

The Mini Skirt
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When I was six my mother and I took one of our weekly day shopping trips to the mall. On our way back we stopped at this local thrift store. This being one of the first times I had ever experienced one, everything seemed so different and weird, in a good way. I wasn't used to there only being one of everything, or one store that sold clothes, books, toys, home decor and shoes. Walking down the 'bottoms aisle' is where I first came across it. It was black and flowy, probably a cotton material, with a black elastic band around the waist. I wanted it, I needed it. It was the perfect mini skirt. It reminded me of the one I saw Regina George wear in the Hallway Scene in the movie 'Mean Girls' a few months prior and had to get it, even though it was a "little" big. There was only one, I was going to make it work.



When Monday came I wasted no time showing off my new skirt at school. It made me feel like a whole new person. At some point of the day however my teacher had stepped out of the room to talk to another teacher, in conjunction one of my classmates playfully grabbed my pencil out of my hand, to which I decided to chase him around the room to retrieve it back. I tripped and my skirt fell right to my ankles, in front of the entire class. At least I didn't fall into a trash can though, right?

Regardless of this incident mini skirts have remained one of my favorite garments until this day. And believe it or not the mini skirt dates back to 5400-4700 B.C according to archaeologists who have discovered European figurines sporting the timeless trend (Bourne,2014). Years later, in 1926, the french dancer Josephine Baker made a debut in a miniskirt made of bananas during her performance of the "Folies Bergère" in Paris (Bourne,2014). However the mini skirt didn't really become popular in the United States until the mid 1960's.

I am a huge fan of the mini skirt. Whether its denim, velvet, corduroy, lace; button up, snap or zip up: you can definitely expect to catch me in one. I feel like they are a very versatile garment and even though they are made to be very sexy and feminine, pairing them with tights, long thigh high boots or sneakers, as opposed to high heels, can change the overall look and feel of an

individual's outfit. In my opinion the mini skirt is a trend that will never really go out of style, especially now that there are so many different styles where even the most conservative or most tomboy can rock them too.

Mary Quant, a British fashion designer, is known as the inventor of the mini skirt and left a huge mark in fashion history ever since (Limone, 2018). She started selling clothes that reflected the ideas of the youth at that time yet differed from established Paris fashion houses (Lehnert, 2000). However, along with her another designer, André Courrèges, is known as the garment's inventor as well. He did for France what Quant did for England, and eventually America. He started experimenting with hemlines in 1961 but showcased his futuristic, space-age minimalistic dresses which scandalously fell above the knee in late 1964. Similar to Quant, Courrèges shocked the fashion world. Contrary to Quant, his designs were intended to sport more a more elegant and sophisticated look, which, in turn, helped make the miniskirt acceptable to society and French haute couture (Cawthorne 1999).



1965 Colin Rolfe's "White Shift Dress" 2018 S/S Gucci Stretch Viscose dress with Velvet Trim

Above are two very similar dresses from two very different decades. The first is a dress that was made specifically for Jean Shrimpton, an English model/actress, by her dressmaker, Colin Rolfe in 1965. Shrimpton had attended the Melbourne Cup Carnival in Australia to judge a fashion competition while promoting Orlon, DuPont's, new acrylic fabric. The textile manufacturer however did not provide enough fabric to complete the original design, which led Rolfe no choice but to improvise, completing the hemline 4 inches above Shrimpton's knee. This caused quite the buzz not only because dresses above the knee were not commonly worn out in public

but she wore the mini skirt with no stockings, hat, or gloves (Safe, 2105). As far as material the dress was made from Orlon, which is a synthetic fiber.

The second dress made by Gucci is made out of 75% viscose, 17% nylon and 8% elastane. It is described by the Gucci website as “a short sleeve stretch viscose dress with contrast multicolor pressed velvet torchon with crystal trim.”

It's quite uncanny, to say the least, that although 53 years apart in creation both dresses share such a resemblance. They are neutral, same cut sleeve length and rounded neckline. Even the neck trim of the Gucci dress resembles the necklace accessory Shrimpton chose to wear with her dress.

Jean Shrimpton wore the White shift dress made by Colin Rolfe in 1965. The second dress made after 1980, a Gucci Stretch Viscose dress with Velvet Trim, was wore by a Gucci model on their website for their Spring 2018 collection.

Potentially the first dress could be worn by any everyday woman, ranging from low to upper class. You can find a simple white dress like this anywhere from JC Penney's to Lord and Taylor so this includes, but isn't limited to; an assistant, teacher or professor, real estate agent, broker, lawyer, banker, politician, etc, all of whom might wear the dress to their workplace. The second dress on the other hand would more than likely be worn by upper to middle class business professionals, fashion executives, fashion stylist, celebrities, celebrity makeup or hair stylist, and fashion innovators or influencers due to its price point (\$3,500). These group of people might wear this dress to attend a radio or tv interview, fashion show or other event or even the workplace or an internship if worn with tights or stockings and a blazer perhaps.

The fabric choice definitely doesn't dictate wear these people would wear the dress as opposed to the length, which might statute whether someone would wear it. More often than not an individual wouldn't chose to wear a mini skirt to church or a wedding due to its length. The material is made out of three-fourths Viscose which is a type of Rayon (Gucci, 2018). There are so many different types of Rayon which can be made to imitate other fibers such as cotton, silk, linen, and even wool. Meaning, although the dress maybe short and sleeveless it can keep you warm or cool, and it can also be layered and paired with other things making it more appropriate for different occasions.

The who isn't so much what inspired me to choose my topic as opposed to the what. When deciding the textile I wanted to talk about for my paper I first thought about pieces of clothing that I actually love to wear. Denim, bodysuits and fur are all things that came to mind. Eventually I decided on the Mini Skirt, however I couldn't find any pictures of anyone wearing a Mini skirt before the year 1980 so I broadened my topic to the Mini Dress to where I was able to find a picture of Shrimpton.

Colin Rolfe's white shift dress was made out of the fiber Ofelin. “Olefin is a manufactured fiber in which the fiber-forming substance is any long chain polymer composed of at least 85% by weight of ethylene, propylene, or other olefin units, except amorphous polyolefins qualifying under rubber” (iTextiles, 2015). Olefin is a synthetic fiber made from a

polyolefin, polypropylene or polyethylene being the most common types due to its variety of applications and low cost (Prospector).

Polyolefins are the biggest group of thermoplastics, substances that become plastic from heating and harden from cooling and are also able to repeat the same process. Polyolefin consists of simple olefins such as butenes, isoprenes, ethylene, propylene, and pentenes, and copolymers as well (Gooch, 2011).

The Gucci Stretch Viscose dress is made from Viscose, nylon and spandex. Viscose is a type of Rayon, also known as artificial silk. The name actually comes from “a viscous organic liquid used to make both rayon and cellophane” (Barnhardt, 2018).

Rolfe’s 1965 Dress was more than likely made through a process called extrusion, injection molding, blow molding, and rotational molding methods, which is how polyolefin is made. Although thermoforming, calendaring, and compression molding are used, it is to a more minimal lesser caliber (Fabric University).

As far as the Gucci garment, the manufacturing process of viscose rayon starts off by processing the purified cellulose, then producing the filaments and ends with spinning. A sheet of purified cellulose is steeped in sodium hydroxide which makes sheets of alkali cellulose. These sheets are then dried, shredded into crumbs and left in metal containers where the temperature and humidity is controlled anywhere between 2-3 days (Frietas, 2017). After the crumbs are mixed with liquid carbon disulfide, which turns the mix into orange crumbs (sodium cellulose xanthate). The cellulose xanthate is soaked in caustic soda which makes a viscose solution that appears like honey (Frietas, 2017). Dyes, if any, are added and the solution is filtered for impurities and stored in vats between 4- 5 days (Frietas, 2017). To produce the filament the Viscose solution is next turned into strings of fibers by use of a spinneret (Frietas, 2017). The filaments now spun into yarn. Pot Spinning, Spool Spinning, and Continuous Spinning are a few spinning methods that could be used during this process. After the yarn is ready to be weaved in order to produce the fabric. The end fabric can be finished through a number of different treatments. These include, wrinkle resistance; calendaring, which controls smoothness; fire resistance; pre-shrinking and water resistance (Frietas, 2017).

Polyolefins itself means "oil-like" this alludes to the waxy type of feel that these materials have. So the process Rolfe’s dress was made definitely gives the fabric a somewhat more shiny appearance. For Gucci on the other hand the end result of viscose typically looks silky depending on what it is made into. Polyolefin is strong but lightweight, lightest fiber, fast drying, color fast, abrasion resistant, stain-, resistant, and odor-resistant and non-allergenic. This makes wear very comfortable and convenient garment which is most likely why the Rolfe chose this fabric. Gucci’s Viscose dress is likely to breathe really easily, it is loose and also a cellulose fiber. It is mostly very comfortable and gentle on the skin. Viscose is also hydrophilic meaning it absorbs water, smooth, drapes well and inexpensive (Frietas, 2017).

The design of the 1965 Colin Rolfe's "White Shift Dress" is very loose fitting and boxy, unlike most dresses made today that are more tight and form fitting. The mini dress didn't actually become a popular trend until the late 1960's, thus being the reason Jean Shrimpton received so much backlash after her appearance in her's in 1965. However it was becoming common amongst this time that females no longer covered themselves with long skirts and stockings and neglected to show bare skin, especially when in the public eye. The young people of this era started to get tired of the conservativeness of their society and wanted to make a change. After the Vietnam War people were more socially and financially stable, which led to the youth receiving more money from their parents and becoming the new leaders of fashion.

Not only were the short dresses and skirts different from what society was used to for so many years but so were the bold colors, prints and patterns that started to become popular in the 1960's as well, which were different from the 1950's more moderate approach to clothing. In my opinion, the mini dress/skirt started gaining its popularity because people, in general, became more open minded about sex. After the birth control pill was approved by the FDA on May 9th, 1960, girls weren't as afraid to dress more daring and sexy than ever before. Women felt more free not only regarding their personal life decisions but in selecting their outfits.

The designers choice to use Olefin was most likely because women during this time period were starting to enter the paid workforce after dramatic cultural changes in the United States. Olefin's characteristics of strength, durability, comfort and color fastness were some great qualities for the workplace.

The 2018 Gucci Stretch Viscose dress is definitely a tad bit more modern than Rolfe's dress. It features a lot more textures, color and detailing. While the Shift Dress is more Plain Jane, the Gucci dress consists of contrast of multicolor pressed velvet tuchon and a crystal trim. The front trompe l'oeil bow is meant to emanate Gucci's collections romantic vibe. Although the Ivory piece seems very loose fitting the material, viscose, is stretchy. Viscose is also breathable and great for creating a luxurious look at a more affordable price. I definitely feel like females today care more about others opinion and being seen in finer quality which is why olefin works for this garment. And although you can find a dress in 2018 that looks similar to Rolfe's from the 1960's the Gucci Viscose dress is more adventurous.

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