

Write an essay or a letter
advise society on ways to increase the

Revolutionary New Insoles Combine Five Forms of Pseudoscience

FROM THE ONION

The Onion is a humor magazine published every week as a current-events newspaper. Begun in 1988 in Madison, Wisconsin (and still based there), it now has a national readership of almost a million people each week. The Onion's book *Our Dumb Century* (1999) was a number-one New York Times bestseller. Every year, The Onion publishes collections of the year's articles, among them *The Onion's Finest News Reporting* (2000), *The Onion Ad Nauseam: Complete News Archives* (2000–2004), and *The Onion Platinum Prestige Encore Gold Premium Collector's Collection* (2003). In the following article from 2000, The Onion reports on a new, almost-scientific product. As you read, note the style and form of this piece. How do style and form contribute to the purpose of the article?

MASSILLON, OH—Stressed and sore-footed Americans everywhere are clamoring for the exciting new MagnaSoles shoe

inserts, which stimulate and soothe the wearer's feet using no fewer than five forms of pseudoscience.

"What makes MagnaSoles different from other insoles is the way it harnesses the power of magnetism to properly align the bio-magnetic field around your foot," said Dr. Arthur Bluni, the pseudoscientist who developed the product for Massillon-based Integrated Products. "Its patented Magna-Grid design, which features more than 200 isometrically aligned Contour Points™, actually soothes while it heals, restoring the foot's natural bio-flow."

"MagnaSoles is not just a shoe insert," Bluni continued, "it's a total foot-rejuvenation system."

According to scientific-sounding literature trumpeting the new insoles, the Contour Points™ also take advantage of the semi-plausible medical technique known as reflexology. Practiced in the Occident for over 11 years, reflexology, the literature explains, establishes a correspondence between every point on the human foot and another part of the body, enabling your soles to heal your entire body as you walk.

But while other insoles have used magnets and reflexology as keys to their appearance of usefulness, MagnaSoles go several steps further. According to the product's website, "Only MagnaSoles utilize the healing power of crystals to re-stimulate dead foot cells with vibrational biofeedback . . . a process similar to that by which medicine makes people better."

In addition, MagnaSoles employ a brand-new, cutting-edge form of pseudoscience known as Terranometry, developed specially for Integrated Products by some of the nation's top pseudoscientists.

"The principles of Terranometry state that the Earth resonates on a very precise frequency, which it imparts to the surfaces it touches," said Dr. Wayne Frankel, the California State University biotrician who discovered Terranometry. "If the frequency of one's foot is out of alignment with the Earth, the entire body will suffer. Special resonator nodules implanted at key spots in MagnaSoles convert the wearer's own energy to match the Earth's natural vibrational rate of 32.805 kilofrankels. The resultant harmonic energy field rearranges the foot's naturally occurring atoms, converting the pain-nuclei into pleasing comfortrons."

Released less than a week ago, the \$19.95 insoles are already proving popular among consumers, who are hailing them as a welcome alternative to expensive, effective forms of traditional medicine.

"I twisted my ankle something awful a few months ago, and the pain was so bad, I could barely walk a single step," said

Helene Kuhn of Edison, NJ. "But after wearing MagnaSoles for seven weeks, I've noticed a significant decrease in pain and can now walk comfortably. Just try to prove that MagnaSoles didn't heal me!"

Equally impressed was chronic back-pain sufferer Geoff DeAngelis of Tacoma, WA.

"Why should I pay thousands of dollars to have my spine realigned with physical therapy when I can pay \$20 for insoles clearly endorsed by an intelligent-looking man in a white lab coat?" DeAngelis asked. "MagnaSoles really seem like they're working."

Topics for Thought and Discussion

1. Look at the form of this essay. Note the short paragraphs and the extensive use of quotations. What would you call this kind of writing? Why is this form appropriate for this essay? How does the form of the essay contribute to its purpose?
2. This essay pokes fun at pseudoscience and our own gullibility when it comes to believing pseudoscientific claims. Read through the essay again and mark or make a list of all of the terms and techniques that *The Onion* uses to emphasize the unreliability of this science. What do the writers do to call attention to the lack of scientific credibility?
3. *Scientific literacy* is our ability to understand scientific language and to differentiate between real science and "pseudoscience." Look at the list of techniques you came up with in question #2, and use those terms and techniques to consider how this essay comments on our general scientific literacy. How does it use our scientific literacy as a source of comedy while criticizing our lack of scientific literacy at the same time?
4. Why might products like MagnaSoles use pseudoscientific jargon to sell their products? What does this tell us about the authority, and the role, of science in our culture?

Suggestions for Writing

1. Using this article as evidence, write an essay in which you define the terms *science* and *pseudoscience*, emphasizing the differences between the two.
2. In the above article, the absurdity of the pseudoscientific claims is funny and borders on the ridiculous. But is there a sense in which pseudoscience (and you'll need to clearly define the term) can be dangerous? Write an essay in which you argue for either the harmfulness, or the harmlessness, of pseudoscience (particularly in the form presented by *The Onion*).