

Research on the Sexualization or Empowerment of High-heeled Dancing on Social Media

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Abstract: With the rapid development of modern technology and the internet, social media has become the mainstream way to shape groups. Many people will express their ideas online, which can greatly affect their psychology and spirit. Heel dancing has evolved, incorporating different dance styles and cultural influences. In terms of high-heeled dancing, social media also became a hotbed of debate. This article delves into the sexualization of heel dance on social media platforms, highlighting the difficulties dancers, particularly women, encounter as their image shapes society's perceptions. By reviewing and analysing historical insights, we have revealed the social factors that contribute to this phenomenon. In addition, the paper aims to challenge stereotypes and regain the empowering narrative of heel dance as a symbol of strength and self-expression. According to the study, social media, pop culture, and fashion, whether heels dancing or its industry, empower women overall, portraying a powerful, free, and diverse female role. Therefore, eradicating negative comments and stereotypes about heels and other dances would be beneficial.

Keywords: High-heeled dance, Social media, Empowering women, Pop culture, Gender.

1. Introduction

Heels dance has drawn significant inspiration from burlesque and cabaret performances. These performances date back to the 19th and early 20th centuries and were popular in European and American theaters. With the rise of music videos, mass culture, and pop culture in 1990s and 2000s, many celebrities made heels dance more popular. Stars like Madonna, Janet Jackson, and Britney Spears began featuring energetic dance routines in high heels in their music videos and tours. Nowadays, heels dance continues to evolve, incorporating different dance styles and cultural influences. It has gained large recognition through television, social media, and performances. However, there is still a certain amount of debate about the image of women on social media, especially whether high-heeled dancing is sexualizing or empowering.

This paper, through a review of magazines, books, and Internet materials related to the female image of high-heeled dance, summarizes the pertinent concepts and historical background. Combining the author's experience and understanding of high-heeled dance, the author deeply analyses the views on high-heeled dance on social media networks and objectively expounds the significance of this dance from a technical perspective. The paper also points out that high-heeled dance elements influence song style and fashion in various pop culture music videos.

The article overall argues from historical aspects to illustrate the real meaning of heels dance and why it become a popular dance all over the world. As well as, trying to use this paper to change many people's stereotype of heels dancing and show the role of empowering women in society by this dance style. This article has the potential to increase awareness of comments made about women on social media and highlight the significance of dance in shaping women's image. The release of this article gradually reduces the impact of negative gender stereotypes on women, thereby increasing awareness of female power.

2. Techniques

High heels are typically associated with women's sex because they enhance the attractiveness of the female body, a tradition that dates back centuries[1]. However, many feminists turn the limitations of high heels into opportunities to empower women. Wearing high heels and performing many complex and difficult movements has also become a way to represent. Over time, the perception of dances like Tango as oppressive to women changed to one of sexual arousal and empowerment for women themselves. n themselves[2].

Heels dance requires good coordination of all body muscles, including stable legs, control of arm movements, and coordination of eye and emotional expressions. Because the heels dance is different from other dances, you can wear your own comfortable sneakers to stabilize the center. It requires the dancers to have strong leg muscles to control the ankle and accurately express gel movements.

The dance's strong, deliberate movements project confidence and self-assurance. The ability to perform complex routines in high heels signifies overcoming physical challenges and symbolises female empowerment. It required core strength and leg strength. People have to maintain balance and stability, so the core strength could help dancers execute body movements smoothly and stay grounded, preventing falls. On the other side, the legs bear most of the body's weight when wearing high heels. Therefore, strong leg muscles provide the support needed to jump, do high kicks, and pose without strain. If people want to improve and reach a high level in heel dance, it is important to train themselves, allowing for better control over isolated movement.

Ankle strength is the most unique skill required in heel dancing. Strong ankles and calves are crucial for maintaining balance on the narrow base of high heels. It helps to prevent wobbling and supports intricate foot movement. There are several representative techniques in heel dancing that indicate power. High kicks are one of heel dance's best-known techniques. This technique involves lifting one leg in the air, usually above the waist, with precision and control, which can be challenging for individuals to maintain balance, leading to a high risk of falling. To make this technique perfect, it requires strong leg and core muscles to achieve height and maintain balance. The kick's speed and height, as well as the controlled descent, demonstrate the power. Piroettes (turns) are also worth paying attention to because dancers usually spend a long time practicing to complete perfect turns on heels. A pirouette is a turn on one foot, often performed with the supporting leg in relevé (on the ball of the foot) and the other leg in passé (foot at the knee of the supporting leg). Maintaining alignment requires significant core strength, and staying on relevé requires powerful ankles and calves. Furthermore, fundamental skills such as heels, raises, and walks align with the essential physical requirements. It's one of the most basic heel dancing techniques. Ascending onto the balls of the feet, you take deliberate, joyous strides. Although it may appear simple, it requires significant muscle control and long-term training. Strong calves and ankles are essential for maintaining elevation and balance. The power lies in the sustained height and smooth, deliberate movement.

3. The Application of High-heeled Dancing to Sexualize and Empower on Social Media

3.1. Social Media

As technologies and social media developed rapidly, many dance technologies and dancing videos were posted on various websites or applications. The term "sexualization of culture" describes a phenomenon in Western cultures where young women's bodies are markedly sexualized in the media and in society at large[3]. As the popularity of YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok grows, more and more people are becoming familiar with heels dancing. Dancers and choreographers regularly upload their routines to these platforms, reaching a wide audience. Social media allows for a more diverse representation of heel dance, showing dancers from various backgrounds, body types, genders, and skill levels. This inclusivity breaks down stereotypes and broadens the appeal of heel dancing. Many posts emphasize themes of empowerment, confidence, and body positivity, portraying heel dance as a powerful form of self-expression and personal growth.

Social media in China primarily transmits positive messages. Many users appreciate the heel dance for its portrayal of confidence and empowerment, especially among women. Women see the dance style as a bold way to celebrate femininity and express their strength and individuality. However, some users express concern over the potential over-sexualization associated with heel dancing. They worry that it might send the wrong message, especially to younger audiences, about body image and the ways women should express themselves. Comments such as "These dances will resemble those of a porn girl" are prevalent. "She is a little fat and dark." "Flirting men" appears widely on Chinese social platforms. In China, the common perception of heel dance is that it symbolizes sex and flirtation, a practice that defies the preservation of traditional Chinese culture. The over-sexualization of heels dance has significantly hindered the development of heels dance and other popular Western-style dances in China.

3.2. Pop Culture

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, many music videos used heel dance elements to express the song's emotion and theme.

For example, *Crazy in Love* by Beyoncé was one of the first music videos to include the element of heels dancing. In 2003, the music video made the heel dance popular in society for the first time [4]. Beyoncé wore a pair of red high heels and short pants, representing the role of a woman who is free and can do whatever she wants to be. More and more girls are thriving in their hearts. Take Beyoncé's famous song *Single Ladies*. In the music videos, dancers in black and white clothes wear heels and perform intricate choreography in high heels together. As the rhythm of "I'm a single lady" moves around, the heels dance, emphasizing confidence, independence, and strength, reinforcing the song's message of being a "single woman," which is self-worth and empowerment. Beyoncé represents the wave of feminism in society. Let feminism become a hot topic for discussion and attention[5]. Another example could be Ariana Grande's *Dangerous Women*. The music videos for *Dangerous Women* also incorporate the heel dance as an element to convey to the audience that women possess the strength to defend themselves. The heel dance highlights sensuality and empowerment, fitting with the song's themes of promoting femininity and female inner strength. There are numerous examples of music videos, such as Lady Gaga's *"Bad Romance"*, Lady Gaga's song *Bad Romance* includes dramatic heel dance sequences that complement the song's intense and emotional narrative. Through the use of high-energy choreography, dramatic poses, and intense expressions while wearing heels, the heels dance effectively portrays a powerful, almost confrontational femininity that combines vulnerability and strength. The song *"I'm a Slave 4 U"* by Britney Spears also features prominently. In this music video, Britney Spears integrates fluid hip

movement, floor work, and a confident, commanding presence. Here, the application of heels dance emphasizes a mix of sensuality and assertiveness, showcasing Birtney's control and command over her movement. Moreover, it reflects a woman's inner power, which is a representation of independence.

3.3. Fashion

Not only does the high-heeled dance dominate popular culture, but it also plays a significant role in shaping the image of women in fashion. Chanel's use of heels in their campaigns often emphasizes elegance and sophistication. The choreography complements the brand's timeless, classic aesthetic, reinforcing its image of luxury and refinement. In their campaigns focused on real beauty and self-acceptance, Dove has used heel dance to emphasize body positivity and confidence. The dance routines highlight the beauty and grace of women of all shapes and sizes, promoting an inclusive vision of femininity.

High-end fashion campaigns often use heels dance to convey elegance and sophistication. For instance, brands like Balmain have incorporated dance elements into their campaigns to create a dynamic and luxurious image. In their Spring 2022 campaign, Balmain featured supermodels like Naomi Campbell, blending the worlds of fashion and performance to highlight the brand's glamorous and high-energy aesthetic[6].

Fashion brands frequently use heels dance to redefine modern femininity, emphasizing self-expression and confidence. For example, Nike's "Better for It" campaign focused on women's inner thoughts during sporting activities, linking sport, self-esteem, and the influence of apparel on confidence. This campaign resonated with female consumers by promoting an empowering and relatable narrative.

Brands like Under Armour have leveraged the power of dance to highlight women's athleticism and strength. In their "I Will What I Want" campaign featuring ballerina Misty Copeland, Under Armour presents her as a powerful and determined athlete, challenging traditional perceptions of both dancers and women in sports. This campaign underscores the message that femininity and strength are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary qualities.

4. Discussion

Can heels dancing be considered a form of female empowerment? The answer is very complicated. For some women, the dance is a way to express their confidence, self-awareness and strength. In the process of performance, they can express female power through the control of the body, and they can convey emotions and stories through dance. This process of self-expression and self-control is essentially empowerment.

However, this form of empowerment, which involves dancing in heels, may not be appropriate for everyone. For many women, traditional concepts and gender stereotypes have deeply shaped in their minds that high heels are usually provocative and sexy, which is different from the traditional society's expectations that women should be demure and conservative. So, given the multiple pressures of society and the male gaze, high heels may not be a form of empowerment for a wide range of women.

People's thoughts are constantly changing with the progress and development of The Times and social media. More and more people are appearing in dance studios to pursue the sexy charm of high-heeled dance, seeking ways to show the beauty of their bodies. The dance studio has become a place in a woman's life where she can shed her inhibitions and show her true beauty. Many others are willing to post their dances on social media or incorporate them into their artwork. Therefore,

with the rapid development of these ideas and the growing influence of spirituality in people's lives, high-heeled dance is poised to become an increasingly important tool in promoting gender roles.

Overall, the role of stiletto dancing in the relationship between female empowerment and gender stereotypes is complex and multifaceted. Either it serves as a potent instrument for women's self-expression and empowerment, or in certain situations, it reinforces gender stereotypes. Understanding and discussing these complexities helps us to explore more deeply the multiple pathways and manifestations of gender equality.

5. Conclusion

Although high-heeled dancing has shown some negative comments on Chinese social media platforms, many people argue that this dance actually breaks Chinese cultural traditions, exacerbates feminization, rather than empowering women. However, from the analysis of dance techniques, movements, popular culture, and fashion, it can be seen that high-heeled dance not only requires a muscular figure with strong physical fitness and a sense of strength. In the subsequent development, high-heeled shoe dancing has also become a symbol of expressing women's independence, freedom, and power. Whenever high-heeled shoe dance appears in videos, it is easier for everyone to associate it with feminism and power. Overall, this study reveals that high-heeled dance has created a positive female image and empowered women through social media.

This study mainly focuses on literature investigation, data analysis, and objective observation. Therefore, in the future, this research will aim to combine real-life interviews and real people to more accurately examine what people think about high-heeled dancers on social media. Furthermore, the study will aim to broaden the scope of research on dance and gender stereotypes related to high-heeled dancing to encompass a wider range of dance styles, along with examining the psychology of the participants.

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