

Are Some People Undeserving of Free Stuff?

New research finds that "Freecycle" does not help environment as claimed, but instead contributes to a consumption economy.

HOUSTON, TEXAS, UNITED STATES, May 11, 2016 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Freecycle users who

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Sofya Aptekar

want to get rid of items evaluate potential recipients for "worthiness," rather than giving for altruistic reasons. Sofya Aptekar, a sociologist from the University of Massachusetts Boston, finds that this behavior, too, also contradicts claims that Freecycle helps the environment -- in fact, it helps contribute to a consumption economy. Investigating Freecycle members via an online survey of members and observing two local Freecycle groups for three years, Aptekar finds that

Freecycle givers develop a moral framework to evaluate those who respond to their advertisements for their unwanted items. Members use strategies to evaluate and choose the most desirable recipient of their item, preferring those who have a compelling story for why they need the item. As Aptekar states in a recent article in the academic journal "[Social Problems](#)," "Helping others was not simply a byproduct of Freecycle giving...with givers attempting to control the recipients' behavior, holding expectations common to charity, or drawing moral stipulations about need and deservingness."

Despite the desire to find a deserving and compelling recipient, Aptekar finds that altruism is not the main motivation for giving for these individuals. Instead, Freecycle is seen as a convenient and quick way to declutter one's home and reduce environmental degradation for members. Regardless of Freecycle's supposed environmental benefits, this research finds that giving on Freecycle can aid in a consumption-driven lifestyle, wherein members may buy items knowing that they can give away the excess or old items through the community.

The Freecycle Network is an online forum designed to allow people to advertise items that they wish to give away and request items that they would like to receive. Millions of members give away and receive items like baby clothes, furniture, and books. Unlike other companies in the sharing economy, like Uber and Airbnb, Freecycle is free and aims to reduce consumer waste, not generate a profit..Additionally, Freecycle is engineered to make those giving their items away feel special, wanted, and rewarded. Members have the ability to meet the individuals they are giving the items to, unlike other charitable organizations which are anonymous, and are able to know for sure that the item is wanted and needed. The majority of members who give on the site rarely even get things through it for themselves, highlighting the one-sided nature of the exchange in the Freecycle Network.

For further information, please contact Devon R. Goss (devon.goss@uconn.edu) or the author, Sofya Aptekar (sofya.aptekar@umb.edu or 617-287-6250). The article appears in the May 2016 Issue of "Social Problems," and is entitled "[Gifts Among Strangers: The Social Organization of Freecycle Giving](#)."

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the most widely respected and read professional journals in the social sciences. This quarterly journal presents accessible, relevant, and innovative articles that uphold critical perspectives on contemporary social issues. For additional commentary, you can follow the journal on [Twitter](#).

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