

The gifts we keep on giving

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Birthdays, graduations, Christmas, baby showers, bridal showers, bar and bat mitzvahs, Mother's Day, Father's Day, first marriages (and second.. and third...), wedding anniversaries, the spontaneous friendship gesture, the occasional sorry-about-that gesture, hostess gifts and presents that don't even fall into a recognizable category. The year is filled with opportunities and obligations to give and receive.

So who can blame someone for doing a little recycling, or as it is commonly known, regifting? Not the person who actually gave the original gift, despite what a regifter may think.

In an article to be published in a forthcoming issue of *Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, researchers from Stanford Graduate School of Business, the Harvard [Business School](#) and the London Business School explore the whole question of regifting from the perspective of both the original giver and the receiver who may or may not rewrap and regift.

In five studies they investigate whether the practice of "regifting", which is a social taboo, really is as offensive to givers as gifters assume. Over and over again, participants who had received gifts and were told to contemplate regifting thought that the original givers would be more offended than givers reported feeling.

"Regifitng isn't bad," said Gabrielle Adams from the London Business School. "In fact it is one way to ensure that gifts are passed along to those who will truly enjoy them. People shouldn't be afraid to pass along

a gift they received to someone else."

In one study, 178 participants were divided into the roles of givers and receivers. They all read a scenario in which they were asked to imagine that they had recently been given a watch as a graduation gift. Givers were asked to imagine that the receiver had either regifted the watch to a friend or had thrown the watch in the trash. Receivers were asked to imagine that they had either regifted or trashed the watch.

The reactions to each scenario were measured on a five point "offensiveness" scale, which ranged from "very slightly or not at all" to extremely offended. Those who contemplated regifting the watch or pitching it, were asked to rate how offended the giver would be with either scenario. Givers did the same.

Givers were less offended when they learned that the receiver had regifted the watch than when they learned the receiver threw the gift away. But those who received the gift believed that givers would be equally offended no matter what option they took. They basically equated regifting with discarding.

"The finding that receivers think that regifting is as bad as throwing a gift in the trash was particularly interesting to us, " said Adams. "Givers thought throwing a gift away would be much worse than regifting it."

It all boils down to beliefs about entitlement, researchers say. Receivers feel that givers should have a say in what happens to their gifts, while givers feel that receivers are entitled to do whatever they like with a gift.

How to get everyone on the same page? Just add another holiday to the [gift](#) giving list; this one could be called National Regifting Day. Adams explains, "It turns out that National Regifting Day is one way to make receivers think regifting is less offensive."

Provided by Association for Psychological Science

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