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(54) **FOOTWEAR ACCESSORY DEVICE AND METHOD OF ACCESSORIZING AN ARTICLE OF FOOTWEAR**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

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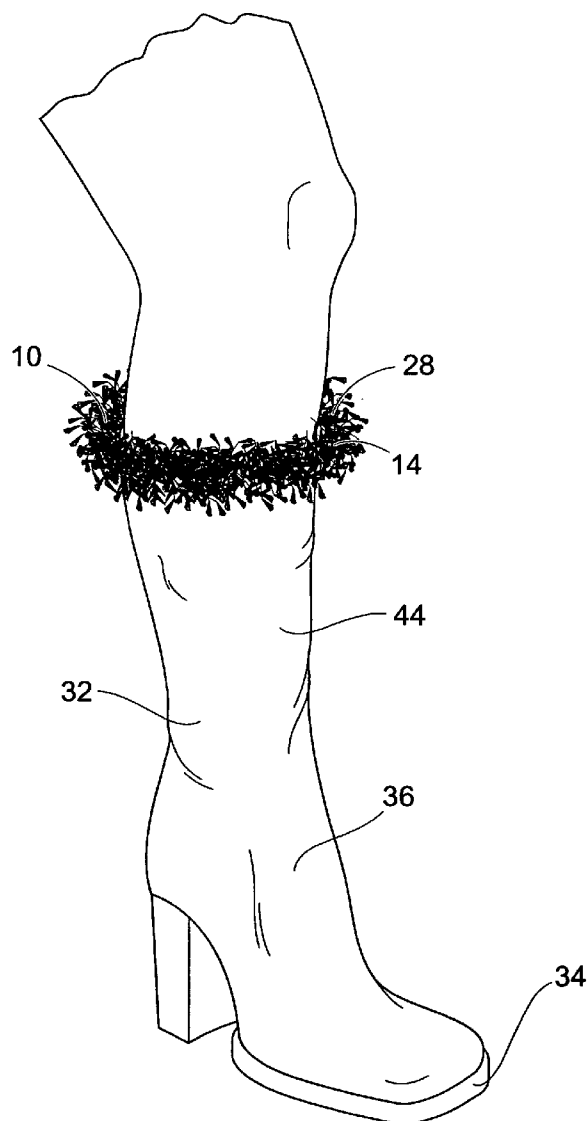
An accessory for altering the appearance of footwear is disclosed and comprises a support portion and a decorative portion. The support portion comprising a loop that is circumferentially resiliently stretchable and that has axially opposite first and second openings. The loop is adapted and configured in a manner such that the loop can stretchably encircle a leg of a person in a manner releasably securing the support portion to the leg of the person. The decorative portion is connected to the loop in a manner such that the decorative portion encircles the loop adjacent the first opening and such that the decorative portion extends radially outward from the loop of the support portion. A method of altering the appearance of footwear is also disclosed.

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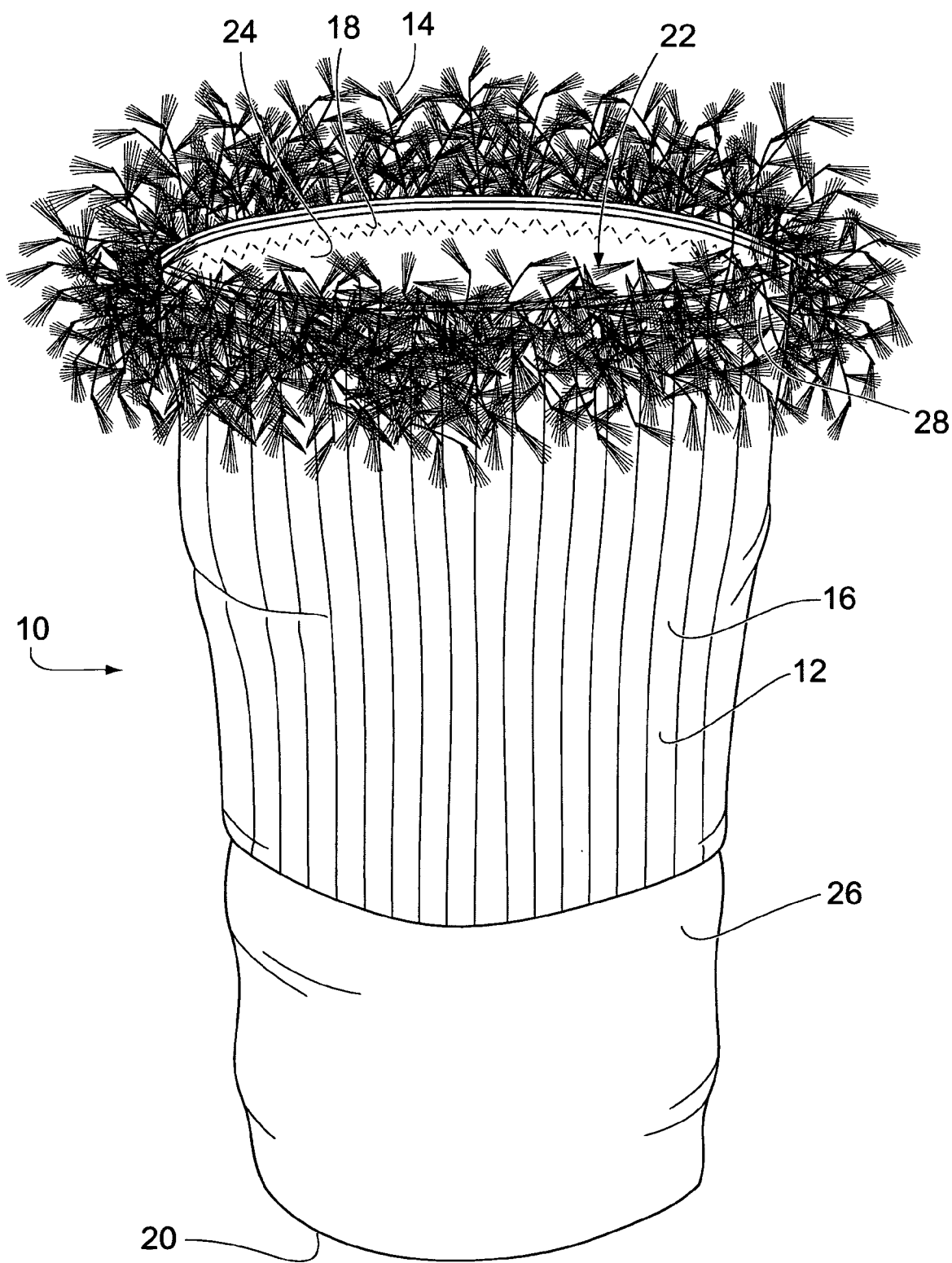
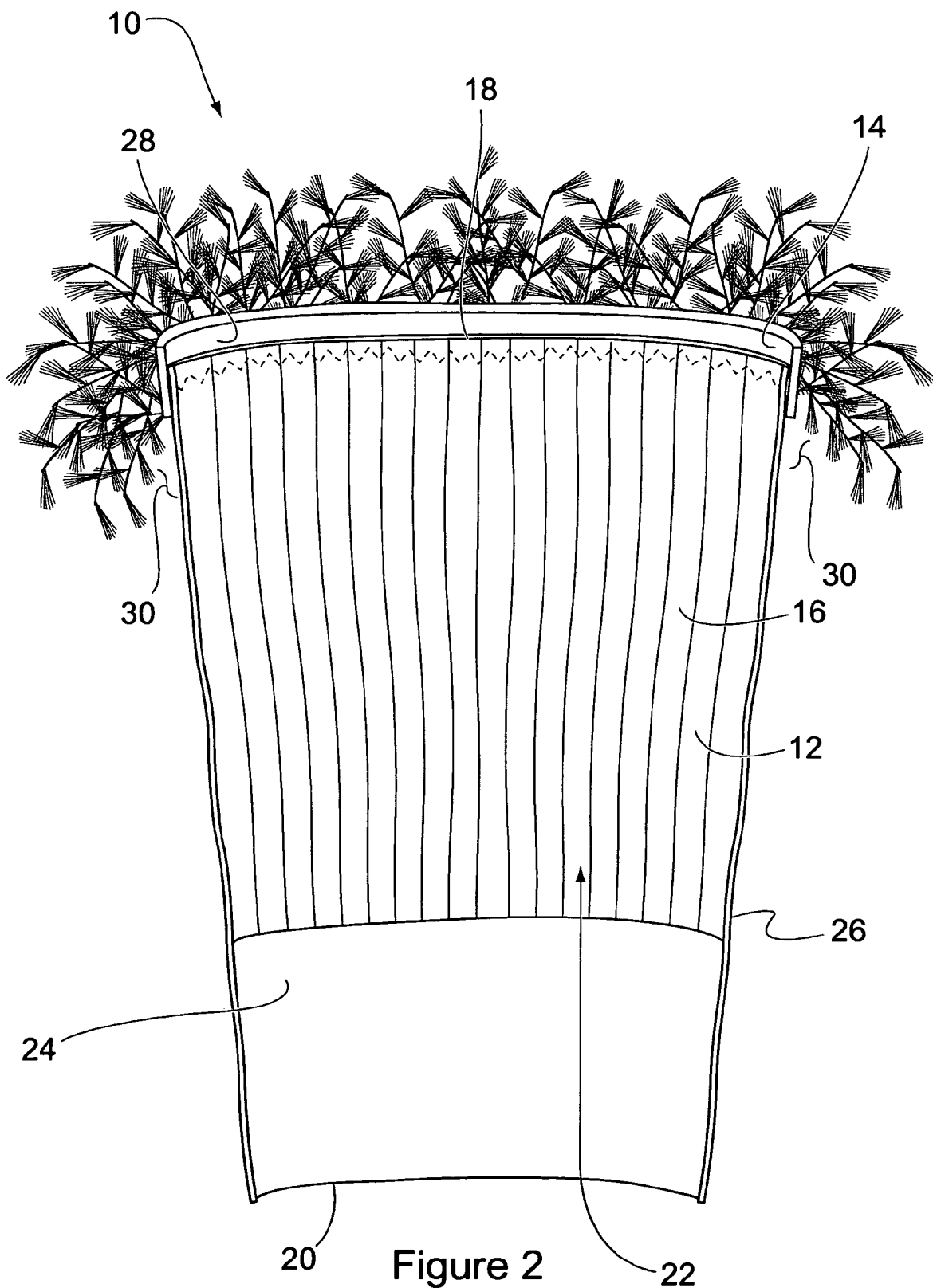


Figure 1



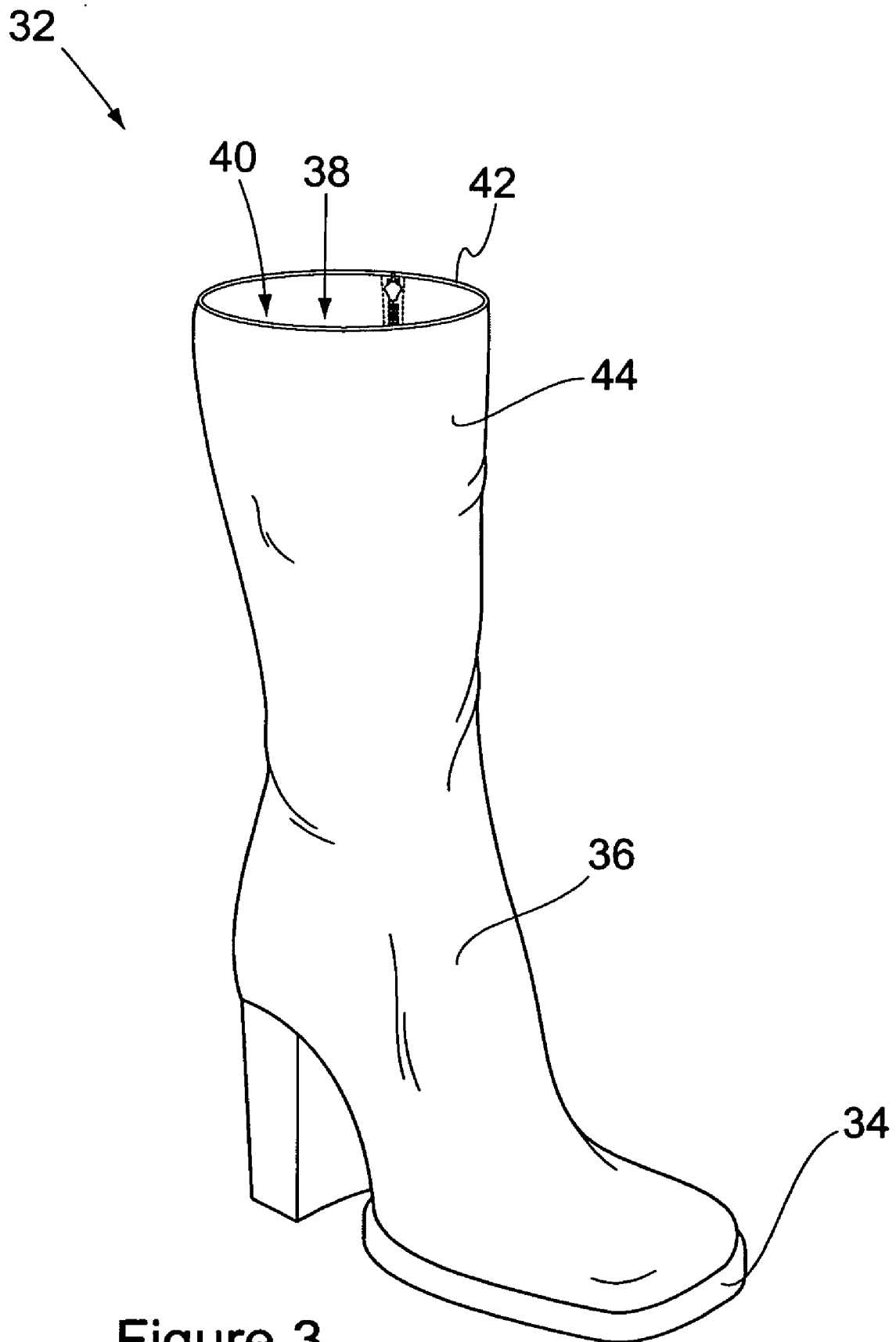


Figure 3

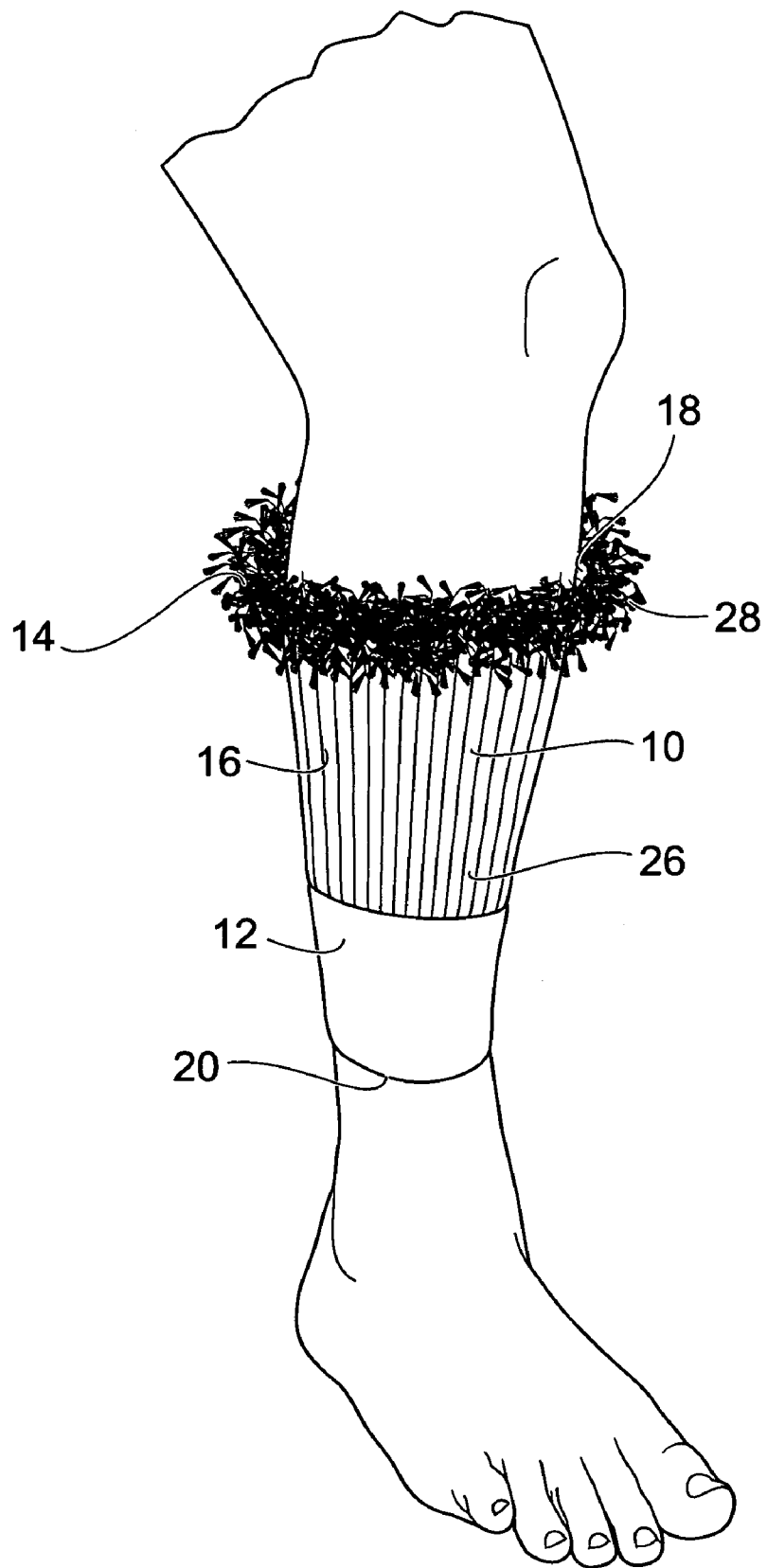


Figure 4

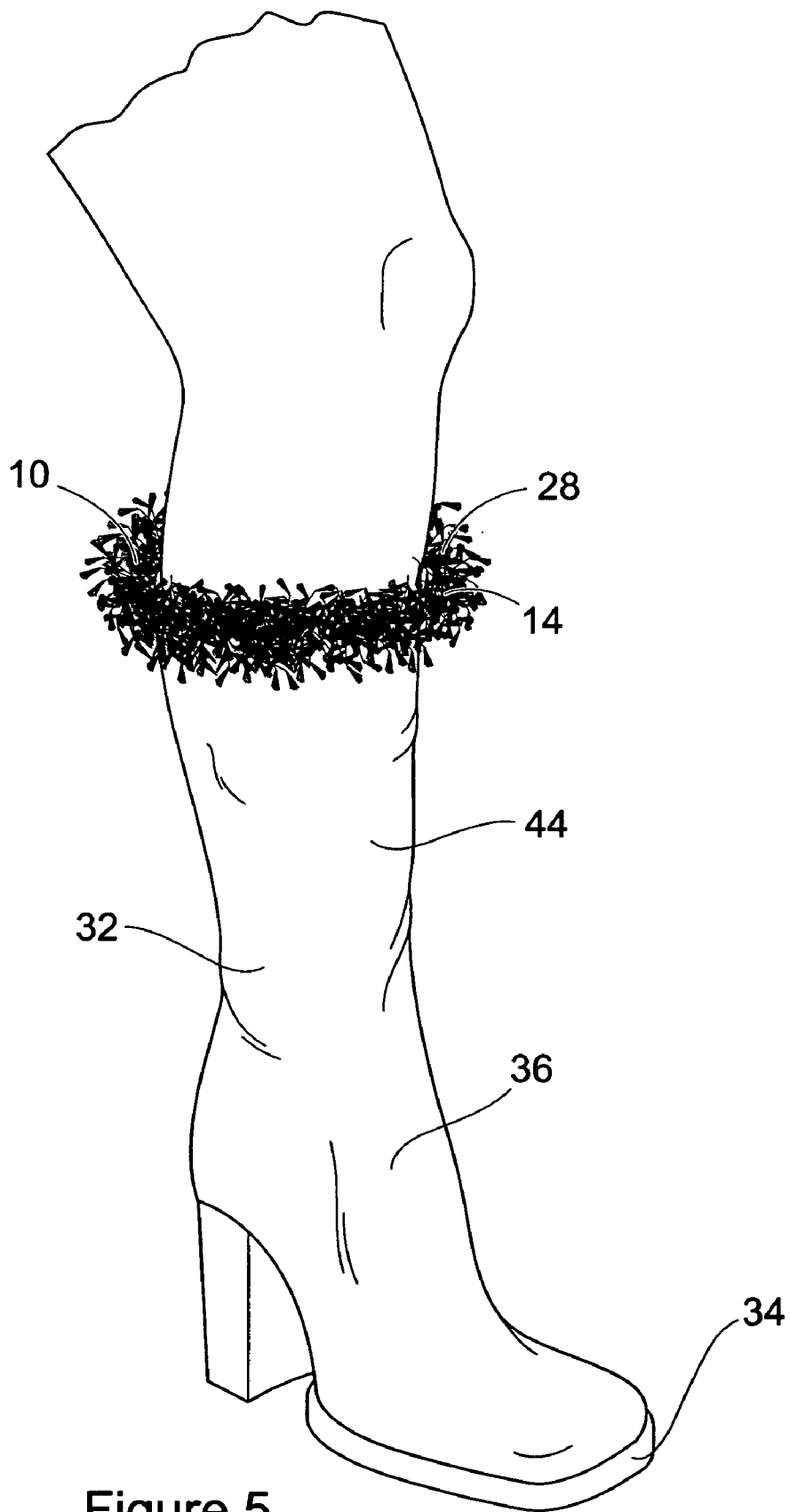


Figure 5

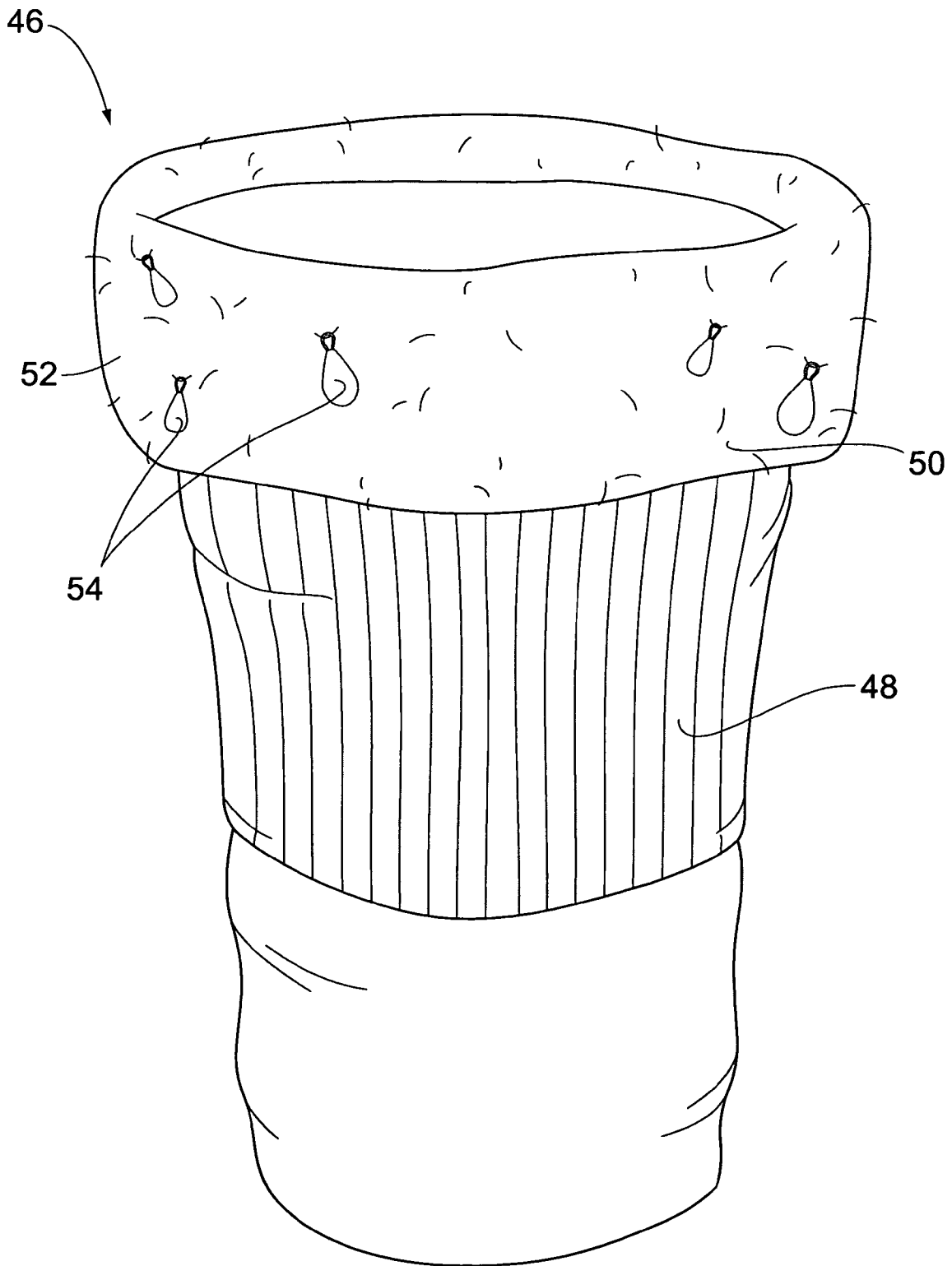


Figure 6

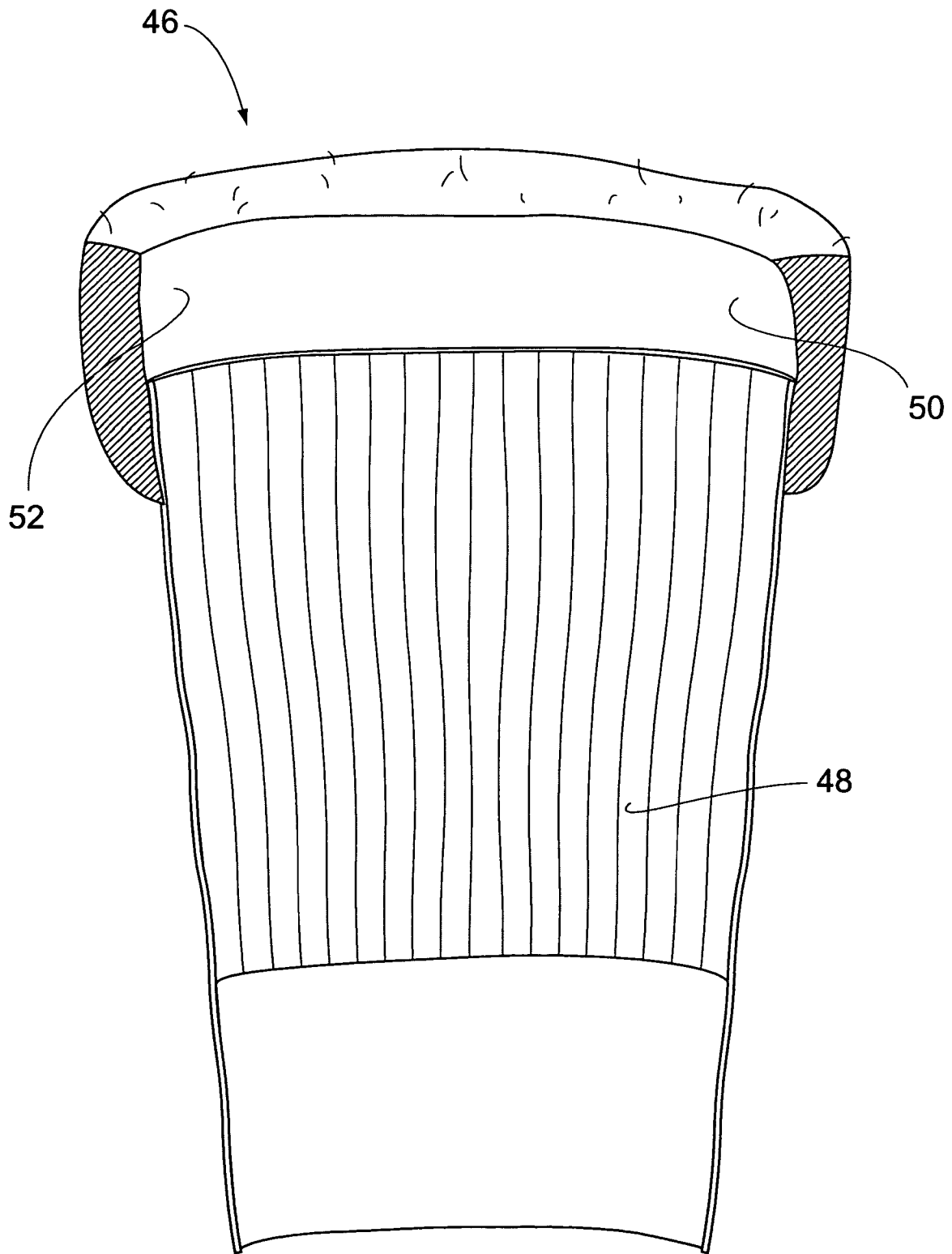


Figure 7

**FOOTWEAR ACCESSORY DEVICE AND METHOD
OF ACCESSORIZING AN ARTICLE OF
FOOTWEAR**

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0001] (1) Field of the Invention

[0002] This invention pertains to the field of footwear. More particularly, this invention pertains to a footwear accessory device for altering the appearance of and decorating an article of footwear.

[0003] (2) Background

[0004] It is common for individuals to own a variety of footwear. Additionally, people that are particularly fashionable frequently own many pairs of a similar type of footwear to facilitate the coordination of such footwear with particular outfits being worn. For example, a woman may desire to coordinate a particular outfit with a pair of relatively simply styled boots that do not draw attention, and also desire to coordinate another outfit with a pair of similar yet flashy boots. Thus, it should be appreciated that different styles, colors, and overall look of similar types of footwear are often each desired in particular situations. With changes in fashion trends, many people are faced with constantly purchasing new footwear if they are to keep pace with such trends. However, purchasing new footwear merely to keep pace with fashion trends can be expensive. This is especially true when numerous pairs of shoes or boots are purchased only to be worn a few times on special occasions.

[0005] Thus, it is desirable to be able to modify the appearance of a particular article of footwear without making such modifications permanent. To this end, various articles such as footwear anklets have been developed to provide means for subtly altering the appearance of footwear. However, many articles used for altering the appearance of footwear fail to provide significant changes to the appearance of footwear. Additionally, many such articles are difficult to add and remove to footwear, and thereby make the use of such articles impracticable.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0006] In view of the foregoing, the inventor of the present invention develop a footwear accessory device that can be utilized to significantly alter the appearance of various types footwear and that takes no appreciable effort or time to apply and remove to footwear. Moreover, the footwear accessory device and its method of use does not require any permanent alteration to the footwear on which it is utilized.

[0007] In a first aspect of the invention, a method of accessorizing an article of footwear comprises a step of providing an article of footwear. The article of footwear has an upper and an interior cavity. The upper has a foot receiving opening that defines an opening edge of the upper, and that is in communication with the interior cavity and with an environment external to the article of footwear. This method also comprises a step of providing a footwear accessory device. The footwear accessory device has a support portion and a decorative portion. Additionally, this method comprises attaching the footwear accessory device to the leg of a person by positioning the support portion of the footwear accessory device in manner such that the support portion encircles a first portion of the leg of the

person and such that the support portion exerts a radially compressive force to the leg of the person. This method further comprises a step of attaching the article of footwear to the leg of the person. This is done by extending the leg of the person through the foot receiving opening of the article of footwear in a manner such that the first portion of the leg of the person is positioned within the interior cavity of the article of footwear and such that a second portion of the leg of the person is positioned in the environment external to the article of footwear. Still further, this method comprises a step of positioning the footwear accessory device relative to the article of footwear. The positioning occurs in a manner such that at least a portion of the support portion of the footwear accessory device is positioned radially between the first portion of the leg of the person and the upper of the article of footwear. Additionally, the positioning occurs in a manner such that the decorative portion of the footwear accessory device at least partially conceals the opening edge of the upper of the article of footwear.

[0008] In another aspect of the invention, a method of accessorizing an article of footwear comprises the same steps of providing an article of footwear, providing a footwear accessory device, attaching the footwear accessory device to a leg of a person, and attaching the article of footwear to the leg of the person. Additionally, this method comprises a step of positioning the footwear accessory device relative to the article of footwear. This step occurs in a manner such that at least a portion of the support portion of the footwear accessory device is positioned radially between the first portion of the leg of the person and the upper of the article of footwear. Additionally, this step occurs in a manner such that a portion of the upper of the article of footwear adjacent the opening edge of the upper is positioned between a portion of the decorative portion of the footwear accessory device and the first portion of the leg of the person.

[0009] In yet another aspect of the invention, an accessory for footwear comprises a support portion and a decorative portion. The support portion comprising a loop that is circumferentially resiliently stretchable and that has axially opposite first and second openings. The loop is adapted and configured in a manner such that the loop can stretchably encircle a leg of a person in a manner releasably securing the support portion to the leg of the person. The decorative portion is connected to the loop in a manner such that the decorative portion encircles the loop adjacent the first opening and such that the decorative portion extends radially outward from the loop of the support portion.

[0010] While the principal advantages and features of the invention have been described above, a more complete and thorough understanding of the invention may be obtained by referring to the drawings and the detailed description of the preferred embodiment, which follow.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0011] **FIG. 1** is perspective view of a footwear accessory device in accordance with a first embodiment of the invention.

[0012] **FIG. 2** is perspective view of the footwear accessory device of **FIG. 1**, and is shown cross-sectioned about a plane of symmetry of the footwear accessory device.

[0013] FIG. 3 is a perspective view of an article of footwear for use in connection with a method of practicing the invention.

[0014] FIG. 4 is a perspective view showing the footwear accessory device of FIGS. 1 and 2 attached to the leg of a person in accordance with a method of practicing the invention.

[0015] FIG. 5 is a perspective view showing the footwear accessory device of FIGS. 1 and 2 attached to the leg of a person in combination with the article of footwear shown in FIG. 3 as used in accordance with a method of practicing the invention.

[0016] FIG. 6 is a perspective view of a footwear accessory device in accordance with a second embodiment of the invention.

[0017] FIG. 7 is perspective view of the footwear accessory device of FIG. 6, and is shown cross-sectioned about a plane of symmetry of the footwear accessory device.

[0018] Reference characters in the written specification indicate corresponding items shown throughout the drawing figures.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT OF THE INVENTION

[0019] A first embodiment of a footwear accessory device in accordance with the invention is shown by itself in FIGS. 1 and 2, and is indicated by the reference numeral 10. In general, the footwear accessory device 10 comprises a support portion 12 and a decorative portion 14.

[0020] The support portion 12 of the footwear accessory device 10 preferably comprises a length of tubular material 16. The length of tubular material 16 forms a loop and has axially opposite top 18 and bottom openings 20 that connect a passageway 22 that extends through the loop. The passageway defines interior 24 and exterior 26 surfaces of the tubular material 16. The tubular material 16 is preferably formed of resiliently flexible material of the type that is commonly utilized to form socks. As such, the tubular material 16 is preferably resiliently stretchable both circumferentially and axially. Preferably, the axial length of the tubular material 16 is approximately equal to two to four times the average diameter of the top 18 and bottom 20 openings.

[0021] The decorative portion 14 of the footwear accessory device 10 preferably comprises a band of material 28 that encircles the top opening 18 of the tubular material 16 of the support portion 12. Preferably, the band of material 28 is engaged with the exterior surface 26 of the tubular material 16 of the support portion 12 and is attached thereto via stitching or the like. The band of material 28 preferably extends axially above the top opening 18 of the tubular material 16 and thereby partially conceals the top opening of the tubular material. The band of material 28 also preferably extends a short distance from the top opening 18 of the tubular material 16 toward the bottom opening 20.

[0022] The band of material 28 that forms the decorative portion 14 of the footwear accessory device 10 is preferably many times thicker than the material that forms the length of tubular material 16 such that the band of material bulges

radially outward from the exterior surface 26 of the tubular material 16. As shown, the band of material 28 is formed of a relatively open fibrous material. Additionally, the band of material 28 that forms the decorative portion 14 of the footwear accessory device 10 of this embodiment diverges axially as it extends radially outward from the exterior surface 26 of the tubular material 16. As such, the lowermost portion of the band of material 28 is radially spaced from the exterior surface of the tubular material 16 and defines an annular channel 30 therebetween.

[0023] The footwear accessory device 10 is preferably utilized in connection with a conventional article of footwear, such as the boot shown in FIG. 3. The boot 32 comprises a sole 34 and an upper 36 that together define an interior cavity 38 of the boot. The upper 36 comprises a foot receiving opening 40 that extends into the interior cavity 38 of the boot 32 and that defines an opening edge 42 of the upper.

[0024] In practicing the invention via the footwear accessory device 10, a person preferably first inserts his or her foot through the band of material 28 of the decorative portion 14 and tubular material 16 of the support portion 12, in a manner such that the top opening 18 of the tubular material 16 is positioned above the bottom opening 20 of the tubular material on the person's shin. It should be appreciated that the tubular material 16 of the support portion 12 is preferably dimensioned such that the tubular material must be circumferentially stretched when positioned as shown in FIG. 4. As such, the resiliency of tubular material 16 creates a radially inward compressive force against the person's shin. This compressive force creates friction that acts to hold the footwear accessory device 10 in place relative to the person's leg. Additionally, the resiliency of the tubular material 16 of the support portion 12 allows the tubular material to conform to the contour of the person's leg and thereby creates interlocking geometry that prevents relative movement between the footwear accessory device 10 relative to the person's leg, absent an applied force sufficient to further stretch the tubular material.

[0025] With the footwear accessory device 10 attached to the person's leg as described above, the person then inserts his or her foot into the interior cavity 38 of the boot 32 through the foot receiving opening 40 of the boot. While doing so, the position of the footwear accessory device 10 is preferably adjusted relative to the person's leg such that the footwear accessory device will be positioned as shown in FIG. 6 relative to the boot 32, when the person's foot is fully inserted in the interior cavity 38 of the boot. In such a relative position, the support portion 12 of the footwear accessory device 10 is positioned radially between the person's leg and the upper of the boot. Additionally, the decorative portion 14 of the footwear accessory device 10 is immediately above the foot receiving opening 40 of the boot 32. As such the decorative portion 14 of the footwear accessory device 10 conceals the opening edge 42 of the upper 36 of the boot 32. Additionally, in view of the fact that the decorative portion 14 axially diverges as it extends radially outward, the lowermost portion of the decorative portion can drape over the opening edge 42 of the boot 32 and cover a portion of the exterior surface 44 of the boot immediately adjacent the opening edge of the boot. In other words, the opening edge 42 of the boot 32 can be positioned

in the annular channel **30** formed between the lowermost portion of the band of material **28** and the support portion **12**.

[0026] In view of the foregoing, it should be appreciated that the footwear accessory device **10**, when used as described above, will have the appearance of being part of the boot **32**. Thus, the footwear accessory device **10** effectively alters the overall appearance of the boot **32** and allows people to accessorize their footwear for various occasions. Moreover, it should be appreciated that the footwear accessory device **10**, when used as described, does not require direct attachment to footwear and thereby in no way damages the footwear. Additionally, the configuration of the footwear accessory device **10** allows the device to be easily and quickly worn and removed. Still further, the configuration of the footwear accessory device **10** makes the device simple and cost effective to manufacture.

[0027] It should also be appreciated that various different embodiments of footwear accessory devices can be formed in accordance with the invention. For example, a second embodiment of the invention is shown in **FIGS. 6 and 7**. This alternative footwear accessory device **46** has a similar support portion **48** and decorative portion **48**. However, the band of material **52** that forms the decorative portion **48** of this footwear accessory device **46** extends about half of its axial length above the top opening of the tubular portion of the support portion **48**. Additionally, unlike the material that forms the band of material **28** of the decorative portion **14** of the footwear accessory device **10** shown in **FIGS. 1 and 2**, the material that forms the band of material of the decorative portion **50** of the footwear accessory device **46** shown in **FIGS. 6 and 7** is shown as being natural fur or synthetic fur-like material. Additionally, the decorative portion **50** of the footwear accessory device **46** shown in **FIGS. 6 and 7** has a plurality of decorative beads or jewels **54** attached to its exterior surface.

[0028] While the present invention has been described in reference to a specific embodiment, in light of the foregoing, it should be understood that all matter contained in the above description or shown in the accompanying drawings is intended to be interpreted as illustrative and not in a limiting sense and that various modifications and variations of the invention may be constructed without departing from the scope of the invention defined by the following claims. For example, it should be appreciated that the support member of the footwear accessory device could comprise a belt like member in place of the length of tubular material. To this end, such a belt member could be adjustable in length via Velcro®, buckles, snaps, buttons, other types of adjustable or non-adjustable fasteners. Thus, the support portion needs not necessarily comprise a loop of resiliently stretchable material to exert a radially compressive force on a person's leg. Additionally, it should be appreciated that the decorative portion of the footwear accessory device could be formed of many various types of material and have many different shapes. Moreover, the decorative portion of the footwear accessory device needs not necessarily encircle the loop of the support portion. Thus, other possible variations and modifications should be appreciated.

[0029] Furthermore, it should be understood that when introducing elements of the present invention in the claims or in the above description of the preferred embodiment of the invention, the terms "comprising," "including," and

"having" are intended to be open-ended and mean that there may be additional elements other than the listed elements. Similarly, the term "portion" should be construed as meaning some or all of the item or element that it qualifies.

What is claimed is:

1. A method of accessorizing an article of footwear, the method comprising:

providing an article of footwear, the article of footwear having an upper and an interior cavity, the upper having a foot receiving opening, the foot receiving opening defining an opening edge of the upper and being in communication with the interior cavity and with an environment external to the article of footwear;

providing a footwear accessory device, the footwear accessory device having a support portion and a decorative portion;

attaching the footwear accessory device to the leg of a person by positioning the support portion of the footwear accessory device in manner such that the support portion encircles a first portion of the leg of the person and such that the support portion exerts a radially compressive force to the leg of the person;

attaching the article of footwear to the leg of the person by extending the leg of the person through the foot receiving opening of the article of footwear in a manner such that the first portion of the leg of the person is positioned within the interior cavity of the article of footwear and such that a second portion of the leg of the person is positioned in the environment external to the article of footwear; and

positioning the footwear accessory device relative to the article of footwear in a manner such that at least a portion of the support portion of the footwear accessory device is positioned radially between the first portion of the leg of the person and the upper of the article of footwear and such that the decorative portion of the footwear accessory device at least partially conceals the opening edge of the upper of the article of footwear.

2. A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein the step of positioning the footwear accessory device relative to the article of footwear occurs in a manner such that a portion of the upper of the article of footwear adjacent the opening edge of the upper is positioned between a portion of the decorative portion of the footwear accessory device and the first portion of the leg of the person.

3. A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein the step of providing the footwear accessory device occurs in a manner such that the support portion of the footwear accessory device comprises a length of tubular material, the material being flexible and resiliently stretchable, the length of tubular material having opposite open end portions, the decorative portion of the footwear accessory device being secured to one of the end portions of the length of tubular material, the step of attaching the footwear accessory device to the leg of the person further comprising positioning the leg of the person in a manner such that the leg of the person extends through the open end portions of the length of tubular material, the radially compressive force exerted on the leg of the person resulting from the material being

resiliently stretched when the leg of the person extends through the open end portions of the length of tubular material.

4. A method in accordance with claim 3 wherein the step of providing the footwear accessory device occurs in a manner such that the decorative portion of the footwear accessory device forms a loop, and wherein the step of attaching the footwear accessory device to the leg of the person comprises positioning the decorative portion of the footwear accessory device relative to the leg of the person in a manner such that the loop of the decorative portion of the footwear accessory device encircles the leg of the person.

5. A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein a portion of the upper of the article of footwear adjacent the opening edge of the upper forms a loop and a portion of the decorative portion of the footwear accessory device forms a loop, and wherein the step of positioning the footwear accessory device relative to the article of footwear occurs in a manner such that the portion of the upper of the article of footwear adjacent the opening edge of the upper is positioned radially between the portion of the decorative portion of the footwear accessory device and the first portion of the leg of the person and such that the decorative portion of the footwear accessory device completely conceals the opening edge of the upper of the article of footwear.

6. A method in accordance with claim 7 wherein the step of providing the footwear accessory device occurs in a manner such that the decorative portion of the footwear accessory device forms a loop, and wherein the step of attaching the footwear accessory device to the leg of the person comprises passing the first portion of the leg of the person through the closed loop of the decorative portion of the footwear accessory device.

7. A method of accessorizing an article of footwear, the method comprising:

providing an article of footwear, the article of footwear having an upper and an interior cavity, the upper having a foot receiving opening, the foot receiving opening defining an opening edge of the upper and being in communication with the interior cavity and with an environment external to the article of footwear;

providing a footwear accessory device, the footwear accessory device having a support portion and a decorative portion;

attaching the footwear accessory device to a leg of a person by positioning the support portion of the footwear accessory device in a manner such that the support portion encircles a first portion of the leg of the person and such that the support portion exerts a radially compressive force to the leg of the person;

attaching the article of footwear to the leg of the person by extending the leg of the person through the foot receiving opening of the article of footwear in a manner such that the first portion of the leg of the person is positioned within the interior cavity of the article of footwear and such that a second portion of the leg of the person is positioned in the environment external to the article of footwear; and

positioning the footwear accessory device relative to the article of footwear in a manner such that at least a portion of the support portion of the footwear accessory device is positioned radially between the first portion of

the leg of the person and the upper of the article of footwear and such that a portion of the upper of the article of footwear adjacent the opening edge of the upper is positioned between a portion of the decorative portion of the footwear accessory device and the first portion of the leg of the person.

8. A method in accordance with claim 7 wherein the step of providing the footwear accessory device occurs in a manner such that the support portion of the footwear accessory device comprises a length of tubular material, the material being flexible and resiliently stretchable, the length of tubular material having opposite open end portions, the decorative portion of the footwear accessory device being secured to one of the end portions of the length of tubular material, the step of attaching the footwear accessory device to the leg of the person further comprising positioning the leg of the person in a manner such that the leg of the person extends through the open end portions of the length of tubular material, the radially compressive force exerted on the leg of the person resulting from the material being resiliently stretched when the leg of the person extends through the open end portions of the length of tubular material.

9. A method in accordance with claim 7 wherein the portion of the upper of the article of footwear adjacent the opening edge of the upper forms a loop and the portion of the decorative portion of the footwear accessory device forms a loop, and wherein the step of positioning the footwear accessory device relative to the article of footwear occurs in a manner such that the portion of the upper of the article of footwear adjacent the opening edge of the upper is positioned radially between the portion of the decorative portion of the footwear accessory device and the first portion of the leg of the person.

10. A method in accordance with claim 7 wherein the step of positioning the footwear accessory device relative to the article of footwear occurs in a manner such that the portion of the upper of the article of footwear adjacent the opening edge of the upper is positioned between the portion of the decorative portion of the footwear accessory device and the support portion of the footwear accessory device.

11. A method in accordance with claim 7 wherein the step of providing the footwear accessory device occurs in a manner such that the decorative portion of the footwear accessory device forms a loop, and wherein the step of attaching the footwear accessory device to the leg of the person comprises passing the first portion of the leg of the person through the closed loop of the decorative portion of the footwear accessory device.

12. A method in accordance with claim 7 wherein the step of attaching the footwear accessory device to the leg of the person comprises positioning the decorative portion of the footwear accessory device relative to the leg of the person in a manner such that the decorative portion of the footwear accessory device encircles the leg of the person.

13. An accessory for footwear comprising:

a support portion, the support portion comprising a loop, the loop being circumferentially resiliently stretchable and having axially opposite first and second openings, the loop being adapted and configured in a manner such that the loop can stretchably encircle a leg of a person in a manner releasably securing the support portion to the leg of the person; and

a decorative portion, the decorative portion being connected to the loop in a manner such that the decorative portion encircles the loop adjacent the first opening and such that the decorative portion extends radially outward from the loop of the support portion.

14. An accessory for footwear in accordance with claim 13 wherein the decorative portion extends radially outward from the loop of the support portion in all radial directions.

15. An accessory for footwear in accordance with claim 13 wherein the decorative portion diverges axially as the decorative portion extends radially outward from the loop of the support portion.

16. An accessory for footwear in accordance with claim 13 wherein the decorative portion is sewn to the support portion.

17. An accessory for footwear in accordance with claim 13 wherein the loop of the support portion has an average undeflected diameter and the first and second openings of the loop are spaced from each other by a distance that is between two and four times the average undeflected diameter.

18. An accessory for footwear in accordance with claim 13 wherein the decorative portion extends axially away from the second opening of the loop as it extends radially outward from the loop of the support portion.

19. An accessory for footwear in accordance with claim 13 wherein the decorative portion extends radially outward from the loop of the support portion and thereafter extends axially toward the second opening of the loop in a manner such that a first portion of the decorative portion overlaps a first portion of the loop of the support portion, the first portion of the decorative portion being radially spaced from the first portion of the loop in a manner defining a channel that encircles the loop and that is positioned between the first portion of the loop and the first portion of the decorative portion.

20. An accessory for footwear in accordance with claim 19 wherein the decorative portion extends axially away from the second opening of the loop as it extends radially outward from the loop of the support portion.

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