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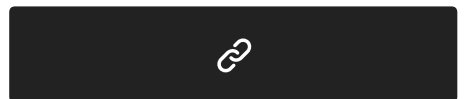
A Brief Guide To "Mormon Underwear"

Your awkward Mitt Romney questions answered.



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You can see the neck of Mitt Romney's special Mormon undershirt in this Facebook picture pic.twitter.com/EmR8OfWR





Twitter: @hunterw



It's perhaps the most awkward question of the 2012 cycle: What's with Mitt Romney's underwear?

The subject of long-running public curiosity, the question occasionally pops back into the foreground, as with a widely-retweeted image earlier this year (top), and footage of the candidate in Florida this week.

From the start of Romney's career as a public figure--and, in many ways, well before then--the special undergarment worn by many observant Mormon men and women has been a point of political curiosity, debate, and derision. While provocateurs and bloggers make jokes about "magic Mormon undies," anti-Mormons try to cast the garment as something more sinister--a bizarre symbol of its wearers' fealty to a scary, secretive cult. The reality is far less exciting.

It's true that Mormons are taught not to flaunt "garments" (as they're called) for public view, which can feed the impression that Romney's hiding some dark, cultish secret beneath his well-starched shirts and neatly-creased slacks. But the principle behind Mormon garments would be familiar to any Baptist who's worn a "What Would Jesus Do" bracelet, or any Jew who's worn a yarmulke or tzitzit (woven threads Orthodox Jews wear on shawls under their shirts). As [the website](#) for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints puts it, garments are worn as "an outward expression of an inward commitment."

Because garments are considered so sacred, Mormons tend to recoil when they hear non-Mormons make casual reference to their underwear--especially in a political context. But if there ever was a time when discussion of the subject could be contained to LDS circles, now is not it. Anyone who's attended a performance of The Book of Mormon Musical has already seen actors wearing replicas of the underwear on stage. And as the presidential race wears on, there's no doubt it will come again and again.

So, in the spirit of debunking and demystifying, BuzzFeed is here to answer your questions about "magic Mormon underwear." (This reporter is something of an expert on the subject.)

What are garments? Who wears them?

Garments are worn by faithful adult Mormons who've received certain ordinances in one of the church's temples (which are different from the churches Mormons attend on Sundays). In temples, Mormons pledge to obey Biblical commandments, live chaste lives, and serve in the church--and the garments are worn to remind wearers of those promises.

Mormons begin wearing garments when they "go through the temple" for the first time--a spiritual rite of passage that typically coincides with leaving to serve a mission, or getting married. Children in the church don't wear garments.

Because wearing them is a personal choice, it's impossible to know for sure if that familiar (to Mormons) neckline in the Romney photo is actually attached to a temple garment. But as a lifelong member of the church who served a mission, married his wife in the temple, and continues to be active in his religion, it would stand to reason that Romney is still a garment-wearer.

What do they look like?

Garments today come in two pieces--a white undershirt, and white boxer brief-style shorts--and they contain small symbols meant to remind Mormons of the covenants they've made in the temple. Some undershirts, like the one Romney appears to be wearing, have circular, low-cut necklines, while others resemble crew-cut t-shirts. They also come in a variety of materials--cotton, polyester, silk, etc.--to accommodate different climates (a fact for which Mormon missionaries in subsaharan Africa are grateful).

Generally, wearing them takes some adjustment at first, but most Mormons report quickly growing accustomed to them. (Out of respect to Latter-day Saints, we are not posting photos of the garments here.)

How often are they worn? Where do Mormons get them?

Garment-wearing Mormons tend to own several pairs, and wear them on a daily basis in lieu of regular underwear. There are obvious exceptions, though: no one keeps them on while playing sports, for instance, or on trips to the beach.

Because of their sacred nature, garments are not sold in retail stores or manufactured by outside companies; they can be purchased at various church-owned stores throughout the world (often attached to temples), or online at one of the LDS church's websites.

Are they magical?

In a word, no. Though it's common in Mormon-mocking rhetoric to use some variation on "magic Mormon undies" to describe the garment ([paging Bill Maher](#)), there's nothing especially mystical about them.

Mormons are taught that by putting on "the whole armor of God"--a Biblical metaphor regularly employed in LDS discussions of the subject--they are afforded protection from temptation, in that they have a physical reminder not to sin. But there's no magical guarantee involved. Just as cheating spouses ignore the vows symbolized by their wedding ring, plenty of garment-wearing Mormons sin. The power is in the symbolism of the garments, not any kind of miracles that result from wearing them.

Within Mormon folklore, there are stories of garment-wearers receiving physical protection--being spared from injury in a car accident, for example--but this isn't part of official LDS doctrine, and it's not widely preached.

Elder Carlos E. Asay, a high-ranking church official, explained the garment like this: "It is given to remind wearers of the continuing need for repentance, the need to honor binding covenants made in the house of the Lord, and the need to cherish and share virtue in our daily living so that promised blessings may be claimed."

Update: In October, 2014, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints published a [video](#) explaining that for members who wear them, the garments "represent the sacred and personal aspect of their relationship with God and their commitment to live good and honorable lives." The video also included images of the garments.

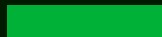


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