

# New Centre for Consumer Science report on Christmas gifts

February 6 2012

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The stereotypical Christmas gift shopper is a stressed-to-the-max individual with a filled-to-the-rim shopping cart in a busy shopping mall. The shopping hysteria during the weeks before Christmas is frequently debated in the media, and the seeming overflow of just about everything is often viewed as immoral. In the report *Att skapa familj i en värld av pengar* (making a family in a world of money), Professor Helene Brembeck from the University of Gothenburg is moving the focus from the Christmas overflow as something entirely bad to questions about the origins of the overflow, who defines what's excessive and how the overflow is managed.

Helene Brembeck, Professor of Ethnology at the Centre for Consumer Science, has studied [Christmas gift](#) discussions on the internet, in media and in written accounts and interview material gathered within the framework of the research project *Growing up in abundance. Managing childhood and parenthood*.

In the weeks leading up to [Christmas](#), parenting blogs tend to focus on the affective features of Christmas. There is a strong link between Christmas and family members being cosy together. Parents want to give their children a 'real' Christmas, and Christmas gifts are viewed as a natural part of the envisioned togetherness, along with good food, candles and family quality time in general. Christmas gifts are an important symbol of generosity and warm ties among family members and friends.

Where is the excess? Overflow management may be about handling that there is so much 'out there' but so little in the wallet. There can be an overflow at home as well. This may be a matter of having two of the same or having things you don't want or like. Then the overflow is simply passed on via buy-and-sell websites or second hand stores. The importance of the growing e-market for overflow management, where the Swedish internet sites Tradera and Blocket are perfect examples of tools that can be used both before and after the purchasing of a product, cannot be overestimated.

Who defines what's excessive? Overflow 'out there' is primarily defined by self-proclaimed experts, journalists and participants in the public debate. Overflow at home is defined by the bloggers, who tend to refer to what's at the stores as 'a lot' but not 'too much'. The talk about 'too much' is usually saved for when the different products invade the home and take up too much space or are perceived as unnecessary or ugly.

Christmas gifts as overflow management implies that we manifest relations and family togetherness not primarily through the transfer of wrapped gifts, but through the long implementation phase, which includes writing of wish lists, online surfing, physical shopping, and extensive pondering over what [gifts](#) are perfect not only for the receiver but also for the giver and his or her wallet.

Provided by University of Gothenburg

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