

Female High Heel Shoes: a Study of Comfort

A C Broega; M Righetto; R Ribeiro

University of Minho, Centre for Textile Science and Technology, Textile Engendering
Department, Campus Azurém, Guimarães, Portugal
cbroega@det.uminho.pt

Introduction

Protection, was the basic principle that made man to create the footwear, once he felt the need to protect their feet from direct contact with soil, heat, cold and sharp objects. Footwear is an object composed by many cultural traditions that have many dimensions, as indicators of social class, gender, status, beyond protection. Its importance is enhanced even by Greek Mythology, in which Zeus has gifted Hermes with winged sandals that allowed him to fly [1]. Even then the shoe was seen as a mystic and possessed of supernatural powers that go far beyond its physical dimension.

In fashion, the footwear icon represents a transformation, since the models may make remembering different epochs, from the past or to the future. Fashion trends influence the shoe design, the model, the height or shape of the heel, or in the format itself.

The peculiarity of this accessory, that resembles the clothing, with which it is possible to identify some characteristics of the individual personality, depending on the style model of the shoe worn.

"Our choice of shoes reflects our personality, they reveal if we are audacious or distinct, conservative or free spirit (...) shoes communicate our desires for a specified social status and lifestyle, as well as proclaim our needs for power and sex " [2].

Among the many elements that make up the universe of women's footwear, one in particular has a singular symbology, the "high-heeled". This element leads to the manifestation of two classes of audiences very different, those who love and those who complete reject it. For many it is considered a symbol of femininity and seduction, but others consider it a suffering and submission symbol. O'Keeffe claims that this accessory can place Women in a position of power and control, which is the main focus of seduction and femininity [3].

The orthopaedic professionals recommend the occasional use of high-heeled shoes only, as they may create serious health problems, involving deformities of the toes, postural damage, and muscle shortening, among others.

The comfort in shoes is associated with the shoe fitting the foot. It is essential that at all stages of prototyping and manufacturing of the footwear (...) are based on "forms" that respects the anatomy, physiology and biomechanics of the feet" [4]. When analysed the production of a high-heeled shoe, often can be seen that to achieve an attractive design, comfort is disregarded. Despite the medical alert, the high-heeled shoes in many women arouses devotion, may be linked to the symbolism related to this. "The association between high-heels shoes and sensuality is related to the fact that it produces changes in the female body. The increasing of heel-height causes changes in the hip movements, the bust and buttocks become more evident, and create an effect of legs elongation, the use of this accessory creates in the mind of the consumer a sense of psychological comfort in relation to her powers seduction" [5].

Experimental Part

This research aims to analyse female's shoes, especially high heel shoe, trying to understand the affective relationship that this accessory sets in the mind of the consumer and how far she is willing to abdicate in benefit aesthetics [6]. For the development of this work, a literature search was led and served as a foundation for the second phase of research in which a survey was conducted with 574 women through online platform. The questionnaire was comprised of 28 questions divided into six parts, seeking in this way to facilitate the collecting, comprehension and analysing the data.

When the results were analysed it was found that for the sample, the comfort was the most important criterion when buying shoes and they do not have the habit of using high-heels shoes, for more than 4 hours daily. It was verified that the majority does not use high-heel shoe (over 5 cm), but when asked what type of shoe would they like to use more often, the vast majority indicated the shoes models with high heels. This demonstrates that most women are not satisfied with the type of shoe that they use, the lack of ergonomic features may be the explanation for women to desist from using the product they want to guarantee their comfort. When trying to understand the psychological perception of the interviewees, was found that the high-heels represents for a large part: beauty and femininity, however, was remembered by many as a sacrifice and discomfort.

Final considerations

Conclusively, the respondents replied how they felt when using high-heeled shoes, a significant part claimed that the accessory provides psychologically the feeling of being more feminine.

The research demonstrates that the high-heeled shoe is an accessory that has a high aesthetic power in the minds of consumers. This association is part of the symbolism that this type of shoe has, because it is an almost unique element of the feminine universe. Despite its symbolic power and its cargo of seduction and femininity, the relative comfort of this accessory was more important for women, that despite wishing to use the high-heels shoes, end up preferring the welfare of low-heeled shoes. These results demonstrate that the footwear sector, a strong segment of the world economy needs to invest in research and development, seeking to combine comfort and aesthetics in high-heeled shoes.

Keywords: Shoes Comfort, High Heels Shoes, Fashion Accessorys

Acknowledgments

“This work is financed by FEDER funds through the Competitivity Factors Operational Programme - COMPETE and by national funds through FCT – Foundation for Science and Technology within the scope of the project **POCI-01-0145-FEDER-007136**”

References

- [1] Danesi M, *Of Cigarettes, High Heels, and Other Interesting Things: An Introduction to Semiotics* 2st edition, New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 1999
- [2] Fischer-Mirkin T, *O Código do Vestir*, 1st edition, São Paulo, Rocco, 2001
- [3] O’Keeffe L, *Shoes*, 6st, New York Workman Publishing Company, 1996
- [4] Seale K, Women and Their Shoes: Unrealistic Expectations? *Foot and Ankle*, v.44, n.6, 1995, p.379-384
- [5] Steele V, *Shoes: A lexicon of style*, 3st edition, United Kingdom; Co & Bear Production, 2005
- [6] Righetto M, *O conforto no Calçado Feminino com Ênfase no Conforto Psico-Social*. Master Thesis in Design & Marketing, Minho University, Guimarães, Portugal, 2013

Corresponding author:

Ana Cristina BROEGA

University of Minho, Centre for Textile Science and Technology, Textile Engendering Department, Campus Azurém, Guimarães, Portugal

E-mail: cbroega@det.uminho.pt

For the **Oral** presentation on the **topic** option: 23. *Leather and shoes industry*