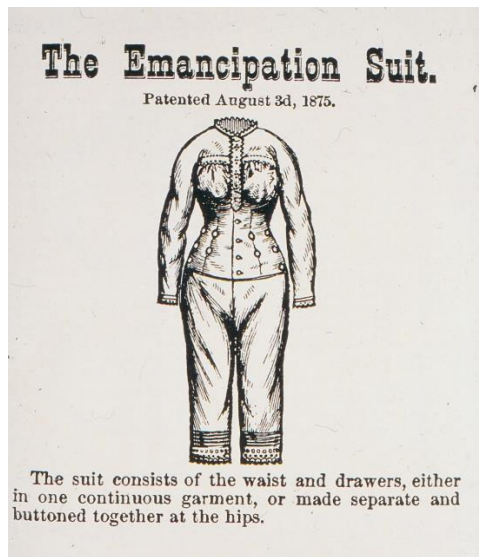


## Medical Profession pro Caleçons



"Everything which alters or disguises Nature proceeds from a false taste [...]. Everything that constrains Nature, or hinders the freedom of action, proceeds from a depraved taste."

*Gentleman's Magazine* (1738)

Few contemporaries were as outspoken about the unnatural constraints of fashion as this unnamed author of an English gentleman's magazine in the early 18th century. In fact, the prevailing dress, dictated by contemporary fashion, was the stark opposite of a costume in harmony with human nature; it coerced, raped and hindered the body in many ways. Even its function as heat protection was inadequately fulfilled, at least in women's fashion, as the lower abdomen and legs were only loosely covered by skirts.

The first serious attempts to fight the dictates of fashion came from the medical profession. Committed to the ideas of the Enlightenment philosophy, scientifically interested doctors began to investigate the causes of certain diseases and thus gained insights into the - sometimes dramatic - health consequences of fashion-based exaltation. In line with their self-image as healers, they took their criticism to the public, be it in the form of publications, newspaper articles or lectures.

Pants are healthy and tasteful, they said. They protect the female abdomen from cold air and free women from the burden of their numerous underskirts. These were their main arguments. However, the protection from immorality, certainly not a genuine task of medical profession, was also put forward by some. The physician Gottfried Wilhelm Becker commented on this in a treatise from 1803 as follows: "Why is it so difficult to get our women to make use of leggings; they, who for many reasons were in the end even more in need of them than we men? How many a voluptuous impulse would be avoided if the naked thighs were not allowed to be folded over each other in this way; if the skirts did not touch such parts which, tickled by them, give rise to desires and lusts which are not always compatible with feminine virtue!"

By 1850, knowledge of the female physique had become more widespread in medical circles. Thus, most doctors advocated the wearing of women's underpants, at least in the cold season.

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