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## Review of Patihis & Carter (2026)

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This manuscript examines whether reappraisals of one's first date partner bias memory of emotion for that event. Using experimental manipulations via writing prompts, the authors found that downward reappraisal reduced positive recall and increased negative recall – in terms of both the partner and the date itself. Upward appraisal, however, showed no significant effects relative to the control condition. The work builds on earlier studies of emotional memory malleability and extends the paradigm into a socially and ethically charged domain (dating experiences with potential #MeToo implications). The topic is provocative, and the replication of effects across pilot and main studies gives it some empirical weight (though more on that in a moment). However, the design's simplicity and interpretive framing raise several concerns about construct clarity, causality, and the boundary between psychological inference and social commentary. I would suggest some attention to this in the intro as well as in the discussion. Be careful about making assertions about the implications for legal cases and the like because that seems to be an overreach based on the results presented here.

In terms of the theoretical framing of the study, the authors position it as both a conceptual replication and an extension into "first-date" memories. But the theoretical rationale seems to be largely a restatement of prior work. What seems to be missing is an argument for why first-date memories could be theoretically distinct (or not) from other autobiographic memories. As written, it just seems like a replication study using a different focal stimulus.

The reference to the #MeToo movement in the opening paragraph feels rhetorically risky and is only loosely connected to the actual data. Unless there is direct evidence of relevance to legal or testimonial memory, it risks politicizing an otherwise narrow cognitive experiment. Part of this issue becomes a bit more manifest when we look at the size of the effects. There doesn't seem to be strong effects, which is fine, but the lack thereof also weakens any connection the practical issues of #MeToo or other reporting behavior. The truth is that we don't know how slight changes in ratings – as reported in this particular study – would alter actual behavior (one of the biggest gaps in a lot of psychology research as we tend to treat self-report ratings as indicative of likely behavioral differences as a result of those ratings).

The logic that changes in appraisal cause changes in emotional memory is plausible, but the causal language (“reappraisals lead to distortion”) overreaches. The manipulations shift reported affective recollection immediately after prompting, which could reflect temporary framing effects rather than true memory distortion. Given the fact that the effects were only observed for the downward appraisal condition, it also begs the question of whether we would expect such framing asymmetries and if so why. Is there reason to suspect that negative appraisals would be more open to manipulation than positive? Perhaps some attention to this in the discussion would be beneficial.

From a design and methodology perspective, I also had a few comments and thoughts that, if addressed, would make the manuscript stronger. First, the authors mention the pilot, and supplemental materials detailed that, but it’s unclear to me how the pilot was any different than the study proper. Perhaps I missed that somewhere, but the pilot is nothing but a smaller-sample version of the larger study, why not simply collapse the samples together for power purposes? And if there’s a reason to keep them separate, why does the manuscript benefit from a supplemental document instead of the pilot being discussed in the manuscript proper?

Second, I had a few concerns with the writing prompts. A case could be made that they manipulate valence priming more than appraisal *per se*. The authors treat these as equivalent, but appraisal theory (Lazarus, 1991) is about interpretive meaning, not just adjective framing. They need to clarify that distinction. Some of this gets back to the issue of affective framing I mentioned above. But I also wondered why there was no control condition in terms of having them do something neutral as it relates to this prior date (e.g., describe the setting of the date). Having no neutral task for the control condition opens up the potential that there are demand characteristics at play, as opposed to legitimate effects on actual reappraisal.

One big question I had was in regards to the temporal distance from the first date. Was any data collected on this? People recalling a 6-month-old experience may differ dramatically from those recalling one from 5 years ago. Without controlling or measuring elapsed time, it’s impossible to gauge whether “reappraisal” or “memory decay plus reconstruction” drives the effect.

On the emotions front, in terms of the specific items used, where did these come from? I get that they were adapted from a couple of prior studies, but that doesn’t really tell me how they were derived. Given that they seem to be a somewhat arbitrary collection of affect-related descriptors, it would be helpful to articulate a reason why this collection makes sense. I also noticed that there was a total of 23 items (12 about partner and 11 about the date), but when I counted the subtotals from the composite measures, I counted only 14 items used there. There were some other items that popped up in specific analyses, but those should be detailed in the method section too. This way, the reader has a very clear idea of all of the variables of interest.

Also, while I appreciated the inclusion of means and standard deviations by condition in Table 1, it would also be helpful to have – at least as a supplemental document – a table of correlations among the DVs in each condition. There’s an awful lot of tests that take place, and I wonder to what extent these really are different tests (and if they are, there would seem to be some Type I issues that need to be accounted for). If, for example, we see strong associations between partner and date for each of the appraisals, is it really accurate to treat them as if they are somehow independent (I suspect they are not truly independent, but I would be interested to see what those correlations actually are before drawing any firm conclusions there). If they do remain fully

separate, it would be helpful to perhaps consider ways to collapse some of those figures so they more than one test can be presented per figure. No, I'm not entirely sure what I suggest there in terms of how, but I found the number of figures to be difficult to keep track of (they all started to bleed together after a while). Finding a way to make those visuals more friendly for consumption purposes would benefit the manuscript.

One last point to bring up. The authors use the term "distortions" a few times, but that word implies that there is a fully accurate view of these events that would exist outside of the presence of prompts, reappraisal, or other emotion-related ratings. How do we know, for example, that writing prompts don't make the memories more salient and perhaps accurate than without such prompts? The short answer is we don't because memory for such events is not something that can be easily confirmed (and we already know based on prior research that memories are not fully accurate to begin with, regardless of how those memories are primed). At best, we can argue here that in the downward condition, ratings seem to be biased toward the negative when compared to the other conditions, but we cannot say that those are any more or less distorted than what was observed for those other conditions.

In closing, I do think there's some interesting stuff going on here, but I'd like to see a little more attention toward strengthening the overall coherence of the different pieces and maybe streamlining the flow both across and within sections so it all fits together as a more complete package.