

When Maternity Encounters Innocence
Lin Mu

In February, 2009, Campbell's published an advertisement in Family Circle magazine for its product—Chicken *NoodleO's* soup. The ad depicts a background-blurred sunny scene of lunch where there is a very lovely red-headed boy leaning his little head on his pretty fists, looking downwards, and smiling sweetly as if he was drifting in his own dreamed fairy tale world. In front of him is a bowl of Chicken *NoodleO's* soup on the table. The designer then delineates a cartoon racecar “launching” from the soup with two wheels substituted by two noodle rings. In the upper-right corner of this ad are a slogan (“Nourish his body and feed his imagination”) and a 20-word introduction for the noodle soup. Following those are two sentences—“You’ll be thrilled when he reaches the finish line” and “*M’m! M’m! Good!*” Probably, nobody will deny what a warm breeze the picture blows toward its readers—from the bright morning sunshine, the innocent little kid and the cute child’s pose, which seems like a realistic neoclassic displayed in the British Museum, and most importantly from the food full of human care for children by their responsible parents, who are actually the major readers of this magazine. To boost the sales volume over its competitors, Campbell’s associates its Chicken *NoodleO's* soup with parental love and responsibility for the next generation.

This marketing strategy works very well in a market of monopolistic competition, such as the market for kids’ food. The game rule for such a market determines whoever wants to win a bigger share of the cake must distinguish his products from those of others, or at least make them plausibly different. Jib Fowles concludes there are two sorts of content from advertisements in this country’s media. He reports that the first is “the appeal to deeprunning drives in the minds of consumers,” and that the second is information about the product such as “its name, its manufacturer, its picture, its packaging, its objective attributes, [and] its functions” (75). For monopolistically competitive corporations, it is almost impossible to flourish only through the strategies of showcasing the second kind of content because in nature there is very limited difference between the products supplied by various factories. Therefore, it is a central policy for these enterprises to make efforts to invoke in parents’ specific emotion that could resonate with the sellers’ conveyed values in order to establish consumer loyalty for the product on the basis of some “deeprunning drives.”

In this sense, this advertisement for Campbell’s is very successful. Published in Family Circle, this ad has its default target readers—housewives, especially young mothers. Maternal instincts define most kids’ mothers as very emotional animals when they face issues or options about their honeys. Love of this sort for children is so strong that we can call it instinct because kids are like the continuation of their parents’ lives, often the bearers of their parents’ unrealized dreams and sometimes the only hope for many families in poverty or undereducation. For the good of their children, parents seldom hesitate to pay for love and to invest in the future, especially when they find their children have dreams at young ages, which can further trigger the outpouring of their love. As a result, parents enthusiastically pay for their children’s dreams, which on the other hand means money in the pockets of the commercial corporations.

If mothers see this ad for Campbell’s, they can see the boy looking at a launching racecar. They will treat the racecar as a representation of his young dream. In addition, they will see the two Chicken *NoodleO's* wheels as the dynamic force for the racecar and the great support for the dream. In the same direction as the racecar to the kid, there is also a bowl of Chicken *NoodleO's* soup from which the racecar is “launching.” Can mothers refuse to help their kids to realize their

dreams? Can parents scrimp on their children's future when food is much less expensive than their own clothes? No, it is impossible. The all-out support for children's dreams is the sublime virtue of parents' love. Parents have the need or even the aspiration to achieve their kids' dreams. The need to achieve, as Fowles says, "is the drive that energizes people, causing them to strive in their lives and careers" (82). Chicken *NoodleO's* soup just fulfills parents' need to achieve their unsophisticated and instinctive goal of assisting their kids in the march of their ambitions. Then the payment for the fuel for the innocent dream has to deservedly become the destiny and duty for any loving parent.

However, a further observation of the picture leads to doubt. The soup and the racecar are interchangeable since you can hardly decide from the first impression which one exactly the kid is looking at, the racecar which stands for the dream or the soup which represents the product. In fact, this is probably an intentional design to link the product to the dream so as to artificially make the soup more meaningful for consumers. What is more, does the racecar belong to the kid? No, because it is intentionally drawn by the advertisement's designer. Nonetheless, the parents may not focus on this detail or even want to search for the truth at all. They would rather believe that Chicken *NoodleO's* soup may serve as some kind of force capable of pushing their kids' dreams forward because they expect to see that their children have visions. At least, they will prefer this food in some sense instead of others because this ad has given parents positive feelings about their kids' future, even though they only believe that food can offer their children some basic everyday energy without anything for dreams. In both situations, the ad has won the readers and consumers.

If the readers of this ad read the text, they will probably first see the slogan, "Nourish his body and feed his imagination." Here, the ad's designer combines together the two notions—"Nourish his body" and "feed his imagination"—which are originally unrelated actions but in this situation charmingly setting off with the picture of this ad. This slogan injects idealistic vibrations into an empirical consumption, successfully creating a mixed association exhibited to the public, which can manifestly increase the positive acceptance of the values the ad imparts and the product the ad presents. The readers may read more details and notice the sentence: "You'll be thrilled when he reaches the finish line." This is a semantic double entendre, isn't it? When "the finish line" refers to winning in a race, Chicken *NoodleO's* soup can offer energy to contribute to the kids, which is reasonable in some sense. When "the finish line" refers to succeeding in life, Chicken *NoodleO's* soup can do nothing real to forward this goal, but this is still reasonable because parents would rather accept that there is something that can really cast their children's dreams. Also, if focusing on "*M'm! M'm! Good!*" you will be shocked how powerfully a kid's petition can influence their parents' purchase. When the boy so eagerly tells his mother how he likes the flavor of the soup and how he would like to have more, can a mother's deep love for the kid not be aroused? Can a mother not be proud of choosing this food with the feedback from her kid to appreciate his mother through confirming what she gave him? Can a mother resist her child's simple desire to have a little more even if the kid has not said that aloud? If all the answers are no, then this is what the ad's designer expects—to convey the information of the product's popularity through kids' voices to persuade their parents to pay for the food. No wonder Campbell's registered "*M'm! M'm! Good!*" as an exclusive brand.

Campbell's, through photographing a knockout boy in a lunch scene, portraying his figurative future and typing a few simple words, spreads the feelings of the parents and the children. It energetically heightens the profound love of parents for their children, forcefully telling parents the necessity of purchasing its Chicken *NoodleO's* soup. It irrefutably wins

consumer preference, triumphantly harvesting its marketing tactics—to differentiate its individual characters from those of other brands. We may have to admit that the sentimental marketing strategies of this kind are even more convincing than sexual progressive suggestive fashion for ads, at least for many demographics if not all. Humanity can really increase the philanthropy in one's soul for children, for family, for friends and for society. It is these strategies that secure the definitive success of the advertisement of Campbell's.

Then, how influential is a successful Campbell's advertisement? Statistics collected by McNeal indicate that about \$24 billion per year is directly spent on children, who also have influence in their family on household spending worth an additional \$500 billion. Through a well-designed ad, Campbell's will win a larger share of the billion-worthy market. At the same time, it will win a large number of consumers in the long run. As Moore, Wilkie, and Lutz find, children are now considered as the campaign target "aiming at forging brand loyalties at an early age" (qtd. in Moore 161). Klein also reports that "the pre-school audience [...] is an important demographic, recognized for its value in building brand loyalty early on" (qtd. in Kunkel and Ford 402). Nevertheless, this is not the ultimate goal for Campbell's, since as Mr. Callahan, Vice President of global business development at Campbell's, said, "We can win on a worldwide basis and own the world's soup bowl" (46). For an enterprise in a monopolistically competitive market with this global ambition, Campbell's has seemingly made its own way—to get profits by selling sentiment rather than products alone. As the wise designer of this advertising strategy, Campbell's is seeing its success.

Works Cited

- Chicken *NoodleO's* soup by Campbell's. Advertisement. Family Circle Feb. 2009: 71.
- Fowles, Jib. "Advertising's Fifteen Basic Appeals." Common Culture: Reading and Writing about American Popular Culture. 5th ed. Ed. Michael Petracca, and Madeleine Sorapure. New Jersey: Pearson Prentice-Hall, 2007. 75-82.
- Kunkel, Dale, and John Ford. "Predicting a renaissance for children and advertising research." International Journal of Advertising 24.3 (2005): 401-405. Business Source Complete. EBSCO. Denison University, Granville, OH. 8 Feb. 2009 <<http://0-search.ebscohost.com>>.
- McNeal, James. "Kids' Markets." American Demographics 20.4 (1998): 36-41. MasterFILE Premier. EBSCO. Denison University, Granville, OH. 12 Feb. 2009 <<http://0-search.ebscohost.com>>.
- Moore, Elizabeth. "Children and the Changing World of Advertising." Journal of Business Ethics 52.2 (2004): 161-167. Business Source Complete. EBSCO. Denison University, Granville, OH. 8 Feb. 2009 <<http://0-search.ebscohost.com>>.
- Pollack, Judann. "Campbell's Callahan wants to 'own world's soup bowl.'" Advertising Age 69.40 (1998): 46. Academic Search Complete. EBSCO. Denison University. Granville, OH. 8 Feb. 2009 <<http://0-search.ebscohost.com>>.

**Commentary by Kevin Lynch
'11, English and Music**

When I first read Lin Mu's paper, what immediately struck me was the immense value he placed on every word and phrase in his paper. Rather than impartially choosing words to convey his meaning, Mu chooses words and phrases that mean something to him. In the first paragraph, I realized that Mu was not just writing this paper because it was an assignment; he was writing it because he wanted to be invested in it. With phrases like "Nobody will deny what a warm breeze the picture [Campbell's Chicken soup ad] blows toward its reader," Mu does something many writers fail to do – he makes his words matter. One of the best examples of this idea comes later in his work. He writes, "Maternal instincts define most kids' mothers as very emotional animals when they face issues or options about their honeys" (2). The unique thing in this sentence is in the last word. Mu uses "honeys" to describe a mother's child. He could have easily chosen a word like "children" or "kids," but "honeys" has a unique feel to it – it conjures an emotion in the reader who remembers back to his or her own childhood experience of sitting at the kitchen table waiting for mommy to set a bowl of Campbell's Chicken soup on the table. And it is that feeling that the reader gets that is special, that make Mu's choice of words so powerful. But it is not just the words that make Lin's paper so strong. How Mu attacks the assignment is unique as well. For Mu, the analysis of the advertisement does not stop on the surface. He discusses every angle, every minute detail in multiple ways, peeling back the layers and layers of messages that the advertisement is trying to get the reader to notice and feel. And with these two factors, Mu's paper becomes an example of great word choice and an example of the deep level of explanation of detail that a writer needs when communicating with readers.