

Shoes and Self

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SHOES AND SELF

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ABSTRACT -

Based on questionnaires, observations, and interviews in 1990 and 2000, it is clear that to most Americans, their footwear is an extension and expression of themselves. The study finds strong gender differences, with women being more alert to the symbolic implications of shoes than men. Shoes affect our perceptions of others and our perceptions of self, including our passage into adulthood. Among the magical transformations we attribute to shoes is their ability to supercharge our athletic performance. Not only is footwear an extension of self, it also acts as a repository of memory and meaning in our lives.

How lovely are thy feet with shoes, oh prince's daughter (Song of Solomon 7:1)

Shoes are totems of Disembodied Lust. They are candy for the eyes, poetry for the feet, icing on your soul.

They stand for everything you've ever wanted: glamour, success, a rapierlike wit, a date with the Sex God of your choice, Barbie's wedding dress. Shoes hint that attaining those things is just as easy as slipping them on your feet. They seem to have the magic power to make you into someone else, someone without skin problems, someone without thin hair, someone without a horsy laugh. And they do (Pond 1985, p. 13).

An initial impression might well be that there is no more ordinary and unremarkable consumption object than shoes. For some of the people included in this U.S. study the impression is accurate-buying, wearing, caring for, and disposing of shoes is for them a necessity with which they concern themselves as little as possible. But far more commonly, shoes are seen as highly significant articles of clothing that are regarded as expressing the wearer's personality and perhaps as even capable of magically transforming them into beautiful, handsome, happy, confident, or heroic people. Shoes are seen by most of those studied as revealing age, sex, and personality and as creating moods and capturing memories. For adolescents, shoes are a key signifier of their identities, and the shoes they desire often conflict what their parents regard as appropriate. Shoes appear as a key vehicle through which adolescents and young adults work out issues of identity, individualism, conformity, lifestyle, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and personality.

This paper draws on portions of two studies conducted in 1990 and 2000 in Salt Lake City, Utah. I began with a half dozen depth interviews and a small scale student survey involving ideas about footwear. I subsequently enlisted 96 university students (32 in 1990 and another 64 in 2000) to examine their wardrobes and write-up an autobiography of their shoes in a manner suggested by the work of Kopytoff (1986) and Lofgren (1990). Each student subsequently conducted semi-structured depth interviews with two non-students and prepared transcriptions. The students in the 2000 study also conducted and wrote-up observations of shoe buying behaviors. While the shoe autobiographies come from university students primarily in their early twenties, the interviews include a wider set of people ranging in age from 16 to 74. Just under 10 percent of the 288 interviews and autobiographies were from people born outside of the U.S., and they are excluded from the present analysis.

SHOE SIGNIFICANCE FOR MEN AND WOMEN

The small, non-representative, survey of 30 students in 1990 revealed that men owned an average of 12 pairs of shoes or boots while women owned an average of more than 30 pairs. Men, however, paid approximately \$25 more for their most expensive footwear. The depth interviews and shoe autobiographies conducted in 2000 support these findings, but only after excluding two women who paid more than \$1200 for their most expensive shoes or boots. Interviews and autobiographies also revealed that while no male reported owning more than 30 pairs of footwear, several women had over 100 pairs and a dozen owned between 50 and 70 pairs.

The survey also found that women were significantly more likely than men to agree with statements that:

- * I often look at what shoes women wear.
- * I often look at what shoes men wear.
- * I like to window shop for shoes.
- * I would like to buy new footwear soon.
- * I often buy footwear to indulge myself.
- * I have a difficult time throwing out old footwear.
- * Some of my footwear has sentimental meaning for me.
- * There is at least one pair of my footwear that I will probably keep forever.

Men were more likely than women to agree that:

- * I have had erotic thoughts about women wearing certain sorts of shoes or stockings.
- * For me, shoes are just a utilitarian thing and style doesn't mean much.

Nevertheless, both sexes overwhelmingly rejected the latter statement. Shoes are seen by both men and women as important and shoe styles, color, condition, and match with clothing are seen as telling cues for making inferences about others.

These findings are supported by other work on shoes. The average American woman is said to own 30+ pairs of shoes and 88 percent of women buy shoes that are a size too small (O'Keeffe 1996). Americans buy approximately a billion pairs of footwear a year and 80 percent of these are estimated to be purchased for purposes of sexual attraction (Rossi 1993). Shoes figure prominently in stories and fairytales, including Cinderella (a highly sexualized tale in its more original versions-e.g., Bettelheim 1976), Puss n'Boots, Seven League Boots, The Wizard of Oz, The Red Shoes, and The Old Woman who Lived in a Shoe, as well as more contemporary tales (e.g., Bird 1998; McMurtry 1982; Nicholson 1997; Wolfe 1987; Vonnegut 1987). Shoes and our desire for them are the objects of art (e.g., Cotton 1999; West 2001; Warhol 1998), satire (e.g., Alderson 1998; Pond 1985), museum exhibitions (e.g., Michell 1997; Pratt and Woolley 1999; Ricci 1992), films (Turim 2001), and exposTs (e.g., Goldman and Papson 1998, Vanderbilt 1996). And they are the objects of a growing number of histories, catalogs, essays, and tributes (e.g., Beard 1992; Caovilla 1990; Cox 1998; Girotti 1997; Mazza 1994; McDowell 1989; Patterson and Cawthorne 1997; Steele 1999; Sunshine and Tiegreen 1995; Trasko 1989; Yue and Yue 1997). As all of this attention suggests, what we wear on our feet is far from a matter of indifference or utilitarianism.

SHOES AND IDENTITY

Rites of Passage

In other times and places including Scotland (Wright 1922) and Mexico (Heyman 1994), the mere possession of shoes was enough to confer status, with the rich being known as "people with shoes." In other contexts, including American adolescence, the type of shoes worn is the more critical marker of age and economic status. One of the more common rites of passage involving shoes, is a young girl's symbolic transformation to womanhood through her first pair of high heeled shoes. The poignancy and meaning attached to this purchase is evident in reports such as this one:

I was in 6th grade when I decided I was ready to venture into the world of womanhood; I needed to bless my virgin feet with their first pair of high heels. I began to save every penny and nickel I earned. I even charged one of my father's houseguests rent for staying in my room. Every time my family went shopping, I begged to go see if "my" shoes were still there, to make sure that nobody had stolen them away from me. When I finally had enough money, my mother took me to Payless to get my shoes. I was so thrilled. She kept asking me if I was sure I wanted those shoes, those white, fake-leather, sandal-like shoes with a two-inch cork heel. Undaunted, I walked out of the store in my shorts with my new high heels on. I wore my new shoes home proudly, feeling like a real woman, sexy and mature.

Just as more traditional rites of passage involve suffering a trial or an ordeal, many women reported that they suffered blisters, sprained ankles, falls, and embarrassment on first wearing heels. Although high heels are the most common shoe rite of passage for young woman, some also reported that first owning ballet slippers, non-orthopedic shoes, or pantyhose were their marks of becoming a woman.

Obtaining and wearing certain shoes was also seen as a rite of passage for men during their adolescence (see also Barthelemy 2001).

When I was around twelve years old, I always wanted to have a pair of leather shoes. There were couple reasons why I always wanted to have leather shoes, especially black leather shoes for school. Firstly, it was about time that I left grade school and got ready for junior high. I felt a pair of black leather shoes could upgrade my status from being a kid to a teenager. A pair of leather shoes could make me feel that I was more mature and a lot more independent. The reason why I felt that way because my parents determined not to buy leather shoes for their kids until they graduated from grade school. They felt kids were kids and they didn't need to wear expensive things. However, they felt that graduation from grade school reflected that kids were more knowledgeable and self-disciplined than before.

Unpopular shoes during childhood could also be stigmata (Goffman 1963). Some of those whose parents' forced them to wear unpopular footwear resigned themselves to wearing the hated shoes until they wore out or were outgrown, while others resorted to more devious strategies of superannuating their shoes.

Thanks to some tasteless blue light special-Mom and Dad arrived home one night with a large sack full of shoes. The shocking thing was that only one of us at the time was in need of a new pair of sneakers. We peaked into the sack only to find ten pair of bright green sneakers. My first thought was how UGLY they were. Of course, who could pass up a good \$1.99 per pair deal-certainly, my parents couldn't! From then on over the course of 3 years my brothers and I were forced to wear those awful shoes.

One of my childhood memories in regard to shoes was when my father made me purchase a pair of shoes because they were "sturdy". I came from a large family where money was a concern and, therefore, each of us as children only owned one or, if you were lucky, two pairs of shoes. This situation made it more important that

the shoes purchases were of good quality. Needless to say, my father made me purchase "sturdy" shoes. In this particular case, the "sturdy" shoes were ugly. I hated them. It was only my father's persuasive personality that made me break down and say I would wear these shoes. I wore the shoes, but hated every second. I purposely tried to destroy them. I kicked walls, knocked them against curbs, and dragged them along the sidewalk while riding my bike. However, nothing would destroy these shoes. To my great dismay, they were truly "sturdy" shoes. I ended up wearing them for what I felt was a very long, long time.

What I would do, is get on my skateboard; and I'd go out and ride my skateboard and sit down on my skateboard and get going fast down a hill and drag my feet down the hill.

The role of parents as gatekeepers in deciding when it is time for the sought-after rite of passage shoe is evident in these comments. By keeping children in their childhood shoes for longer, these parents are perceived to be withholding adulthood (or the next stage of adolescence) from their children. There is some indication of the importance of these developmental status symbols in reports of sleeping with the desired shoe once it was acquired. Such shoe attachments are similar to those of transitional objects which symbolically bridge the gap between child and absent parent (e.g., Gulerce 1991, Winnicott 1953), except that in the present case they are more accurately separation objects which reflect the newly independent status of the child from the parent.

By Their Shoes Shall We Judge Them

If shoes are thought to be expressive of self, it is likely because we judge others within our culture according to their footwear. One woman began by stating that she had an open mind when it came to shoes worn by others, but her subsequent comments call this judgment into doubt:

I don't think I have too strong of an attitude about what men and women should wear on their feet....I don't like women wearing shoes that look too much like men's business shoes....I also don't like it when women wear spiked heels that look like the type of thing some of the women on State Street wear. I like wild shoes as long as they are tasteful, but four-inch clear plastic heels just doesn't do anything for me. I also think that the shoes that look like nurses shoes or orthopedic shoes are the worst thing ever invented to put on your feet. Sure they might be comfortable to wear, but they are ugly as sin! For mens' foot wear, I have a hard time with men wearing sandals, especially the full footed type like huaraches....I also think that men should never where white shoes unless they are tennis or running shoes or unless they are in a wedding line. I don't know why it bothers me so much but I HATE mens' white dress shoes!

Strong negative expressions like hate were common in evaluations of certain shoe styles worn by men and women.

There is one kind and women's footwear that I just cannot stand. High, high heeled shoes. I hate them with a passion. I have never understood how women can stand to wear them. I wonder if they know how stupid they look when they attempt to walk in them. What is even funnier is that you know their feet are killing them. I would much rather see a woman in something more practical such as short pumps or flats. The only other footwear that I have strong thoughts about are faddish shoes. For instance, Vans "off the wall" tennis shoes. Those things drove me crazy. More recently is the fad of having steel tipped shoes and boots.

I like women's shoes to be classy and feminine. The ultimate turnoff for me in a woman's dress shoe is when it is cut so low that you can see the cracks between her toes. I'm not sure why I don't like this, perhaps its like seeing what I affectionately term "plumbers butt," which Dan Akroyd made famous on Saturday Night Live.

I hate it when people wear black shoes with blue jeans; with black or grey jeans it's okay, but I think it looks stupid with blue jeans.

In other cases shoe styles worn by others were the basis for applying stereotypes and categorical labels to these people.

When a person wears sandals or orthopedic shoes, I automatically stereotype him or her as a granola or very idealistic and radical.

Preppies have the penny loafers, and thrashers, all they wear are hightops, and stuff like that...it just sort of goes with them.

I don't like 'rapper' shoes. I don't like combat boots because they scare me because I know the people who are wearing them are probably racist.

Because shoes carry many connotations, they quickly reflect different personalities and interests. Cowboy boots suggest one is from the country; extremely high heels insinuate promiscuity; and hiking boots reflect the new "back to nature" lifestyle.

As part of the last comment suggests, high heels were highly valued, by both men and women, for their sex appeal, verging on fetishism for some. As Veblen (1899) noted, high heels not only incapacitate a woman, but also signal her class, inasmuch as such shoes preclude manual labor.

Nevertheless, because of different values and lifestyles there is a lack of consensus about whether certain stereotype-evoking footwear is good or bad. Consider for instance the cowboy boot, a uniquely American contribution to footwear fashion (Beard 1992).

One of the most unattractive looks for men is the business suit and cowboy boot combination that is somewhat popular in Utah. Every time I see that, it makes me cringe. Those silly high heeled, pointy toed things definitely belong on the range and not in the board room. They look fine in their place, but absolutely ruin the effect of a pinstriped suit.

I think it is great when men wear cowboy boots. I don't know what it is but I love boots. My grandpa has about eight different kinds of cowboy boots- snake skin, eel skin, etc., and they look so sharp.

Rightly or not, cowboy boots, for me, now symbolize everything that I can't stand; F-Dudes, big belt buckles, people who call their girlfriends and wives their old ladies, people who poke along in those muddy four-by-fours slowing traffic to a stand still, and worst of all redneck pride and mentality.

There is a certain classificatory zeal evident in the first comment above, which sees cowboy boots as appropriate in some contexts, but now in others. This is not just an outsider's perspective. For those who wear cowboy boots, there are even more specific canons of what

represents appropriate footwear.

As I got older style became more important to me. I grew up in a small town and became a cowboy. I recall the need for cowboy boots, both as functional and for style. The first pair I bought was an impulsive act. I had \$35.00 in my pocket and I saw a pair for \$29.95. They just happened to fit. I was so proud to wear boots. However, when my peers learned I bought a cheap pair of Acme's, I was again humiliated. Real cowboys wore Tony Lama boots, and paid well over \$100.00. This was an early '70's price. I can't remember the next pair of boots I bought, but from then on I bought quality.

As I became more serious about being a cowboy, I realized the importance of quality boots. Cowboys do funny things with their expensive boots. I got heavily into rodeo and rode saddle broncs and bulls. The cowboy boot is a very important tool for rodeo riding. I had a pair of Justin brand boots that I had to modify for riding saddle broncs. I cut the inside of the heel off to form a deep pocket for the stirrups. This aided in keeping my feet in the stirrup while riding the bronc. I then cut a slit all the way down the back to allow my foot to slip out in the event I got bucked off and my foot hung up in the stirrup. A good, expensive pair of boots is needed to hold up to the abuse of riding broncs.

I needed a different pair of boots to ride bulls. This pair needed to be as tight and deep as possible because besides your hand, your feet kept you on the bull. If your foot came out of your boot, you lost your spurring ability and you'd be bucked off. In 1974 I bought a pair of Tony Lama's that had a good riding heel, was 15 inches deep and cost close to \$200.00. I slit the front and back slightly to aid in tucking in my pants while I rode. I still have those boots today. And with a bit of polish every now and then, I still wear them for dress sometimes. This is the best quality boot or shoe I've ever purchased.

During my cowboy days it was also in style for what we called 'freak shoes.' These had big, blocky heels with wing tips on the toes. It was o.k. to wear them for fashion to most any place we went. But don't be caught wearing them to a rodeo. Not only did they provide no function, but they simply were not 'cowboy.'

The American cowboy heroic myth is invoked by these boots, along with the characteristics associated with this myth, including rugged individualism, independence, quiet strength, and alienation from civilization (see Cawelti 1971).

Having the appropriate regional footwear props can also be instrumental in affecting self-image (McMurtry 1982). Other boots may have similar effects (Lyon 2001). This is not unlike the magical transformation envisioned in tales like Cinderella in which a glass slipper is both a symbol of identity and a key part of the magical transformation of a poor and unimportant girl into a beautiful princess (see Philip 1989). Such transformations of self-image are much in evidence in the present study, as the next two sections reveal.

Shoes and Self Transformation

As with most aspects of consumption, relationships with shoes are not so much person-object relationships as person-person relationships mediated by objects, in this case shoes. Whether self image is changed by shoes because of actual feedback from others or because of the reactions we have learned to expect from wearing certain shoes in certain situations, donning shoes can be a self-transformative experience. Like Cinderella, part of the magic of shoes is in having something new and different on your feet. A part of the incentive for buying new shoes is in attempting to renew this magical newness.

She said that ballet shoes make her very conscious of her feet. She also said new ballet shoes make her want to dance and make her feel like she will be able to dance better than before. New shoes "make me want to be a great dancer."

His childhood memories were mainly of his black canvas low top tennis shoes. He remembers quite vividly that he and his friends thought "new shoes make you run faster".

Converse is a brand that comes to mind. Getting a new pair was always exciting because you feel like your athletic abilities were going to increase; jump higher, run faster, etc. As kids, I feel that we are all caught up in this.

The shoes I'm wearing often effect how I feel about my entire appearance. I think my new shoes look good. I think I look good.

I love new things, and I always enjoy getting new shoes. They add zest to my wardrobe and give my spirits a lift, especially my dress shoes.

For adolescents, having objects that physically or psychologically aid in performance of a skill can be important to developing a sense of identity (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981). Moreover, some informants report feelings of magically acquiring new skills by donning special shoes.

I also remember my tap shoes that I wore for dancing. I really thought I was a wonderful tap dancer. I would try to wear my tap shoes everywhere, my mom use to get upset with me when she would notice that I had my tap shoes on to go outside and play. I guess the tap shoes made me feel like I could do something that other kids couldn't do.

Those first toe shoes meant you were older and really ready to dance. I got mine before a lot of other girls in my class and I was really proud. It meant I was stronger and more prepared than the rest.

The most fondest [sic] memory I have as a child is when my grandpa bought me a pair of cowboy boots. It was a [sic] event in my life when I was either six or seven years of age. It might have been a birthday but I can't exactly remember. I can recall exactly the store that we bought them at, it is now a clothing store. The boots itself [sic] was the type with a square front and also a buckle on the side. I can't remember if they were leather or not. At that time it didn't matter too me. The reason I can remember this so well is that I had a cowboy hat, gun, and holster to go along with my boots. My outfit went together so well that I had pictures taken of me in my backyard. The only other memory I have of those boots are those of going to school with them. I really don't think anybody else noticed them but I sure did, in fact, I think it even boosted my confidence while I had them.

The special transformative functions of shoes do not disappear with adulthood. If anything, shoes may provide more specialized transformations among adults. Consider the following accounts of adult men.

Dress shoes place me in a sense of responsibility and authority. I feel more noticeable in a quality pair of dress shoes.

I always felt cocky in my cowboy boots, after all they looked good and they made me a few inches taller. I remember going out several times and feeling good about the way I looked and felt. Sometimes the girl I was dating was almost taller than me and the boots gave me a little advantage (not just in height either).

My cowboy boots are only worn when I feel like getting dressed up and/or feeling tall. You see, cowboy boots have a heel on them that can add to your height and make you seem taller. I think this effect may be a reason why cowboys like to get in fights. When you feel taller, you feel like you are bad. You feel stronger and meaner. Though I never have personally fought because I've worn cowboy boots, I have experienced the feelings earlier described while in cowboy boots, and have actually hoped and wished for a fight.

Adult women also report transformative effects from their footwear, some of which are like those of men wearing similar shoes.

I like cowboy boots. When I wear my cowboy boots, I feel rugged, outdoorsy and masculine. I like how they make me feel tall, I feel like I can dominate when I wear cowboy boots.

When I'm wearing flats I get mean, or at least I'm ready to get mean. If I had to I could fight with flats, like if a smart ass was beginning to bug me, I would be more inclined to throw down with her or him. Whereas when I'm wearing heels I'm always a lady.

I act and feel different in different pairs of shoes. In Keds I feel sort of "Bee-Boppy" and high spirited. In my more athletic tennis shoes I feel like a "jock" . In high heels I feel regal, businesslike, and sexy.

I find when I wear high heels I never fully relax. They put me in a formal state of mind, and I feel I have to walk straight, sit straight, and speak correctly.

Just as the right pair of shoes can provide a magical transformation of self, their lack can prove devastating as one woman whose special shoe order was unsuccessful recalls:

I had to wear another pair of shoes that I really hated, and that turned out to be a very embarrassing time in my life. Having the wrong shoes really ruined the entire Prom.

Similarly, other women reported that:

If I do not like the shoes I am wearing and feel ugly or inappropriate it makes me grouchy, unsociable, and insecure.

My white keds are my favorite shoes because they are casual, comfortable and easy to wear. They reflect a simple, down to earth attitude. Conversely, my dress shoes make me feel conservative, formal and serious. It is difficult to be comfortable and easy going while wearing nylons and heels.

I will change from outfit to outfit just because the shoes are wrong and I often have a pile of shoes on the floor. My need to look right and feel right can often get out of control. And it is essential to have my look complete in order to feel complete.

Besides acting as magical transforming devices, shoes can also act as disguises or cloaks of invisibility to hide behind as two other women observed:

I also get really paranoid when I feel my shoes look stupid or the color is wrong or something. I mean I really get fixated on them, I can't seem to look people in the eye, and my whole day is shot. I rationalize many of my purchases with the fact that I am short. Fashion experts tell us that in order to draw the eyes up and create the illusion of height, short women should wear the same color of shoe and hose as her skirt. Of course, it is for this reason that I have many different colors of dress shoes.

And also because I hate my ankles I am particular about the styles of shoes I wear. I prefer to wear either high top tennis shoes with scrunched socks or a boot of some kind. I am teased about it a lot, but I just can't stand for my ankles to show. I have been known to go home just to change shoes. I also dislike most colored shoes. I do own my share of them, but they always seem to stand out and I end up feeling very uncomfortable.

Athletic Shoes and Performance

A special category of transformative shoe is the athletic shoe. Given the \$200 million dollar annual U.S. advertising expenditure by makers of such shoes, it is perhaps not surprising that people come to believe that their athletic performance is greatly affected by the shoe they wear (Bloch, Black, and Lichtenstein 1990; Telander 1990, Van Pelt 1988). Athletes also recognize the psychological advantage that having the latest footwear may give them over competitors (Albert 1984, Nash 1977). While it is estimated that over 80 percent of the athletic shoes sold are worn for fashion are not used for their avowed purposes (Pereira 1988, Telander 1990), the focus in this section is on those that are used for their intended purposes. Perhaps because the advertising for these shoes stresses the performance benefits they provide, it is such benefits that are cited by many athletes (sometimes almost verbatim) as the reason for their preferences in athletic shoes.

My snow boots don't make my feet look small, delicate or attractive but they do serve the purpose of keeping my feet warm and dry. Similarly, my athletic shoes are not extremely flattering but they serve the purpose of protecting my body and feet while I exercise. For example, my Nike Air jogging shoes maximize performance, protect my joints and provide comfort while I run. The fact that the shoes are bulky and bright pink is irrelevant. My main concern is that they maximize performance and protect my body.

The shoes that I run in are generally Nike. They have a good reputation for support and comfort. It's important to have a good padded sole for bounce and arch protection. So I purchase a pair with a good reputation that will have mercy on my feet.

...bicycling shoes have got to be stiff. They have got to be stiff to be efficient. If they are not stiff, you've lost a lot of energy. You also have to determine which type of cleat system works with your bicycle. Hiking boots must have deep treads on the sole [sic] and a stiff toe so you can kick steps into snow and ice. Running and racquetball shoes must have a lot of cushion in the sole [sic] in order to absorb the shock that can cause

damage to your knees, ankles, and shins. Name brands in these shoes are important because...the larger companies do more research into the product they are producing, which results in a better product. You can also read about and compare name brands in magazines and books to determine which brand will suit you best.

Despite the existence of "cross-training shoes" intended for multiple sports, there is a belief in this sample that each sport requires distinct footwear with different features.

Shoes are very important to our society. Without the appropriate shoes I would not be able to run, hike, play tennis, ski, scuba dive, bike, golf, or participate athletics like basketball, baseball and football. Each of these activities requires a specific kind of shoe.

If athletic performance improves with a new specialized shoe, the tendency is to attribute it to the shoe. If performance does not improve, the shoe must not have been good enough and another may be seen as warranted. Heroic stories of shoe performance sometimes result, as the following stories attest.

...I guess I really do owe my life to this pair of boots. Two summers ago, while backpacking in the Tetons in Jackson, Wyoming, I found myself crossing a very steep slope just a few feet above large glacier that headed almost straight down and ended in mass of huge granite boulders. There was no trail across except for footholds that someone had made with an ice-ax. These footholds were just big enough to get my toes into and to make things worse, the ground was composed of very loose sediment that the glacier had deposited as it started to melt in the summer weather. The slope was steep enough that, while standing straight up, I could touch the ground at eye level with my hand. The crossing was about 50 yards across and, with a 60 pound backpack strapped on, I started across. Every step was a new adventure in experiencing fear. Several times, after carefully testing each foothold, I started to slide only to finally have my toes and boots find semi-solid footing. I seriously thought that I was going to die in a 1,000 foot, high speed, decent that would end in a pile of boulders. I thank my boots for getting me across that trail and afterwards I swore that I would never do anything so stupid again. When coming back down the trail I went a mile out of my way to avoid the crossing. I think that this was by far my most memorable event in the life of my feet.

I once borrowed a pair of soccer boots from my friend and tried it for several soccer games. I liked it very much and found it very efficient in the game. It made me feel strong before the other players. I could kick the ball for a longer distance.

Probably my most memorable pair of shoes, as a child, was a pair of baseball shoes made by Pony. To me, this pair of shoes was one of God's greatest gifts. They were extremely comfortable and they could make tracks in the dirt like no other pair could. I always had total confidence in my footing and I know that gave me more confidence as a baseball player. I became emotionally attached to that pair of shoes and every year for the next five years I had a brand new pair of the exact same make, style, and color. I could not believe that not everyone who played baseball was wearing these "perfect" baseball shoes.

Given this sort of perceived effect of athletic shoes, especially those for high risk sports, salesperson expertise is often relied upon in making purchases and high price is more of a comfort than an impediment.

I have rock climbing shoes which are a must for climbing although functionality definitely outweighs comfort. I climb every couple weeks during the summer. I use my chest-high waders 3-4 times per month for fishing. I take great care in storing these just right so that they last longer. What's funny is that I take better care of these waders than my dress shoes which cost twice as much. I have a pair of hiking boots and a pair of ski boots. I demand performance out of these which is how I justified paying for top quality (the ski boots cost \$350).

Nevertheless, some informants recognize that the benefits of top of the line athletic boots may be psychological more than physical.

Furthermore, athletic shoes may improve performance psychologically as well as physically. Advertisements are continually insisting that proper shoes are mandatory for good performance. Therefore, any increase in performance due to new Nike's may, at least in part, be attributed to the power of advertising and the psychological benefits derived from owning Nike Air's.

Others also recognize that the benefits may prove illusory.

I was debating whether I wanted to pay \$80 for the shoe. It sounds kind of strange, you know, you get it, you can't wait to use it, you want to go out and play basketball so you go out and play only to find that euphoria type of feeling quickly wears off and then it just becomes a regular shoe-it hangs out in the closet with the rest of them.

Even in the last account it can be seen that there is a longing to believe that special shoes will magically improve the performance of the athlete. Shoes are seen as an essential part of the ritual garb needed to transform the amateur athlete into a superstar (Gmelch, 1971). However both these and the magical transformations discussed in previously are specialized cases of the more general symbolic function of shoes in the development of self from childhood to adulthood.

CONCLUSIONS

As a second skin for our fragile coddled feet, our footwear helps perform feats we could not attempt without them. Shoes are liminal objects that keep us pure and apart from the excremental contagion of the earth. Whether dancing, running, skiing, jumping, or presenting a cultivated self-image, our footwear is an indispensable part of our lives. We could much sooner get along without automobiles, televisions, computers, CDs, and even clothing than we could do without our shoes. But it is not, or no longer, their simple functionality that we value. This paper has reported only a portion of the findings from the shoe study. Shoes are also richly memory-laden consumption goods that are seldom disposed of with impunity. Ballet dancers keep garbage bags full of old, functionally useless toe shoes, women keep closets full of shoes they will never wear, and men keep closets full of athletic footwear that has long since ceased to be usable. As such clinging to these useless possessions suggests, shoes act not only as temporary carriers of our identity in the contexts in which we wear them. Rather, shoes move from being identity prosthetics and props for self presentation to being seen as inseparable parts of our extended selves. It is as if part of our selves and our experiences have seeped into the leather and fabric of our shoes and resides there indelibly.

There are strong elements of magical beliefs in our regard for shoes. As the many Cinderella tales suggest, we often believe that shoes can transform us. Not only will our appearance be different with coveted shoes upon our feet, our lives will be changed utterly. With the right

brand and model we will become mysteriously alluring, amazingly swift, prodigiously agile, and delightfully rhythmic. For this we are often willing to endure the pain of tortuously designed shoes. We long for the day we can first wear high heels, leather shoes, or any shoes at all. Shoes have long been involved in our rituals from home building to marrying and from coming of age to death. While athletic footwear may be portrayed as the epitome of high technology and engineering, dress shoes are better regarded as works of art. At both of these extremes shoes are ideally imbued with magic.

We also seem to delight in making inferences about others from their footwear. Shoes convey taste, social status, gender, cultural capital, and information about age and self-regard. They inform our ideas of beauty, character, and sexiness. They are more than the foundation upon which we stand. They are the foundation of our sense of self. They can convey wit, irony, fashion sense, seductive intent, aggressiveness, boldness, and other elements of self. Our soles are the mirror of our souls. We feel and act differently in different shoes.

And shoes are a key target for consumer fantasies and indulgence. It is little wonder that shoe stores dominate the shopping mall. As shopping has become entertainment, shoes are an important object of desire and delight. As this tentative analysis suggests, even when they are flippant and frivolous, shoes are serious objects of hope, joy, and sorrow. They separate us from the dirt and symbolic impurity of the ground and elevate our status and gendered sense of self.

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Self-righteous and goody two-shoes are semantically related. In some cases you can use "Self-righteous" instead an adjective phrase "Goody two-shoes". Synonyms for Goody two-shoes. Self-righteous. Show Definitions. Self-righteous adjective " Excessively or hypocritically pious. Goody two-shoes and self-righteous are semantically related. Sometimes you can use "Goody two-shoes" instead an adjective phrase "Self-righteous". Synonyms for Self-righteous.