CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. An article of footwear comprising:

an upper and sole structure;

the upper defining a foot receiving shoe opening;

a heel cup attached to the upper and extending from the sole structure to at least a portion of ~~the~~ a rear ~~heel~~ ankle collar of the upper;

the heel cup uniformly molded with an upper portion, midportion, and lower portion where in the upper portion has a smaller mediolateral length than the midportion, and the midportion and lower portion form a concave structure configured to receive the heel;

the upper portion having a first configuration;

the upper portion capable of distorting into a second configuration under a load of a user's foot when the user is donning the footwear;

wherein in the second configuration at least part of the upper portion is lowered relative to the first configuration;

the upper portion capable of returning to the first configuration after the load of user's foot is removed;

the midportion defining a peripheral portion and a central portion;

the peripheral portion having a first thickness; and

the central portion having a second thickness;

the second thickness being less than the first thickness.

2. The article of footwear of claim 1 wherein the first thickness decreases gradually to the second thickness in a direction extending from the peripheral portion to the central portion.

~~3. The article of footwear of claim 1 wherein at least a portion of the upper portion and a portion of the lower portion have a thickness approximately equal to or greater than the first thickness.~~

~~4.~~3. The article of footwear of claim 1 wherein ~~a lower region of~~ the central portion ~~extends outward~~folds under the load in ~~a direction away from the shoe opening that causes the shoe opening to widen along the mediolateral direction~~the second configuration and unfolds in the first configuration.

~~5.~~4. The article of footwear of claim 1 wherein the upper portion in the first configuration has a downward incline with a first angle relative to a vertical line that is normal to a horizontal surface of the floor and the upper portion in the second configuration has an incline with a second angle, and the second angle is greater than the first angle.

~~6.~~5. The article of footwear of claim ~~1~~ 3 wherein in the second configuration, an upper region of the central portion of the midportion is closer to the front of the article of footwear than in the first configuration and an uppermost segment of the upper portion is moved further away from the front of the article of footwear.

~~7.~~6. The article of footwear of claim 1 wherein in the second configuration, the peripheral portion of the midportion is extended outward along the mediolateral width of the article of footwear to a greater extent than in the first configuration.

~~8. The article of footwear of claim 1 wherein the second thickness is at least 1/6 of the first thickness.~~

~~9. The article of footwear of claim 1 wherein the first thickness is no greater than 3.07 mm and the second thickness is at least 0.5 mm.~~

~~10.~~7. The article of footwear of claim 1 wherein an elastic member is located between the heel cup and a front portion of the foot receiving shoe opening.

~~11.~~8. The article of footwear of claim 1, further comprising a tongue wherein a support member is attached to the tongue and the support member prevents deformation of the tongue when the user is donning the footwear.

~~12.~~9. The article of footwear of claim ~~11~~ 8 wherein the support member is a connector that connects a portion of the tongue to the upper.

~~13. The article of footwear of claim 11, wherein the support member is a rigid member that is at least partially coextensive with the tongue.~~

~~14.~~10. The article of footwear of claim 1, wherein a foam component is located on at least an inner surface of the upper portion and midportion of the heel cup; the foam component is compressed by the user's heel during foot insertion; and the foam component may exert pressure on the user's ankle once the foot is inserted.

~~15.~~11. The article of footwear of claim ~~14~~ 10 wherein the foam component extends from both sides of the upper portion of the heel cup along at least a portion of the inner surface of the upper to form side sections of the foam component.

~~16. The article of footwear of claim 15 wherein the foam component tapers at the side portions.~~

~~17.~~12. The article of footwear of claim ~~16~~ 11 wherein the rear portion of the foam component curves inward and tapers vertically downward along a concave structure of the heel cup.

~~18.~~13. An article of footwear comprising:

an upper and sole structure;

the upper defining a foot receiving shoe opening;

a heel cup attached to the upper and extending from the sole structure to at least a portion of the rear heel collar of upper;

the heel cup uniformly molded with an upper portion, midportion, and lower portion where in the upper portion has a smaller mediolateral length than the midportion, and the midportion and lower portion form a concave structure configured to cup the heel; the upper portion having a first configuration;

the upper portion capable of distorting into a second configuration under a load of a user's foot when the user is donning the footwear;

the upper portion capable of returning to the first configuration after the load of the user's foot is removed; and wherein

the upper portion in the first configuration has a downward incline with a first angle relative to a vertical line that is normal to a horizontal surface of the floor;

the upper portion in the second configuration has an incline with a second angle; and the second angle is greater than the first angle; and

a lower region of the central portion extends outwardly in a direction away from the shoe opening that causes the shoe opening to widen along the mediolateral direction.

~~19.~~14. The article of footwear of claim ~~18~~ 13 wherein the midportion defines a peripheral portion and a central portion, the peripheral portion having a first thickness and the central portion having a second thickness; the second thickness being less than the first thickness of the heel cup.

~~20. An upper of an article of footwear comprising:~~

~~a foot receiving shoe opening;~~

~~a U-shaped foamed ankle collar that is substantially tubular in shape;~~

~~the ankle collar forming the topmost region of the foot receiving shoe opening; the foamed ankle collar extending at least partially around and over the foot receiving shoe opening;~~

the ankle collar capable of being compressed by the user's heel during foot insertion and wherein the ankle collar may exert pressure on the user's ankle once the foot is inserted; and

the ankle collar having a flattened region along its length forming a downward angle from the topmost region toward the front of the article of footwear.

21. The upper of claim 20, wherein the lower portion of the ankle collar has an attachment piece affixed to the upper.

22. The upper of claim 20, wherein the ankle collar is devoid of stitches or seams on an upper portion of the ankle collar.

23. The upper of claim 20, wherein the cross-sectional shape of the ankle collar has a first portion and a second portion; the first portion being approximately a semicircle with a first radius; the second portion being approximately a semicircle with a second radius; and wherein the first radius is greater than the second radius.

24. The upper of claim 20, further comprising a heel cup; the heel cup having a first configuration; the heel cup capable of distorting into a second configuration under a load of a user's foot when the user is donning the footwear; the heel cup capable of automatically returning to the first configuration after the user's foot in fully inserted into the footwear; and the ankle collar is located above the heel cup.

25. An upper of an article of footwear comprising:

a foot receiving shoe opening;

a U-shaped foamed ankle collar that is substantially tubular in shape;

the ankle collar forming the topmost region of the foot receiving shoe opening; the foamed ankle collar extending at least partially around and over the foot receiving shoe opening; and

the ankle collar capable of being compressed by the user's heel during foot insertion and wherein the ankle collar may exert pressure on the user's ankle once the foot is inserted;

the ankle collar having a flattened region along its length forming a downward angle from the topmost region toward the front of the article of footwear.

26. The upper of claim 25, wherein the lower portion of the ankle collar has an attachment piece affixed to the upper.

27. The upper of claim 25, wherein the ankle collar is devoid of stitches or seams on an upper portion of the ankle collar.

28. The upper of claim 25, wherein the cross-sectional shape of the ankle collar has a first portion and a second portion; the first portion being approximately a semicircle with a first radius; the second portion being approximately a semicircle with a second radius; and wherein the first radius is greater than the second radius.

29. The upper of claim 25, further comprising a heel cup; the heel cup having a first configuration; the heel cup capable of distorting into a second configuration under a load of a user's foot when the user is donning the footwear; the heel cup capable of automatically returning to the first configuration after the user's foot in fully inserted into the footwear; and the ankle collar is located above the heel cup.

30. The upper of claim 25, wherein the heel cup defines a peripheral portion a central portion; the peripheral portion having a first thickness; the first thickness defining the maximum thickness of the heel cup; the central portion having a second thickness; the second thickness defining the minimum thickness of the heel cup; and the first thickness decreasing gradually to the second thickness in a direction extending from the peripheral portion to the central portion.

31. An article of footwear comprising:

an upper and sole structure

the upper defining a foot receiving shoe opening;

a heel counter support situated on the upper and above the sole structure;

the heel counter support having at least two hollow receptacles with backward angles;

a compressible component having two ends;

each one of the two hollow receptacles receive one end of the compressible component;

the compressible component having a first configuration;

the compressible component capable of distorting into a second configuration under a load of a user's foot when the user is donning the footwear; and

the compressible component being capable of automatically returning to the first configuration after the user's foot in fully inserted into the footwear.

32. The article of footwear of claim 31, wherein the heel counter support defines an exterior layer of the upper.

33. The article of footwear of claim 31, wherein the compressible component is cylindrical.

~~34. The article of footwear of claim 31, wherein the compressible component extends from the medial quarter, above the foot receiving shoe opening, to the lateral quarter.~~

~~35. The article of footwear of claim 31, wherein the compressible component extends through a tunnel attached to the upper.~~

15. The article of footwear of claim 1, wherein the upper portion, midportion, and lower portion has an overall vertical cross-sectional "S" wave shape.

16. The article of footwear of claim 15, wherein the central portion is at least partially located at an inflection point of the "S" wave shape.

17. An article of footwear comprising:

an upper and sole structure;

the upper defining a foot receiving shoe opening;

a heel cup attached to the upper~~.~~ and extending from the sole structure to at least a portion of a rear ankle collar of the upper;

the heel cup uniformly molded with an upper portion, midportion, and lower portion where in the upper portion has a smaller mediolateral length than the midportion, and the midportion and lower portion form a concave structure configured to receive the heel;

the upper portion having a first configuration;

the upper portion capable of distorting into a second configuration under a load of a user's foot when the user is donning the footwear;

wherein in the second configuration at least part of the upper portion is lowered relative to the first configuration;

the upper portion capable of returning to the first configuration after the load of the user's foot is removed;

the midportion defining a peripheral portion and a central portion;

the peripheral portion having a first thickness;

the central portion having a second thickness;

the second thickness being less than the first thickness; and

the upper portion, midportion, and lower portion has an overall vertical cross-sectional "S" wave shape, wherein the central portion is at least partially located at an inflection point of the "S" wave shape.