

The Thought Is What Counts

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Holiday gift givers who expect to be appreciated for choosing the most expensive gifts are likely to be disappointed when their presents are unwrapped. Cost has little impact on how much we value the gifts we receive, according to research published last year in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*.

Birthday gift buyers asked to rate how grateful they thought their friends would be consistently gave higher marks to gifts with higher price tags, in a study conducted by Francis Flynn of Stanford University in Calif. But surveys given to birthday gift recipients showed no connection between cost and appreciation.

This imbalance in gift size importance between givers and receivers held true for newly-wed couples responding about engagement rings and for subjects who simply imagined giving or receiving a CD or an iPod.

When giving gifts, we have trouble putting ourselves in the role of receiver, according to the researchers. In the experiments, gifts considered to be "thoughtful", regardless of cost, were consistently more appreciated --- but the intention to show concern by spending more was not.

"It seems that [money](#) can't buy love, and givers would do well to buy a thoughtful gift, rather than a more expensive one," concluded the researchers.

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