

## Study: Homeless people find equality, acceptance on social networking sites

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Many have argued the Marxist theories of a classless society died with the collapse of the Soviet Union and a faltering Cuba, but a University of Dayton study has found a place where such approaches may have a shot of survival—Facebook, and other social networking sites.

University of Dayton sociologist and criminologist Art Jipson discovered in his most recent research that the [homeless](#), along with everyone else, are turning to social media and that social media sites are turning into places where all people are truly equal.

Jipson, an associate sociology professor, will present his findings at the 107th Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association.

"People think of Facebook as this billion-dollar entity with stock offerings that sells gobs of advertising," Jipson said. "But, on Facebook, the 'least of our brothers,' as it says in the Bible, have equal access to all of Facebook's offerings and establish a sense of belonging that is based on more than possessions.

"In a sense, it's a very Catholic way of looking at how we interact with one another. Catholic social teaching expresses a concern about 'a communal, social nature' where 'we are called to reach out and build relationships of love and justice.'"

Through his interviews, Jipson found that the homeless use social media not only to build support networks, but to solve practical issues such as

where to find their next meal, where to find safe and warm places to sleep, and where to find various social services.

"Why can't I be on Facebook?," asked one subject in the study. "I have as much right to that as anyone else. Just because I am homeless does not mean that I don't care about this stuff, you know? My family is on Facebook. My friends are on Facebook. People who care about me are on Facebook."

Jipson found that for some members of the homeless community, social media can be a refuge, a place to interact without being judged. Another interviewee said, "No one on the 'net cares if I didn't get a shower yesterday or smell some. They don't judge me, you know? ... I feel accepted. I am accepted."

Jipson also found it interesting that on [social networking](#) sites, some of which are driven by advertising dollars based on likes, clicks, comments, and status updates, even the least commercially attractive users are just as equal as the most affluent users. Everyone is afforded the same services and benefits of using social media.

"Our posts become the commercial property of corporations that will do everything possible to generate revenue in the form of value for the company and stockholders rather than for the users," Jipson said. "But, for homeless users of social media—which is a growing population—the value is for the online community itself, which is very egalitarian."

Jipson's inspiration for the project came by happenstance. Also a researcher of the sociology of music, Jipson has a weekly radio show on the campus radio station, WUDR. When Jipson asked for one caller's name and location, he was surprised to find the caller was homeless but had a cell phone. Jipson later contacted the caller and found he used the phone for social media—checking and writing messages on Facebook

and Twitter.

Jipson set up an interview with the caller, and that led to interviews with 13 other homeless members of the area community to examine their uses of social media. Most of them had 100 or more Facebook friends, according to Jipson.

"They don't have much, and many may wonder how they can afford cell phones when they can't afford a place to live," Jipson said. "But, access to [social media](#) is in reach for them, too. All you need is a phone."

Provided by American Sociological Association

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