

SELLING SYNTHETIC FIBERS THROUGH FASHION : LYCRA THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY

What happens when a product takes on a life of its own, consumers defy predictions and the market and commodity chains change out of recognition? And what happens when a strong public culture of R&D is discontinued? This is what happened to Lycra, one of the most important of the synthetic fibers invented by E. I. Dupont de Nemours (Dupont). Created for a female market that was transformed by the social changes of the 60's and later, this paper which includes long-term ethnographic work shows how, despite the formidable Dupont marketing machine, Lycra lost its intended market, and then found a new one without Dupont's assistance, among the emerging New Women of the 80s. As time went on, the tight marketing focus and strong R&D that had gone into Lycra in the beginning, became diffuse and at the same time, the market and chains changed as they went global. The paper shows how Dupont attempted to keep abreast of these developments, then decided to sell its once-renowned Textile Division – and what happened to Lycra in the hands of its new owners, Koch Industries, who bought the Dupont Textile Division in 2004 and then sold it to Chinese interests in November 2017.

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