Qiana Nylon: Dupont Chemical Company Attempt to Offer a Replacement for High Cost Silk

S. Diane Barnard
Auburn University, USA

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The early 1970s saw the growth in popularity of synthetic fabrics of all kinds such as Qiana nylon, polyesters, ultrasuedes, lycra, acrylics, and orlons. By 1980, Qiana and other synthetics were becoming victims of a consumer backlash against synthetics and they began to be used less, eventually fading out of production altogether (Klapper, 1983).

Nylon is a true synthetic. It is not made from regenerated vegetable or animal matter but from the chemical benzene plus hydrogen and oxygen. In February 1935, DuPont Chemical Company produced a synthesized polymide substance which was named nylon 6,6. In approximately five years from its invention, it was introduced for commercial production revolutionizing the textile industry (Hague, 1957; Kastens, 1965).

When Qiana was introduced to the textile market in 1968, it was the only other nylon since the development of nylon 6, 6 in 1935, that had significant commercial use. DuPont promoted Qiana as a commercial yarn with the silk-like appearance of a luxury fabric, a yarn with dimensional stability, and a fabric having a high wrinkle resistance (Grayson, 1984). DuPont's *Technical Bulletins* for home sewers promoted the qualities of the fiber, its easy care, no-iron properties, and provided the consumer with techniques for making garments of Qiana.

DuPont aimed its promotional launch in 1968 at the women's high fashion industry, promoting Qiana as a replacement for costly silk. The wedding industry employed the fiber extensively but it was not suitable for the lighter-weight lingerie market. Sales were high in the United States but not in the European haute couture industry. In November 1972, as an example, there was no Qiana in the largest of London's Oxford Street stores while there were plenty of other expensive fibers seen in store windows. Many sales personnel had never heard of the "Qiana" (Moncrief, 1975).

A content analysis methodology was employed in the examination of several women's magazines and trade publications. Examination of *Vogue* magazines dating from April 1973 to October 1975 illustrates the use of Qiana in the commercial market of women's bridge price point clothing. The October 1975 issue of *Vogue* magazine showed an ankle length gown of Qiana with a cowl neckline, soft, long sleeves, and a blouson waistline in keeping with current fashion. Although DuPont tried to persuade haute couture designers to use the fiber in place of silk, their efforts were not successful due in part to the high cost of the fiber to the textile mills. Analysis revealed that by 1976, no garments of Qiana were shown in *Vogue* magazines.

Analysis of the trade magazine *American Fabrics and Fashions* showed that the first advertisements for Qiana nylon were in the Spring 1974 issue. The fiber continued to be mentioned from Fall 1974 to the Fall/Winter 1978 issue after which there are no more advertisements. Klapper (1983) reported that DuPont managers stated that by 1980 the demand

for Qiana was so low that textile mills did not make any appreciable quantity. As a result, DuPont halted production in the early 1980s.

Information about Qiana was scarce. Suggestions for further research include an extensive content analysis of many other women's magazines and trade publications to create a more complete picture of the use of Qiana in women's apparel. The growing contemporary men's market of the 1970s was not analyzed. Further research in that area paired with the findings of the women's apparel market could yield a more complete picture of the use of Qiana. Analysis of advertisements in magazines of the late 1970s may give some evidence of the decline in consumer demand for Qiana in favor of newer and more natural fibers.

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