

## **“That Heathen Abomination, Tight Lacing”: Moral Imperatives in Victorian Dress Reform**

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The topic of women’s bodies and public health has been a highly politicized issue in US history. However, this discussion is often left unrooted in historical context. Considering the ribbon “caring for humanity and the world”, this paper focuses the topic of Victorian dress reform, the social movement that aimed to liberate women from the restrictive clothing of the time and compel them to wear more practical, “natural” clothes. While this movement was largely driven by first wave feminists seeking physical comfort and mobility, I illuminate another common perspective unexplored by scholars: the male doctor or minister who projected his own contemporary understanding of women’s gender roles onto her fashion choices. I will examine medical journals, advertisements, and the newly-popular family advice books of the period, as well as Amelia Bloomer’s popular magazine “The Lily,” and argue that there was another vein of not only physical freedom, but moral imperative in rational dress which linked a woman's adoption of wool petticoats and Turkish Trousers to her ability to perform the duties of selfless wife and nurturing mother, ideal female qualities of the 1870’s and 80’s. I hope that by understanding the historical root of this discussion, readers will pursue the ribbon “thinking critically” about their understandings of gender roles, women’s health, and contemporary body politics