

# “SOUP”

## *Brand Mythologies & Mytho-symbolic Worlds*

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September 2008

*Adapted From Mythmaking On Madison Avenue*

**The latent product mythology of brands** often hold the key to understanding the brand's mythology. For example, if you delve into the latent product mythology of soup – its history, facts and folklore – you will find that there is something very basic and primal about soup. There is something intrinsically comforting about a warm fluid. A warm bowl of soup seems to comfort both the body and the soul. In many cultures, soups and broths are also perceived as having restorative, almost magical powers. The image of a sick person being nursed back to health is archetypal, a universally recognizable image that can ultimately be traced to the image of a mother nursing her child.

Historically, soup seems to be as old as human culture. The first evidence of soup making occurred in the remnants of a simple grain soup used in the prehistoric times (7000 to 8000 BC). The word soup was probably derived from the German word *sop*, which referred to the bread used to soak up the broth. Soup has always held wide appeal. It is tasty, easy to prepare, and it has traditionally been the mainstay for the poor (from the Middle ages to modern times, as persists in today's soup kitchens.)

In the Middle Ages, the soup pot or cauldron was a fixture in most homes. In the larger homes it was a large cauldron, generally located in the center of the room. The notion of a stockpot or pot-au-feu probably came out to the image of the cauldron with its ever-changing broth enriched daily with whatever happened to be available.

And soup is most often associated with women, with the image of the *bonne femme* ladling soup from her kitchen kettle, an image of the mother lovingly serving soup to her child. These images are consistent with Campbell's soup brand essence and core image (mother love/nurturing.) Consumer research and the history and folklore of soup both point the fact that one of the most pervasive and enduring images of soup is a mother lovingly serving warm soup to her children. The more recent mother-soup association that comes out of the consumer research has undoubtedly been influenced and reinforced by Campbell Soup's advertising. Starting in the 1930's, mothers and children have been a central theme in Campbell's advertising. However, it is also clear that this image predates Campbell's Soup advertising – it originates in the history, folklore, and imagery surrounding soup.

**The Symbolic Connections Between Women and Soup.** You must seek to understand the soul of a generic product by examining the cannon of mytho-symbolic images that surround that product. Each image helps to illuminate some aspect of the product and, when taken as a whole, the mytho-symbolic images can bring a depth of understanding that other wise would be impossible. Understanding the symbolism that surrounds the Campbell's soup image (mother –child-soup) will help to maintain its brand mythology over the long term.

You can use the analogical approach (mythological amplification) to further your understanding of the symbolic connections among women, children and soup. At the most basic level, there is a connection between women and fluids. Citing Freud (The Interpretation of Dreams) Abraham (Dreams and Myths), Carl Jung says that “the maternal significance of water is one of the clearest symbols in all mythology.” (Jung, 1990, p.218). In mythology and the psychoanalytic literature, deep water symbolizes the womb and the unconscious. And in some sense the two are really one and the same, because our life begins in the unconscious watery realm of our mother's womb.

The first living creatures emerged from the “primordial soup.” This primal moment is re-created in the woman's womb – when we emerge from the amniotic waters of our mother. The ritual of baptism recognizes the connection between water and birth: the person is either submerged or doused with water to signify the rebirth into Christianity.

There is also a connection between a woman's menstrual fluids – a kind of life soup – and the primordial soup from which all life sprang. Camille Paglia, in her inimitable, provocative style, makes the connection between a woman's menstrual fluids and this “primordial soup”: Women have borne the symbolic burden of man's imperfections, his grounding in nature. Menstrual blood is the stain, the birthmark of original sin, the filth that transcendental religion must wash from man. Is this identification merely phobic, merely misogynistic? Or is it possible there is something uncanny about menstrual blood, justifying its attachment to taboo? I will argue that is not the menstrual blood per se which disturbs the imagination – unstanachable as that red flood may be – but rather the albumen in the blood, the uterine shreds, placental jellyfish of the female sea. This is the chthonian matrix from which we rose. We have an evolutionary revulsion from the slime, our site of biologic origins. Every month, it is woman's fate to face the abyss from which we rose” (Paglia, 1990,p.11)

**On another level, soup also symbolizes mother's milk.** Gaston Bachelard, the philosopher-psychoanalyst, traces the unconscious, symbolic connections between fluids – water and milk:

All liquid is a kind of water for material imagination...from a psychoanalytic point of view, we must say that all water is a kind of milk. More precisely, every joyful drink is mother's milk. Here we have an example of an explanation at two levels of material imagination, at two successive degrees of unconscious depth: first, all-liquid is a kind of water; then all water is a kind of milk" (Bachelard, 1983,p.117).

Since the dawn of creation and across all culture, humankind has conceived of a Great Mother archetype – the universal giver of life and nourishment. Neumann notes, "The clearest expression of this giving outward is the breasts, which typify woman as giver of nourishment" (Neumann, 1991, p. 123). Neumann makes reference to Briffault (*The Mothers*), who points out that "the Greeks believed that the first patera, or bowl, was molded from Helen's breast (Neumann, 1991, p123. Symbols of the breast are generally open, wide-mouthed vessels (such as a bow, goblet, or chalice, whereas symbols of the belly are closed (pot, egg, oven, or cave) (Hall, 1980, p. 53).

Jung makes mention of the fact that the root-word for mother's breasts, mama, is found in all languages (Jung, 1990, p.251). And one of the earliest images of feminine idolatry was the Cow Goddess. Mesopotamian Egyptians worshipped the Heavenly Cow. During droughts the Egyptians would milk their cows and let the milk run onto the parched earth in the hopes of appeasing the Cow Goddess so that she might bring rain.

There is, then, symbolic connection between a bowl of soup and the mother's milk. Both are warm, nourishing fluids given by the mother to her child. Both are served from containers that have similar shapes.

In *The Hidden Persuaders*, Vance Packard cites a quote from Advertising Agency magazine: "Soup is unconsciously associated with man's deepest need for nourishment and reassurance. It takes us back to our earliest sensation of warmth, protection, and feeding. Its deepest roots may lie in the prenatal sensations being surrounded by the amniotic fluid in our mother's womb" (Packard, 1957, p. 102) Packard's insights were influenced by the work of Ernest Dichter and the school of motivational research. Unfortunately, Packard's work was later sensationalized and to some extent discredited by people looking for "hidden, subliminal images of breasts in ice cubes." But Vance Packard was essentially right – advertising contains hidden persuaders, hidden emotional benefits that can motivate consumers to choose one brand over another.

The nurturing quality of soup is confirmed by consumer research. Consumers often admit that they derive both physical and emotional satisfaction from eating a bowl of soup. Many people turn to soup when they are feeling depressed and overwhelmed by the demands of life. These same people explain that soup is also a comfort food that not only nourishes and warms their insides, but also makes them feel safe and loved.

There is also a connection between the woman's belly/womb and the soup kettle. Again, Neumann describes the "elementary character" of the feminine archetype as "containing." He states that the central feminine symbol is "the vessel." The basic symbolic equation: Woman = body = vessel corresponds to what is perhaps mankind's – man's as well as woman's – most elemental experience of the feminine" (Neumann, 1991, p.39.)

For early cultures, the containing, vessel aspect of women often took expression in pottery that featured symbolic breasts. The Zuni women made breast-shaped pitchers. The left the nipple open until the pitcher was finished, then ritualistically sealed it off. The Zuni women believed that unless they performed this ritual, they would be barren or their children would die (Neumann. 1991, p. 123).

The Virgin Mother Mary was sometimes referred to as the "Holy Vase" (Harding, 1990, p. 136. Ships as vessels are therefore symbolically feminine. The ancient Greeks not only referred to a ship as *she* but also often used carved female figureheads on the bow. The captain was also referred to as the ships' husband and was expected to go down with the ship.

Jung touches on some of the feminine images and symbols in a summary description of the Great Mother:

The Mother symbol is archetypal and refers to a place of origin, to nature, that which passively creates, hence to substance and matter, to material nature, the lower body, (womb) and the vegetative functions. It connotes also the unconscious, natural and instinctive life, physiological realm, the body in which we dwell or are contained, for the "mother" is also a vessel, the hollow form (uterus) foundations of consciousness (Jung, 1933, p.24).

The containing, vessel aspect of the feminine character is in turn connected once again with the water and life:

The natural elements that are essentially connected with vessel symbolism include both earth and water. This containing water is the primordial womb of life, from which innumerable myths life is born...But the maternal water not only contains; it also nourishes and transforms, since all living things build up and preserve their existence with water or milk of the earth (Neumann, 1991, pp. 47-48).

There is yet another mytho-symbolic connection between the transformative power of the cauldron or kettle and the transformative power of a woman's body. The Great Mother is also the "Great Container." Her body is both an extension and instrument of nature, the cauldron containing the amniotic soup wherein we are first stirred to life. The creation of life in a woman's body is a reenactment of the primordial moment when life was created in nature – an example of ontogeny literally recapitulating phylogeny.

In the *Moon and the Virgin*, Nor Hall refers to the primary work of woman as “transforming”:

The work of woman is transformation: making something out of nothing: giving form to the formless energy. Her instruments in this work are tripod and cauldron, her elements blood and milk...She is both container and contained...She transforms matter and is herself transformed (Hall, 1980, p, 169).

Hall cites Neumann, who outlines the three blood transformation mysteries of woman. The first is menstruation, wherein the girl is transformed into a woman. The second is pregnancy – the transformation of a lifeless biomass into a new human life. At the same time pregnancy brings with it an archetypal transformation of the woman from a maiden to mother. And finally, there is a transformation of blood into milk.

Menstrual blood was also believed to have transformative powers – both good and bad – outside the womb. The blood of virgins, especially the first flow of a young girl, was considered especially potent (Hall, 1980, p. 173).

The cauldron, like the woman’s belly/womb, was believed to be an instrument of transformation and regeneration. It was a central element in alchemy as well as many religions. “The cauldron is believed to have the power to change base material into spiritual, the mortal into immortal” (Harding, 1990, p. 140). Soup is also thought to have magical, transformative powers. In pretechnological societies, medicine men and witch doctors often “heal” the sick (who are frequently malnourished) with a cooked chicken, sometimes in the form of chicken soup.

Worshippers of the ancient Moon Goddess used a silver cauldron to collect animal and human blood, which they believed had restorative powers. Ester Harding makes reference to the fact that Vestal Virgins and priestesses used the silver cauldron, *The Cauldron of Regeneration*, to collect the blood of first-born children, prisoners, and animals that were beheaded at the alter of the Moon Goddess (Harding, 1990, p. 138). The blood was offered up to the Moon Goddess and was believed to have regenerative powers.

In exploring the latent mythology of soup, and some of the mytho-symbolic imagery surrounding soup, we have come to a deeper understanding of “the soul of soup.” At the same time we have come to understand the basis for the nurturing mother child imagery that is the basis for the Campbell’s Soup brand mythology. Through mythological amplification, we have come to understand what gives the image of a mother giving her child a bowl of soup its recognizable archetypal power.