, the industrial focus changed from building war materials to building cars, TVs, refrigerators, dishwasher, and bicycles. More than 4 million TV sets were sold in 1950. Additionally, the social segregation between blacks and whites started to dissolve during this period. Thus, during this time period, values such as time appropriateness (babies should be asleep by 6 p.m.), ignorance, toughness, and sharing are pronounced.

Specific cultural themes in the 1960s. Inspiration emerged during the 1960s. John F. Kennedy was elected as president; he represented youthful energy and the rise of new generation. He encouraged American youths to work for their country, as reflected in his statement "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." He also established the Peace Corps, which empowered American youth to make a difference in the world. This was also the period when Americans were involved in the Vietnam War and women started to ask society for their human rights, in terms of equal wages and job opportunities. In 1968, American citizens started to turn against the Vietnam War. Hippies also emerged during this period, believing in a peaceful world and everyone loving one another. Most of them were middle class and college aged. In this period, the first man landed on the Moon. Neil Armstrong stepped on the moon on July 20th, 1969. Thus, during this time period, values such as fun, teamwork, imagination, loving, and caring also appeared in Peanuts comic strips. It is interesting to see the pattern of culture

in comic strips mapped onto the cultural trends.

Specific cultural themes in the 1970s. The 1970s began with the Watergate Scandal during President Nixon's term. He was also the first president to resign from office. The American Energy Crisis also occurred during the mid-1970s, coupled with significant unemployment (8% in 1977) and high inflation (rising from 6% in 1977 to 10% in 1978). The consumer price index increased by an average of 9.2 percent per year from 1973 to 1982. Thus, Americans felt powerless and lacked self-efficacy during this period. President Jimmy Carter commented during this period that "Lack of confidence threatened to destroy American democracy." The Peanuts comic strips from this decade reflected the cultures that emerged to counteract these problems. As illustrated in Figure 2, 1970s was the period of directness, control, and being success-driven. Hence, these noticeable cultural themes may be the ways that American society copes with unstable environments and gain confidence over their ability to control their faith again.

Specific cultural themes in the 1980s. During the 1980s, the US had a conflict with Iran during the Hostage Crisis, which started in 1979. The 1980s were also when America entered a severe recession, during which businesses went bankrupt and productivity dropped sharply. The purchasing power of working-class American families had dropped to 1960s levels. This was also the period when President Reagan was in power. President Reagan, who has been called the "Great Communicator," wanted to maximize personal freedom and private enterprise while minimizing the role of government. By mid-1983, economic prosperity had returned. The gross nation product grew at 4% per annum from 1982 to 1988, and 17–18 million new jobs were created during Reagan's presidency. Additionally, inflation went down. Despite a blissful outlook, there were problems of income disparity behind the scenes and growing federal deficit, as well

as an increase in the crime rate by over 300% and violent crime rate by over 500%. In 1988, President Reagan visited Moscow, and in 1989, the USSR collapsed. As reflected in Peanuts comic strips, individualism became quite pronounced during this period. The cultural themes include positivity/optimism, self-preservation, sarcasm, expressiveness, and individualism. The positive environment helped to boost optimism; at the same time, the increased disparity and higher crime rate also influenced the concept of self-preservation and sarcasm.

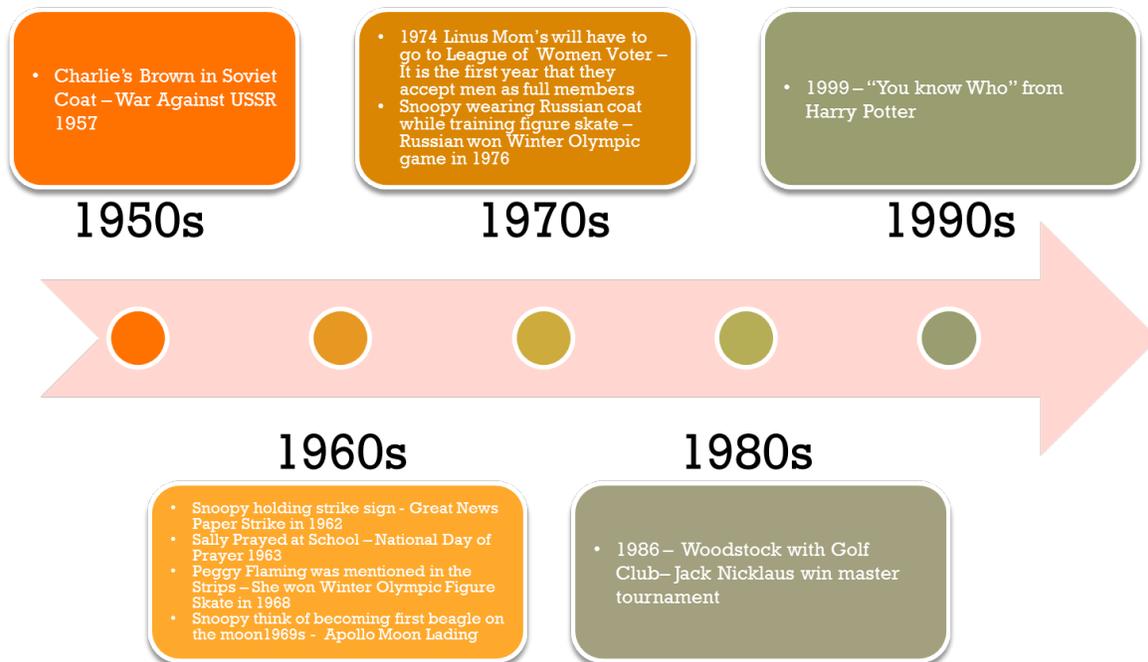
Specific cultural themes in the 1990s. The 1990s were a period of family devotion and good character. This value was adopted by President George H. W. Bush’s family. Also, the Gulf War took place and recession started to hit American society again. By 1992, all of the key economic indicators were retracting. Later, during the time of President Bill Clinton, there were also problems with domestic terrorism. Despite the fact that Americans were more prosperous, healthy, educated, and equal than ever before, there was also pessimism towards the downturn of religion values, as reflected through the higher rates of murder, violent crime, divorce, and abortion. It was also a time when personal computers were booming for Microsoft, Yahoo, and American Online. By 1998, about 98% of American homes had television sets, and two out of three had cable television. Personal computers were in 45% of all homes. 74 million Americans used the Internet by early 1999. Thus, when looking back at the political, economic, and social environment, it was not surprising that the cultural values such as being determined, realism, persistence, confidence, responsibility, and obedience emerged. These are important values in the development of the nation and to regain its moral balance.

Particular analysis on individualism–collectivism. Further analysis was done based on individualism and collectivism to further understand the relative strength of the orientation along this particular spectrum. The findings from the analysis of shot type, both in terms of psychological distance and attention to categories, suggested that the individualism orientation seemed to be more prominent during the 1970s and 1980s. The medium and mono shots were highest during these two decades. In addition, the type of cultural values that were prominent during these two periods, according to the dimensions classified by Oyserman et al. (2002) could be directly mapped onto domains that have been identified as individualistic in individualism–collectivism scales, such as independence, goals, competitiveness, and direct communication (direct, control, success driven) in the 1970s, and unique and direct communication (self-preservation, positive, expressive, and individualistic) in the 1980s. On the other hand, the collectivism orientation was strongest in the 1960s. The cultural values during this period can be directly mapped onto group orientation, relatedness, belongingness, and harmony (fun, teamwork, imaginative, loving, and caring).

Third Element: Mapping Artifacts with Events

The third element of the analysis focuses on the mapping the artifacts with events. The studies of Peanuts comic strips actually mapped well with actual events that happen, proving that cultural artifacts reflect historical events at the time, as shown in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3
Chart D: Cultural artifacts as reflection of important historical events.



1950s.

1957: This strip illustrated a scene of Charlie’s Brown wearing a coat and hat resembling those from the USSR. During that time, the US was in the Cold War against the USSR.

1960s.

1962: The strip illustrates Snoopy holding a strike sign. During

this year, there was a great New York City newspaper strike from 1962 to 1963.



1963: The strip illustrates Sally talking to Charlie Brown about her prayers at school. John F. Kennedy the established National Day of Prayer in 1963.

1968: The strip mentions Peggy Flaming, who won the Winter Olympics in figure skating in 1968.

1969: This strip illustrates that Snoopy wants to become the first beagle on the moon. This was the year when Neil Armstrong landed on the Moon.

1970s.

1974: This strip illustrated Linus sitting on the back of his mother's bicycle, while his mother mentions that she needs to go to the League of Women Voters. In that year, the League of Women Voters started to accept men as full members.

1976: This strip illustrated Snoopy wearing a Russian coat while coaching figure skating. This was the year when USSR won a gold medal in Winter Olympic figure skating.

1980s

1986: The strip illustrates Woodstock carrying a golf club. This is the year when Jack Nicklaus won the Masters Tournament.

1990s

1999: The phrase "You know who" was mentioned in this comic strip. This phrase that appeared in the children's book *Harry Potter*. The first Harry Potter book was first published in the United States by Scholastic in October 1998.

CONCLUSION

This artifact analysis revealed an important connection between cultural artifacts and culture. It demonstrated an important connection between institutions and practices in shaping culture. As demonstrated in the analysis, political, economic and social factors influence the cultural orientation. Furthermore, there is also evidence of the dynamics between the citizens and leaders of a country in directing the cultural values that the nation should strive towards. An unforeseeable force is working behind the scenes in establishing and influencing cultural values.

From an analytical perspective, the study of cultural artifacts not only helps us understand the differences between cultures across different nations, but it also helps us to better understand the evolution of culture within a single nation. It also shows us that culture is a dynamic concept and is not as stable as one would aspect. A highly individualistic nation may not be as individualistic as it has been described through stereotyping. Thus, in order to study culture, researchers need to be able to look at culture through a clear lens without any presumptions, stereotypes, or biases in order to appreciate the culture that they would like to study more fully.

LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could expand the coverage of analysis to other comic strips that were popular during the time period of interest, in order to see whether the results would demonstrate a consistent pattern. Another point worth studying is to look at different types of artifacts and their ability to reveal culture. Comic strips seem to be able to track cultural dynamics better than art works due to their shorter production times and greater ability to respond to cultural changes. Hence, certain types of artifacts may be better at portraying cultural dynamics rather than static forces of the culture.

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Appendix: Summary of the Overall Results

Elements in Analysis	Analysis Code	Results
Psychological Distance (Bang et al)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close Up • Medium • Wide view • Panorama 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The near psychological distance or analytic thinking style and individualism is at peaks during 1970s and 1980s. • While during the period of 1960s, the psychological distance or holistic thinking style and collectivism is more prominent
Attention to Categories (Cohn et al)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Macro-depict multiple active entities • Mono-depict single active entities • Micro-depict less than on active entity (as in a close up) • Amorphic – depict no active entities (i.e., only inactive entities) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 1950s and 1960s, American is more collectivism. However, the degrees of Individualism Culture has reached its peak during 1970s before turning back to more collectivism in 1990s
Cultural Theme Analysis	<p>Use hermeneutics method to interpret and reinterpret the text in the comic strips. The theme that emerges were coded as follows</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individualism • Freedom of choice • Success driven • Time value • Caring • Tough • Sharing • Appropriate time • Obedience • Demanding • Discrimination • Competitive • Teamwork • Ignorance • Athletic • Persistence • Persuasive • Imaginative • Direct • Abstinence • Expressive • Control • Social affluence • Fun • Dirty salesman • Considerate • Brave • Academic value 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1950s - ignorance, touch and sharing • 1960s – fun, teamwork, imaginative, loving and caring • 1970s – direct, control and success driven • 1980s – positive, self-preservation, sarcastic, expressive and individualism • 1990s – Determine, Realistic, Persistence, Confidence, Responsible, Obedience