Hula Hoop Encyclopedia Article

Hula Hoop

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Hula Hoop

One of the simplest concepts in toy design, the hula hoop deserves the title of the most popular, mid-twentieth century fad. In 1958, children and fun-loving adults were reeling and wiggling, trying to spin the four-foot, plastic hoops around their waists. Marketed by the toy manufacturer Wham-O, the hula hoop was introduced to the public in California and quickly became popular throughout America. The craze crossed both oceans; within a year hula hoops were a mania in Europe, the Middle East, and Japan. Approximately one-hundred million hoops were sold in the first year of the toy's production.

When two young chemists working for Phillips Petroleum discovered a durable, heat-resistant, and inexpensive plastic (Marlex), the material turned out to be perfect for the production of the kind of hoops that were used in exercise gyms. American children loved the fun of gyrating like a hula dancer to keep the colored, lightweight plastic rings aloft. The hula hoop craze introduced the public to the plastics industry that would produce everything from baby toys to automobile parts as the twentieth century progressed.

Further Reading:

Asakawa, Gil, and Leland Rucker. *The Toy Book.* New York, Knopf, 1992.