



Stilettoes and Power: What I Did for...

Love? Money? Power?

BY JOHANNA SHIRA YOUNER, DPM

The following essay is excerpted from It's all about Shoes: A Collection of Essays, Poems and Stories About Women and Their Unusual Relationship to Shoes (Plainview Press), edited by Pam Laskin, by permission.

From women of a certain age (that is, over forty), I hear the refrain every day, "I have a closet full of beautiful shoes, and none of them are comfortable! Can you operate on me to make me fit into my shoes?"

The variations on this theme are (from women in their thirties), "My closet looks like Carrie Bradshaw's," meaning "filled with fanciful, sexy high heels." Over forty, the refrain goes something like, "My closet looks like Imelda Marcos' closet," meaning, "My poor closet contains 800 pairs of unworn shoes." With a pair of Manolo Blahnik stilettoes retailing for over five hundred dollars, the investment is significant, especially if we are unable to wear these shoes.

Why Do We Torture Ourselves?

Women have a history of self-scarification in the name of cul-

tural significance. The ritual of foot binding to create a pair of sexy (but useless) feet went on in China until the white Christian missionaries got hold of the Chinese women in the early 20th century. The binding ritual denoted higher status in society. Foot binding meant you were a sexualized object, not a worker in the fields.

Only the great toe was left alone.

The pain of literally breaking growing bones was only part of the ritual. The risks of foot binding included infection and gangrene. In about two years, the binding was completed and the bound foot was, at most, four inches long, with the curve under the foot being the sexualized area.

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A woman with bound feet was unable to walk without assistance. The bound foot, itself, was also a sexualized object, as the bound foot was used during sex as an adjunct vagina.

The foot binding process started at age six, with nightly binding using long linen cloths. The binding was done every evening by a female relative. The lesser toes were bound under the front of the foot, and the whole foot was bound together, trying to meet the heel to the toe area.

In modern times, we look at this ritual and consider it barbaric. How much more barbaric is it to shove one's foot into a shoe that looks nothing like the purpose to which it was born, i.e., to protect the foot and control walking?

It's All About Shoes

The most basic shoe advice to women who cannot find a comfortable shoe to wear is simple. Compare

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your foot to the shoe you are considering. If the shoe does not resemble a foot, chances are, this is not a comfortable shoe.

Fashion dictates the height of shoes. The addition of a platform under the forefoot can make a formerly 4" stiletto into a 6" heel. This platform is modern and sexy. The height of the heel adds slimness to the body, a curve to the back, bum, breasts, and calves. One looks sexier and thinner with the addition of the heel. But with the cost of long-term high heels being deformities such as painful bunions, hammertoes, and neuromas, as well as the more mundane corns and calluses, we can ask, "At what price for beauty?"

Lawyers say that jurors in uncomfortable shoes are not easily swayed. High-end saleswomen in diverse fields are very unwilling to part with their high heels. These women find power in their heels. Their self-worth in business comes partly through their uniforms of heels and suits. These businesswomen use their heels and outfits as suits of armor in a difficult world. Despite a com-

job at hand. If you place an average, square-shaped foot into a stiletto shoe, the foot will become contracted. The back of the leg will also contract, forcing the Achilles tendon to become shorter. Recent studies have shown that the muscle cells in the Achilles tendon are changed and shortened after two years of wearing

Walking around New York City in high heels, although glamorous, is a high price to pay for beauty. Have we not, as women, come further than purposely deforming our feet for the sake of beauty and power?

Carla Bruni-Sarkozy wears ballet flats. As the wife of the President of the French Republic, Nicolas Sar-

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high heels. One of the first signs of the economic downturn in 2008 in New York City was real estate brokers pounding the pavement in their high heels to sell property in a time of panic. These brokers developed stress fractures, and ended up wearing huge CAM walkers (healing, ski-boot type affairs) for six weeks, instead of their former fabulous shoes.

The use of injectable fillers has helped this area of pain and hammer-toes. A difficult and painful hammer-toe can temporarily be helped with

kozy, she plays on the world's stage. Academy Award-winning director Sofia Coppola is known for her gentle but spot-on fashion sense. In the powerful arena of film-making, she wears flats as her calling card. These women are not grasping for an identity or hiding behind antiquated and time-honored foot gear to indicate their ability and power. Their works speak for themselves.

So why do we do this to ourselves? The costs of wearing improper shoes are so high. Do we really want a permanent reminder, via neuromas and other painful foot scars, of the battles of yesteryear, waged in our stilettos? The advice to patients is simple: Wear what is comfortable. Wear what fits. A two-inch heel should be enough power to close the deal. A client is not wagering a multi-million dollar deal on the strength of your shoes. However beautiful, works of art, including unwearable shoes, should be relegated to fashion museums, not to our feet. Be kind to your body. It will thank you. **PM**

Fashion dictates the height of shoes.

mon-sense approach to their corns, calluses and foot pain, stiletto-wearing businesswomen who see these heels as part of their uniform are simply unwilling to part with their heels, no matter what the physical price.

Looking at their shoes, the three-inch heels and pointed toes appear as weapons in the male-dominated world of business. Their gym-toned bodies and tight business suits usually indicate that these women, despite looking for a cure for their pain, are not going to negotiate their heels to a lower spike, or thicker heel. Many women are willing to undergo painful surgeries to shorten their toes, simply to fit into their shoes.

The human body is extremely adaptable, and will mold itself to the

fillers like Juvederm. The process of this simple, albeit expensive, treatment can help a woman fit into her shoes more comfortably, but there are laws of nature at work here. If you continue to put your foot into ill-fitting shoes, a situation will be created by the deforming forces of the shoe.

These deforming forces will create a deformed foot, which is anathema to the sexy, capable female ideal we are trying to project. Wearing a more comfortable shoe day-to-day, and changing into the shoes we need for our competitive, challenging situations is the obvious answer.

I absolutely respect a woman's desire to look beautiful and sexy for her date, for an event, or to appear powerful at a business meeting.



Dr. Youner is an active expert spokesperson for the APMA (American Podiatric Medical Association) and an Executive Board member of the New York State Podiatric Medical Association. A board certified foot surgeon, she received her Doctorate of Podiatric Medicine from California College of Podiatric Medicine in 1990.