Rayon's Introduction to U.S. Consumers, 1911-1924

Carmen Keist
Western Illinois University

Sara Kadolph
Iowa State University

Sara Marcketti
Iowa State University, sbb@iastate.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/aeshm_pubs

Part of the Fashion Design Commons, Fiber, Textile, and Weaving Arts Commons, and the Industrial and Product Design Commons

The complete bibliographic information for this item can be found at http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/aeshm_pubs/72. For information on how to cite this item, please visit http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/howtocite.html.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Apparel, Events and Hospitality Management at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Apparel, Events and Hospitality Management Publications by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.
Rayon's Introduction to U.S. Consumers, 1911-1924

Abstract
The article focuses on the introduction of Rayon in U.S. market. The term was coined by the National Retail Dry Goods Association in 1924. It was created in 1846 in Europe and the U.S. manufactured it in 1911. It was the first regenerated fiber and before its introduction, only cotton, linen, wool and silk were used in making clothes.

Disciplines
Fashion Design | Fiber, Textile, and Weaving Arts | Industrial and Product Design

Comments
This article is from Journal of Family & Consumer Sciences, April 2012 104(2); 45-47. Posted with permission.
Rayon’s Introduction to U.S. Consumers, 1911–1924

CARMEN KEIST
SARA KADOLPH
SARA B. MARCKETTI

Before the turn of the 20th century, only four natural fibers were used to make most clothing: cotton, linen, wool, and silk. With the introduction of rayon, the first manufactured regenerated fiber, science revolutionized the fashion and apparel industry. Rayon was created in Europe in 1846 and first manufactured in the United States in 1911. It was the only available manufactured fiber until the 1924 introduction of acetate. Some authors have noted that World War I helped promote rayon's usage due to a shortage of silk, but more information is needed regarding the early use of rayon to help expand students' knowledge in apparel courses (Field, 2001).

Formerly called “glos” by trade organizations, the new fiber was referred to as artificial silk, art silk, fiber silk, fiber, chemical silk, manufactured silk, scientific silk, rayonner, and rayon silk by the popular press. In May 1911, a Good Housekeeping article “The Selection of Silks,” stated “artificial silk” was made from cellulose, but continued to call the fiber “silk.” It is likely that readers would assume that “artificial silk” was another type of silk rather than a different fiber altogether (Waite, 1911). The name “rayon” was coined in 1924 by the National Retail Dry Goods Association (Avram, 1927; Kauffman, 1993). One author explained that the name rayon “Conveyed the meaning of the radiance of bright sunshine, tempered with the soft glimmer of rippling waters in moonlight” (Glos gives way to rayon, 1924). The production and consumption of rayon increased steadily during the 20th century from 4 million pounds in 1911 to over 9 million pounds in 1913 (Mauersberger & Schwarz, 1939). By 1938, “U. S. rayon consumption was 300 million pounds and exceeded wool consumption for the first time” (Kauffman, 1993, p. 887).

During the early 20th century, rayon was used for clothing, accessories, and home furnishing products including hosiery, sweaters, blouses, draperies, and bed spreads. Rayon products were durable, noted for their comfort, softness, absorption capabilities, and low cost compared to silk (Kadolph, 2007). During the 1920s, when production of rayon skyrocketed, almost 75% of rayon was used in cotton mixes, hosiery, and underwear (Taussig & White, 1931). A producer of taffeta petticoats stated that their goods “looked and feel like silk” with “3 times...
the wear of silk at 1/3 the cost” (Heatherbloom Taffeta Petticoats, 1916). Consumers were able to “dress, from the skin out, in attractive, silky clothing” (Bjorklund, 1917, p. 377-378).

Although rayon provided numerous advantages including luster and reduced cost, the diverse terms used to describe the product must have confused consumers. Since the Textile Fiber Products Identification Act (TFPIA), which requires manufacturers to list percentage of fiber type in order of predominance in clothing, was not passed by Congress until 1958, consumers were provided little information about fiber content or how to care for their new rayon products (Kadolph, 2007). This lack of knowledge undoubtedly resulted in ruined fabrics because the hot irons normally used for cotton could singe and burn rayon beyond repair. Furthermore, even when textiles were labeled, numerous fabrics were mismarked, according to a study published in The Journal of Home Economics. A fabric labeled “artificial silk” in actuality was a mixture of cotton and silk, another fabric labeled “union silk and linen” was in fact “more than half cotton, with the remainder artificial silk” (Hickmans, 1920).
Perhaps due to some of these problems, Women's Wear Daily authors suggested the differences between silk “the real thing” and rayon “the under-study” were numerous (Artificial silk imports increasing, 1912; Silk and artificial silk, 1912).

The early history of rayon, “an industrial achievement” (Kapock Sun-Fast Fabrics, 1916), can be discussed with students in history of dress and textile science courses. To bring to life the importance of the TFPIA, provide students with an image such as Figure 1 and ask them to differentiate between the silk and rayon products. Then, ask students to list the expected serviceability components of goods made from silk and rayon and discuss which product they likely would have purchased. If instructors have available extant rayon and silk products from the early 20th century, students can examine, compare, and contrast the products’ hand, drape, texture, luster, and consider appropriate care for the garments.

References
Artificial silk imports increasing. (1912, July 26). Women's Wear, p. 4.