

Not getting high

Annemarie Conte isn't a heels type of girl. But that won't stop her from buying this shoe.

A few days ago, I was at a party with some *Jane* staffers when I saw our Brandon across the room, wearing the most gorgeous 5-inch black Prada heels. I turned to one of our fashion editors and asked in amazement, "How on earth is she going to last all night in those?" "Well, she knows how to shift her hips and rest on the balls of her feet to give her back a break," my coworker said. Then, watching me shake my head, she shrugged and added, "You just have to suck it up."

But I don't want to. I know that heels can lengthen your legs, improve your posture and allow you to easily get the box of king-size Snickers off the top shelf, but I'll keep my nonsupermodel legs, slouch and stepladder. I'm not trying to sound some ridiculous call to arms against male oppression or demand that men should have to wear them, too—we all saw John Travolta in *Saturday Night Fever*, and it wasn't pretty—because it's not really about men at all. This is something that women do for themselves to feel more feminine, put-together and glamorous, and I'm okay with that. It's just not for me.

Last summer, I wore a brand-new pair

of Marc Jacobs beauties (at 2 inches high, they seemed sensible but not matronly) to a country-club wedding. A few drinks into the night, I followed some friends outside and sat down on a brick wall. Caught up in conversation, I casually banged my feet against the rough surface and unknowingly tore the leather bit by bit from my new shoes. As I surveyed the damage the next day, hungover and cotton-mouthed, I could only think, "This would never have happened with Swarovski-encrusted Chucks." And I remembered feeling so smug at the end of the night for not once removing the MJs, as if pushing through the pain were something I should be proud of. Is this the female version of machismo?

Wearing heels has always symbolized being a grown-up, but I was never one of those 5-year-olds tottering around in my mother's slingbacks, pretending I was off to fabulous places like a gala or the office. I prefer to take advantage of fashion's alternatives—flats, sneakers and more flats—because I want to remain mobile: to descend a staircase without holding a handrail, to walk with a group and not be the one lagging behind, to run away if being chased by an ax-wielding madman

(because it's always the chick in the pumps who gets it first).

People have tried to change my mind, helpfully pointing out that it's more about the angle of the sole than the height of the heel. They'll get this holier-than-thou look (which, probably not coincidentally, is the same look people give women who don't want to get married or have babies), like "Oh, tsk. It's just a phase—you'll grow out of it." But since I'm old enough to know what works for me and what doesn't, and we no longer live in a matching-shoe-and-handbag society, I'm going to exercise my right *not* to wear stilettos.

The irony is that my closet is filled with uncomfortable fancy shoes. Not to wear, of course. Just to look at. Most notable is the pair of ultratrashy, paper-thin white patent-leather 3-inch Manolo Blahniks that I nearly died for at a sample sale. I picture Manolo holding court on my shoe rack, barking commands at my worker-bee motorcycle boots and round-toe flats. One day I'll gather the strength to put an end to it and finally eBay the Blahniks to someone else who will wear them just once. But until then, they're a museum piece, their only purpose to look hot.



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