

## Vertiginously Challenged. The Art of Walking in High Heels.

Marcel Mauss, the French Ethnologist, wrote in *The Techniques of the Body*, 1934, that he could not understand how women could walk in high heels. Decades later, as heels grow higher, academics, alongside mainstream culture, are fascinated with establishing an answer to this, ambiguous question. Articles featuring the towering heights of shoes and their potential health hazards, are rife in media, from *The Telegraph* to *The Daily Mail*. Culture seems fascinated with high heels and why women love to wear them. Stepping into a high-heeled shoe physically transforms the body of wearers. The calf muscles lengthen and tighten, the abdomen pulls in and the buttocks protrude, creating a streamlined body. Interviews with women, who had a passion for high heels, emphasised how this transition was important in instilling confidence and empowerment. However high, these feelings affected how they walked in these shoes, often impeded, but always empowered. The high heel has a significant relationship, emotional, physical and even controversial, with the body, and it is this, which the paper explores. Drawing from interviews with wearers, it discusses how it feels to put on and walk in a pair of vertiginously challenging shoes. The discussion is supported by interviews with shoe designers, that reveal how they consider the body, when designing. How heels are portrayed in advertising imagery, will flesh out the heel's relationship with the body. These approaches consider how the high-heeled shoe brings a cultural understanding to the body as an entity which is both present and absent.