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Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society

Title

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Journal

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, 38(0)

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Publication Date

2016

Peer reviewed

Moral Social Media: Heavy Facebook Users Accept Harsher Moral Criticism for Microaggressions

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Abstract: Microaggressions are unintentional or thoughtless behaviors that convey negative messages to members of minority groups. Due to the attributional ambiguity of microaggressions, people often differ in their judgments about how morally bad acts of microaggression are. To account for this individual variation, we explored the potential influence of heavy social media use on individuals' moral judgments of microaggressive behaviors. We hypothesized that, because of the relative acceptance of strong blame expressions on social media, heavy Facebook users would endorse intense moral criticism of microaggressions. Participants read about several agents who committed microaggressions and judged the appropriateness of moral criticism (pretested to vary in degrees from “disapprove of,” “chastise,” “chew out,” to “lash out at”) that a friend directed towards the offender. Consistent with our hypothesis, we found a strong correlation ($r = .47$) between increasing degrees of Facebook use and increasing acceptance of harsher moral criticism for microaggressions.