Emotional Reactivity Changes to Daily Stressors Surrounding the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election

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Abstract

Results from the Nov. 8, 2016 U.S. presidential election largely contradicted expectations which indicated a popular and electoral majority for the democratic candidate. Although the date of the election was known, the result was not anticipated. We examined potential changes in within-person emotional reactivity to personally-relevant stressors as a function of the more distal, U.S. presidential election. During October and November of 2016 we conducted a daily diary study of stressors and well-being in younger adults. A subsample (n = 29 individuals aged 18-22 reporting on 235 days total) of the larger project (n=107 total) began the 9-day study protocol on Nov. 2 and completed it on Nov. 10. The U.S. Presidential election took place on Nov. 8. Multilevel analyses of the 880 total study days comparing the election subsample and the comparison subsample revealed significant increases in emotional reactivity to daily stressors from before the election to after the election; emotional reactivity became amplified in the short term after the election. These findings highlight the importance of both distal and proximal environmental factors for individual responses in the daily stress process unfolding over time.

Keywords: Election; stress; emotional reactivity; daily diary

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Events that are appraised as stressors typically have potent negative effects on physical, psychological, (Almeida, Wethington, & Kessler, 2002; Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Schilling, 1989; Liu et al., 2016; McVicar, Ravalier, & Greenwood, 2014; Mroczek & Almeida, 2004; Rezaei & Mousanezhad Jeddi, 2018) and cognitive (Lees & Lal, 2017; Neupert, Almeida, Mroczek, & Spiro, 2006) health. Naturally-occurring stressors provide an opportunity to examine the transaction of individuals and their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Hammen, 2016; Hinds & Burroughs, 1997; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and when repeated assessments are captured for each individual before, during, and after an event, a time-based process can be examined (Tudge, 2016). The current study adds to the limited research on the impact of social change on individual development (Pinquart & Silbereisen, 2004). During October and November of 2016 we were conducting a daily diary study of stressors and well-being. A subsample began the 9-day study protocol on Nov. 2 and completed it on Nov. 10. The U.S. Presidential election took place on Nov. 8, with a result that ran counter to most expectations (Lilleker, Jackson, Thorsen, & Veneti, 2016). Thus, the election served as a shared environment of social change to examine its potential effect on individuals' daily lives. We leverage these unique data to examine changes from before the election to after the election in within-person emotional reactivity to personally-relevant stressors.

Linking the election to emotional reactivity is based in Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory which outlines systems of influence on individual development. Asserting that development is affected by everything in one's surrounding environment, his theory acknowledges five different levels ranging from proximal (microsystem: closest to the

individual and the one with direct contact) to distal (macrosystem: cultural environment encompassing the economy, cultural values, and political systems). Importantly, transactions and synergies among the systems can be more important than the individual systems themselves (Rojas-Drummond, 2016), especially in college students (Katz & Somers, 2017). The process by which development occurs and the emphasis on time, both longitudinal and historical, are key features of the model (Tudge, 2016). We draw on Bronfenbrenner's (1977) idea of multiple systems of influence, the role of historical contexts (Tudge, 2016) in naturalistic settings (Jaeger, 2016), and the call to build models of stress that include environmental events and changes in reactivity to stressors based on experience (Hammen, 2016). Specifically, we were interested in whether the distal, shared event occurring outside the individual of the U.S. presidential election (i.e., macrosystem) could become internalized and shift the stress process of forecasting and response to personal events (i.e., microsystem). Thus, we apply a process approach (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Tudge, 2016) and acknowledge the transaction of person and environment in the stress process (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) to explore daily stressor exposure and negative affect as they travel together within a person over time (i.e., emotional reactivity) and change as a function of the U.S. presidential election.

Elections are associated with activation of the stress response; for example, following the 2008 election John McCain supporters showed elevated levels of cortisol following his loss (Stanton, LaBar, Saini, Kuhn, & Beehner, 2010). Elections are also associated with the onset or relapse of psychiatric illnesses, functioning in a similar way to other major life event stressors (Bhugra & Ram Gupta, 1996). Stress responses may be most acute prior to the outcome, with voters reporting higher levels of positive and negative affect at the ballot box compared to the night when results were announced (Waismel-Manor, Ifergane, & Cohen, 2011). We know from

our previous work that news events can permeate into individuals' personal lives in terms of changes in well-being from before the event to after the event (i.e., Columbia Shuttle explosion; BLINDED FOR REVIEW, 2006). One goal of the present study was to examine personal responses (microsystem) surrounding a political event to which a subsample of participants was exposed (macrosystem). In this naturalistic experiment, we compare two subsamples (election vs. comparison) to examine the effects of the election as it occurred and its potential impact on emotional reactivity to events in participants' lives that were personally relevant.

Emotional reactivity is a within-person increase in negative affect in response to stressors and can depend on factors such as age, control beliefs, stressor domain (Neupert, Almeida, & Charles, 2007), aging attitudes (Bellingtier & Neupert, 2016; 2018), personality (Bolger & Zuckerman, 1995), and time since event (Wrzus, Luong, Wagner, & Riediger, 2015). Because younger adults can be more emotionally reactive to microsystem daily stressors than older adults (Neupert et al., 2007), it is crucial to understand macrosystem factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) that may be associated with these differences. In addition, negative affect is important to understand as it unfolds in the stress process because it can precede coping efforts (Martinent & Nicolas, 2017; Zeidner & Ben-Zur, 2014). Just like stressors, coping efforts are embedded in social contexts and appraised within that context (Berg, Meegan, & Deviney, 1998). The transactions of multiple systems is also key, as system-level changes may negatively impact individuals' psychological health. Employees who worked in organizations undergoing system level changes had a significant increase in risk of receiving stress-related medication compared to those at organizations that were not undergoing changes (Dahl, 2011). Within educational contexts, when teacher responsibilities increased and professional roles shifted as a result of high stakes policy change, teachers reported increased feelings of stress and anxiety (Valli & Buese,

2007). In the current study, we examined the transaction of macro- and micro-systems by examining changes in emotional reactivity to both *forecasted* and *actual* stressors as a function of the U.S. presidential election on November 8, 2016.

Daily stressors are defined as routine challenges of day-to-day living, and although they may be relatively minor, they are tangible events, usually occurring within the microsystem, that can have an immediate negative impact on physical and psychological well-being (Almeida, 2005; Almeida et al., 2002; Calderwood & Ackerman, 2016). Some stressors are unhealthier than others, and some individuals are more prone to the effects of stressors than other individuals (Almeida, 2005; Flinchbaugh, Luth, & Li, 2005). Daily stressors also occur within the context of major life events, which can reflect changes in more distal systems (e.g., change in residence), and interact in important ways (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). For example, we know that older adults who have experienced more major life events in the past year are actually more resilient to daily stressors when they do occur, compared to older adults who have experienced fewer major life events (Bellingtier, Neupert, & Kotter-Grühn, 2017). However, this study focused on personally-relevant major life events and daily stressors.

In addition to stressor exposure, expectations of future stress are important predictors of psychological and physical health (Stemmet, Roger, Kuntz, & Borrill, 2018). Anticipatory stress can take two forms: 1) *event* forecasting; or 2) expectations of a *feeling* of stress (BLINDED FOR REVIEW, 2018). We focus on event forecasting, which are individuals' predictions about whether a stressor will occur in a defined upcoming time period (i.e., stressor forecast; BLINDED FOR REVIEW, 2018; Neubauer, Smyth, & Sliwinski, 2017). We know from recent daily diary studies that forecasting a stressor that does not occur is consistently associated with an increase in subsequent negative affect (BLINDED FOR REVIEW, 2018). However,

forecasting some stressors, especially for younger adults, is protective and associated with a subsequent decrease in negative affect when the forecasted stressor occurs (BLINDED FOR REVIEW, 2018). We are unaware of any studies examining changes in forecast of a personally-relevant event, such as a work-related stressor (contained in the microsystem), as it relates to a shared distal event, in this case, the U.S. presidential election (contained in the macrosystem).

Anticipation of an event is threatening to the extent that the event may be associated with a personally-relevant loss (e.g., money) (Hobfoll, 1989). Appraising a future event as threatening serves the function of mobilizing resources to begin coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Schwarzer & Chung, 1996; Schwarzer & Knoll, 2003), and research on expecting the worst suggests that negative predictions may mobilize energy toward avoiding the bad event and actually help prepare for it should the event occur (Jung, 1992; Showers & Ruben, 1990). Importantly, this suggests that forecasting is associated with thoughts and actions before the predicted event occurs. Berg et al. (1998) noted that the process of anticipating everyday life problems is dynamic with microdevelopmental change embedded within macrodevelopmental change. Indeed, Neupert, Ennis, Ramsey, and Gall (2016) applied a microdevelopmental approach and found that coping before a stressor occurred (anticipatory coping) could reduce reactivity to the stressor when it did happen, but was also associated with increases in subsequent negative affect. We extend this previous line of research by looking at dynamic processes within a person over time and how they may change as a function of the election. Specifically, we examine the within-person relationship of forecasting next-day personally relevant stressors on daily negative affect for the days preceding, the day of, and the days following the election.

Results from the Nov. 8, 2016 U.S. presidential election largely contradicted debate results, pre-election polls, and predictions, which indicated a popular and electoral majority for

the democratic candidate (Lilleker et al., 2016). Although the date of the election was known, the result was not anticipated. We were in the midst of completing a daily diary study of younger adults and did not set out a priori to examine reactivity surrounding the election. We are capitalizing on the timing of our study and the uniqueness of our data to examine potential changes in within-person emotional reactivity to personally-relevant stressors in the microsystem as a function of the more distal, U.S. presidential election in the macrosystem. Our focus on college students is fitting because college freshman in the U.S. in 2016 were more politically polarized than in the last 51 years (Glatter, 2017); approximately 35% identified themselves as liberal whereas 22% identified themselves as far right (Glatter, 2017). Although we are not able to draw causal conclusions based on the design of our data, we leverage a strength of daily diary designs that treats each person as their own control; we are able to examine changes as they unfold over time within persons. We are also able to compare patterns of reactivity changes between the subsample participating in the study during the election (election subsample) to those who participated in the study before the election (comparison subsample). We expected that the election would be associated with an increase in emotional reactivity to forecasted (Hypothesis 1) and actual (Hypothesis 2) daily stressors. Specifically, we expected that the within-person associations between forecasted and actual stressors and negative affect would become stronger in the days after the election.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants were the younger adult subsample of the MACE (Mindfulness and Anticipatory Coping Everyday) online daily diary study (BLINDED FOR REVIEW, 2017) administered via Qualtrics. The protocol for the study was reviewed and approved by the

primary institution's IRB on April 28, 2016 (approval # 6517). 107 participants were recruited from introductory psychology courses at [NAME OF INSTITUTION BLINDED FOR REVIEW] which is a land-grant university where introductory psychology serves as a general education requirement. Thus, the courses draw students from all majors across the university. [NAME OF STATE BLINDED FOR REVIEW] voted for the Republican candidate by nearly 5 percentage points in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election. Most students (77.7% in Fall 2015, most recent data available) are from [NAME OF STATE BLINDED FOR REVIEW], where the most common level of education is high school, followed by some college but no degree, and then a Bachelor's degree. Between October 3rd and 6th of 2016, [NAME OF INSTITUTION BLINDED FOR REVIEW] sent a survey over the internet to a random sample of 4,000 undergraduates, generating a 22% response rate. A total of 895 students responded to the survey that had an emphasis on institutional policies and local, state, and federal issues in the 2016 election. In response to the question "If the election were held today, would you vote for Hillary Clinton (D), Gary Johnson (L), or Donald Trump (R)?", 50% selected Clinton, 27% selected Trump, 16% selected Johnson, and 7% selected other. In a separate study from our lab conducted in early 2017, we asked participants from the same participant pool to report their political identity. 7% reported identifying as strongly conservative, 16% identified as strongly liberal, and 77% reported identifying closer to the middle. Based on this information, it is likely that the participants in the current study represented the full spectrum of political orientation and identification.

Participants received course credit for participation and ranged from 18 to 36 years old (49% female, 80% white, parents' education averaged a Bachelor's degree). On Day 1, participants provided informed consent and then reported on baseline sociodemographic

variables. On Days 2-9, daily stressors, daily negative affect, and forecast of future stressors were reported. The election subsample consisted of 29 individuals ranging in age from 18-22 reporting on 235 days total out of a possible 261 days [90% compliance rate]) that began the 9-day study protocol on November 2, 2016. The remaining 78 younger adult participants (comparison subsample) completed the study protocol in October of 2016 and reported on 645 total days out of a possible 702 days [92% compliance rate]. The total sample consisted of 107 participants reporting on 880 days. Post hoc estimates of power (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) indicated that we had a power level of .99 when assuming a small effect size (.20).

Measures

Election Timing. Days before the election (before and including Nov. 8) were coded 0 and days after the election (Nov. 9 onward) were coded 1. We chose to code the day of the election as 0 because the election results were not definitively known until the early morning hours (EST) of Nov. 9th. For the comparison subsample, Days 2-7 were coded as 0, and Days 8-9 were coded as 1. This corresponds to the election timing in the election subsample, thus for the entire sample we refer to Days 2-7 as "pre" days and Days 8-9 as "post" days.

Daily Negative Affect was assessed on Days 2-9 using the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). The PANAS consists of two 10-item mood scales. Negative affect was measured by words such as irritable, ashamed, and nervous. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they felt these emotions in the past 24-hours. Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, such that higher scores indicated more negative affect. A negative affect daily composite score was created for each day by averaging the negative affect items from that day. Daily Cronbach's alpha scores ranged from

.83 to .93 for the full sample and from .83 to .96 for the election subsample. Daily negative affect appeared to be consistently reliable across study days (Cronbach's alpha post-election ranged from .89 [November 10] to .95 [November 9]).

Daily Stressors were measured using a written version of the Daily Inventory of Stressful Events (DISE; Almeida et al., 2002). Participants indicated whether or not they had experienced seven types of stressors within the past 24 hours, these included: disagreements, potential disagreements, stressful events in the workplace/volunteer setting, stressors at home, network stressors (e.g., stressors occurring to one's family and friends), personal health stressors (e.g., problems receiving treatment, medication-related issues, and illnesses), and other stressors. Individuals received a summed total stressor score for each day with higher scores indicating more stressors.

Daily Stressor Forecasts. For each stressor domain, participants were asked to report on the likelihood of the given stressor occurring within the next 24 hours (e.g., How likely is it that you will have an argument or disagreement with someone within the next 24 hours?). This question was answered on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Not at all likely*) to 5 (*Extremely likely*). Individuals received a mean total score for each day with higher scores indicating a greater expected likelihood of stressors the following day. We operationalized emotional reactivity to forecasted stressors by using the current day forecast rating as a predictor of current day negative affect.

Covariates. We controlled for age (serving as a proxy for election experience as a potential voter), neuroticism (The Revised Midlife Development Inventory [MIDI] Personality Scales; Lachman & Weaver, 1997, 2005), number of chronic health conditions, number of major life event stressors (life stress checklist originally used in the National Survey of Midlife

Development in the United States [MIDUS]; Brim et al., 1996; Ryff et al., 2006), and gender in the analyses because of their possible associations with negative affect and stress responses (Schneider, Rench, Lyons, & Riffle, 2012). Specifically, neuroticism is positively associated with negative affect and with increased reactivity (Bolger & Zuckerman, 1995). Chronic health conditions (Assari & Lankarani, 2016) and major life event stressors (Vingerhoets & Marcelissen, 1988) are also known to have positive associations with negative affect. Finally, women tend to report more negative affect than men (Fujita, Diener, & Sandvik, 1991).

Analyses

Multilevel Modeling (MLM) using SAS (1997) Proc Mixed was implemented. MLM, which does not require balanced data, is frequently used to model intraindividual variability; that is, people's variability around their own average. This technique was especially useful in the current study because we sought to examine changes in reactivity, which we operationalized as the within-person relationship between forecasted/actual stressors and negative affect (NA), as a function of the election. Our hypotheses regarding changes in daily (Level 1) reactivity associated with the election across subsamples (Level 2) were tested in four models using the following formula:

Level 1(days): $\text{NEGATIVE AFFECT}_{it} = \beta_{0it} + \beta_{1it}(\text{PRE/POST DAYS}) + \beta_{2it}(\text{STRESSOR \#}) + \beta_{3it}(\text{PRE/POST DAYS*STRESSOR \#}) + r_{it}$ (1)

Level 2 (persons): $\beta_{0i}\ (\text{Average NA}) = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{AGE}) + \gamma_{02}(\text{AVERAGE STRESSOR \#}) + \gamma_{03}(\text{NEUROTICISM}) + \gamma_{04}(\text{CHRONIC CONDITIONS}) + \gamma_{05}(\text{LIFE EVENT STRESSORS}) + \gamma_{06}(\text{GENDER}) + \gamma_{07}(\text{SAMPLE}) + u_{0i}$ (2)

$\beta_{1i}\ (\text{Pre/post slope}) = \gamma_{10} + \gamma_{11}(\text{SAMPLE})$ (3)

$\beta_{2i}\ (\text{Stressor \# slope}) = \gamma_{20} + \gamma_{21}(\text{SAMPLE})$ (4)

$$\beta_{3i}\,(\text{Pre/post X Stressor \# slope}) = \gamma_{30} + \gamma_{31}(\text{SAMPLE}) \;\; (+ u_{3i}) \qquad (5)$$

Equation 1 specifies within-person relationships based on each day of the daily diary data. The intercept, $\beta_{0it,}$ is the expected level of negative affect for person i on days without stressors before the election for the election subsample and on Days 2-7 for the comparison subsample (i.e., PRE/POST DAYS = 0 and STRESSOR # = 0). The first slope, β_{1it}, is the expected change in negative affect associated with the pre/post days; that is, the change associated with moving from a value of 0 (days before the election for the election subsample or Days 2-7 for the comparison sample) to a value of 1 (all subsequent days after the election for the election subsample or Days 8-9 for the comparison sample). The second slope, β_{2it}, is the expected change in negative affect associated with daily stressor exposure, which we operationalized as emotional reactivity. In Model 1 we used forecasted stressors, and in Model 2 we used actual stressor occurrence. The third slope, β_{3it}, is the expected change in reactivity associated with the pre/post days. The error term, r_{it}, represents the amount of daily fluctuation around the mean. The intercept and slopes from Level 1 become the outcome variables in Level 2. Equation 2 includes age, average number of stressors (which served to person-mean center the daily stressor variable and focus on state-like deviations from one's own average), neuroticism, chronic conditions, life event stressors, gender, and sample (election vs comparison). The intercept (γ_{00}) represents the average level of negative affect when all predictors are at 0. Equation 3 yields γ_{10} representing the average relationship between the pre/post days and negative affect and γ_{11} tests whether there are sample differences in the relationship between the pre/post days and negative affect. Equation 4 provides the average relationship between the daily stressors and negative affect (γ_{20}: emotional reactivity) and examines whether that reactivity varies by sample (γ_{21}). Equation 5 tests whether there is an interaction of Pre/post days x Stressors (γ_{30}: changes in

reactivity as a function of the election in the election subsample or as a function of moving from Day 7 to Day 8 in the comparison sample). Hypotheses 1 and 2 are tested by γ_{31} which assesses sample differences in changes in reactivity as a function of pre/post days. Interindividual deviations from the mean level are represented by u_{0i}.

For Model 3 (forecasted stressors) and Model 4 (actual stressors), we allowed the slope to vary across individuals in Equations 5 by including u_{3i} which tests for individual differences in within-person changes in reactivity. That is, we tested to see whether the interaction of the Pre/post days X (Forecasted) Stressor varied across participants. Because we did not have access to information on political orientation or voting behavior, allowing this slope to vary tested to see whether there were any individual differences in the within-person interaction of Pre/post days X (Forecasted) Stressor. A nonsignificant variance around the slope would suggest that the interaction does not vary across participants; that is, the interaction effect would be consistent for the entire sample and thus not depend on individual differences in political orientation or voting behavior.

Results

Descriptive Results

Analyses were conducted to compare the two subsamples of diary participants (i.e., the election vs comparison subsamples). The two subsamples did not differ significantly from each other on any of the variables in Table 1.

Participants reported at least one daily stressor on 31% of study days and multiple stressors on 11% of study days with daily scores ranging from 0 to 5. For comparison, participants in the National Study of Daily Experiences reported at least one daily stressor on 39% of study days and multiple stressors on 10% of study days (Almeida et al., 2002). We

conducted independent samples t-tests to compare rates of stressor exposure between the election and comparison subsamples. In all cases, Levene's test of homogeneity of variance was violated. Thus, adjusted degrees of freedom were used and corresponding results are reported (see Table 1). Participants who completed the study during the election did not differ in the average number of daily stressors experienced compared to those participating prior to the election. Nor did participants differ in the average number of daily stressors reported before or after the election. We then conducted paired samples t-tests to compare rates of stressor exposure from before the election to after the election in the election subsample, and from Days 2-7 (because Day 7 corresponded to the day of the election in the election subsample) to Days 8-9 in the comparison subsample (see Table 1). For both the election subsample and the comparison subsample, the average number of daily stressors was higher on Days 2 through 7 than on Days 8 and 9.

Participants reported at least some likelihood of a daily stressor occurring in the next 24 hours on 73% of study days with daily scores ranging from 1 to 4.29. We conducted independent samples t-tests to compare rates of stressor forecast between the election and comparison subsamples (see Table 1). Participants who completed the study during the election did not differ in the average number of daily stressors forecasted compared to those in the comparison subsample. Nor did participants differ in the average number of daily stressors forecasted before or after the election. We then conducted paired samples t-tests to compare rates of stressor forecast from before the election to after the election in the election subsample and from Days 2-7 to Days 8-9 in the comparison subsample (see Table 1). For the comparison subsample, the average number of forecasted daily stressors was higher on Days 2 through 7 than on Days 8 and 9. The election subsample did not report a significant difference in forecasted stressors from before to after the election, but the mean was higher on Days 2 through 7 than on Days 8 and 9

suggesting that any changes in reactivity are not attributable to greater forecast of stressors post-election.

We additionally explored the possibility that specific domains of stressors may change across the course of the study in both subsamples. Results from 28 paired t-tests (7 stressor domains * forecasted/actual stressors [2] * 2 subsamples) are available from the first author. We applied a Bonferroni correction to account for the increased risk of a Type I error due to running 28 tests. Only four significant differences were found: there were significant decreases in actual disagreements, potential disagreements, and health stressors, as well as forecasted potential disagreements in the comparison sample only. There were no significant differences in the election subsample. Thus, any differences in reactivity levels post-election are not attributable to overall higher numbers of daily stressors experienced post-election.

Multilevel Models

A fully unconditional multilevel model (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002) was used to partition the variance within- and between-persons in daily negative affect. This model contained no predictors and yielded estimates of within-person (σ^2) and between-person (τ_{00}) variability. The estimates were used to obtain the intraclass correlation coefficient [$\rho = \tau_{00} / (\tau_{00} + \sigma^2)$], which represents the amount of between-person variance in the dependent variable. Results indicated a significant amount of variability at both levels of analysis, with 54% ($\tau_{00} = 0.0$, $z = 6.44$, $p <$ .0001) due to between-person differences and 46% ($\sigma^2 = 0.26$, $z = 18.13$, $p <.0001$) due to within-person fluctuations, indicating sufficient variability to continue with the proposed analyses.

Results from separate multilevel models testing for subsample differences in changes in reactivity to forecasted (Models 1 and 3) and actual (Models 2 and 4) stressors are presented in

Table 2. In Model 1, controlling for age, neuroticism, life event stressors, chronic conditions, and gender, increases in forecasted stressors were associated with increases in negative affect (γ_{20}). Although there were sample differences in the effect of pre/post days on negative affect (γ_{11}), contrary to expectations there were no sample differences in changes in reactivity to forecasted stressors (γ_{31}). In Model 2 with actual stressors and the same covariates, increases in daily stressors were associated with increases in negative affect (γ_{20}) and there were sample differences in the effect of pre/post days on negative affect (γ_{11}). There was also a significant Pre/post x Stressor x Sample interaction (γ_{31}). As shown in Figure 1 and in line with our expectations, we found that emotional reactivity did not change pre/post in the comparison sample but that emotional reactivity to actual stressors increased from before the election to after the election in the election subsample. In Model 3, there were no sample differences in the effect of pre/post days on negative affect (γ_{11}), but there were significant individual differences in the variance around the Pre/post x Stressor interaction slope (τ_{11}). This suggests that individual differences in the participants are important for understanding potential reactivity changes to forecasted stressors. In Model 4 and consistent with Model 2, the three-way interaction of Pre/post x Stressor x Sample interaction was significant (see Figure 1). There were no significant individual differences around the interaction slope (τ_{11}), so the interaction of actual stressors and the pre/post days (γ_{30}) fits all participants in the sample equally well.

We conducted an additional supplementary analysis to rule out the possibility that an increase in reactivity could be due to an increase in negative affect in the days leading up to the election. Negative affect actually significantly decreased in the days leading up to the election (γ_{10} = -.09, t = -2.64, p = .0095), thus the increase in emotional reactivity after the election is not due to an increase in negative affect before the election.

Discussion

The goal of the current study was to examine the potential effects of the 2016 U.S. presidential election on emotional reactivity to forecasted and actual daily stressors in younger adults. Our results suggest that in the case of this particular election, emotional reactivity became amplified in the short period after the election. This is somewhat contradictory to previous work showing decreased negative affect when election results were announced (Waismel-Manor et al., 2011), but it is possible that the somewhat unexpected result of the presidential election may have contributed to our observed pattern (Chen & Hong, 2010).

Results from a multilevel model examining changes in the within-person relationship of forecasted next-day stressors with negative affect suggest no systematic effect of pre/post study day or sample (Models 1 and 3). However, the significant individual differences surrounding the Forecasted stressor X Pre/Post interaction (Model 3) suggest that other microsystem factors may need to be considered. It is possible that political leanings might shape the way individuals react to forecasted stressors after the election. There may also be other influences in the comparison sample, such as age or anticipatory coping (e.g., BLINDED FOR REVIEW, 2018) that may help elucidate future work. In addition, we focused on forecasting future *events*, but it could be important to consider anticipation of a *feeling* of stress which could be distinct from a discrete event (BLINDED FOR REVIEW, 2018).

Results from Models 2 and 4 examining changes in the within-person relationship of actual daily stressors with negative affect suggest that stressor exposure and negative affect became more closely aligned after the election in the election subsample. Although daily stressors may be relatively minor, they are tangible events that can have an immediate negative impact on physical and psychological well-being (Almeida, 2005; Almeida et al., 2002). Because

daily stressors also affect well-being by piling up over a series of days to create persistent irritations and overloads that may result in more serious stress reactions such as anxiety and depression (Lazarus, 1999; Zautra, 2003), it is important to acknowledge that the election was associated with an amplification of this process. Our findings extend previous work in organizational (Dahl, 2011) and educational (Valli & Buese, 2007) settings to the importance of political events in the macrosystem affecting personal events in the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). We were unable to test the duration of this amplification beyond two days, but this could be an example of some events being more detrimental than others (Almeida, 2005). The shift in daily relationships associated with the election may be the beginning of the process underlying the reported increases in stress surrounding elections in general (Hassell & Settle, 2016; Slone, Kaminer, & Durrheim, 2000) and this election specifically. Our results highlight the importance of considering multiple systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), their transactions (Hinds & Burroughs, 1997; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and historical contexts (Ben-Ezra, 2011), as distal, shared events outside of the individual in the macrosystem can become internalized and shift the stress process of forecast and response to actual events in the microsystem.

Limitations and Future Directions

The data from the election subsample were part of a larger project and we did not collect information on the political orientation or voting behavior of the participants. However, our results showed that the within-person changes in reactivity to actual stressors were consistent across all participants (Model 4), suggesting that potential individual differences in political orientation or beliefs would not alter this relationship. It is possible that individuals may have experienced heightened reactivity regardless of personal political leanings. We did see, however,

individual differences in the within-person changes in reactivity to forecasted stressors, so it is possible that political orientation (or another, person-level variable such as attitudes toward political behaviors [Eckstein, Noack, & Gniewosz, 2013]) would affect the process. We encourage future work to examine additional microsystems (e.g., family's political leanings), mesosystems (e.g., interaction of family's and peers' political beliefs), and exosystems (e.g., neighbors' political yard signs) and age-related shifts in coping strategies for these specific kinds of stressors (Zimmer-Gembeck & Skinner, 2010). The non-traditional background (e.g., businessman vs. politician) and behaviors (e.g., more direct communication to the American public via Twitter) of the president-elect may have contributed to a sense of uncertainty. Unpredictability and uncertainty can exacerbate responses to stressors (Chen & Hong, 2010; Greco & Roger, 2003; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). It is important to point out, though, that our election subsample consisted of a small number of participants from one university in one state. While we were able to show that our election subsample was not different from the larger comparison sample of younger adults and the general patterns of reactivity are consistent with previous nationally-representative work, caution should be used in generalizing to the entire American population. It is possible that our current findings underestimate the changes in reactivity surrounding the election because we focused on personally-relevant and naturally occurring stressors outside of politics.

Conclusions

The combative political climate and the surprising results of the 2016 U.S. Presidential election may have contributed to increased polarization, dissent, and stress among the general population (Lilleker et al., 2016). Indeed, the election was associated with a shift in the way people expected and experienced naturally-occurring events in their daily lives, such that their

reactions to daily stressors were amplified after the election. Our results underscore the importance of distal and proximal environmental factors for individual responses (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Hammen, 2016; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) in the daily stress process unfolding over time (Tudge, 2016).

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics For Study Variables for the Election and Comparison Subsamples

	Election		Comparison	
Variable	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Age	18.93	1.13	18.97	2.23
Life Event Stressors	0.57	0.63	0.43	0.72
Chronic Conditions	0.89	1.40	1.01	1.81
Neuroticism	2.50	0.61	2.44	0.65
Negative Affect	2.00	0.63	1.77	0.56
Stressor Forecasts:				
Overall	1.67	0.70	1.74	0.61
Days 2-7 (pre-election)	1.74	0.71	1.78[a]	0.63
Days 8-9 (post-election)	1.66	0.85	1.65[a]	0.74
Daily Stressors:				
Overall	0.72	0.86	0.45	0.39
Days 2-7 (pre-election)	0.78[b]	0.86	0.51[c]	0.41
Days 8-9 (post-election)	0.31[b]	0.60	0.15[c]	0.37
Gender	16 men	13 women	38 men	40 women

Note. Independent samples t-tests were used to compare all continuous variables across the election and comparison samples and a Chi Square test was used for gender. Age, life event stressors, chronic conditions, neuroticism, and gender were measured on Day 1. Negative affect, overall stressor forecasts, and overall daily stressor means were averaged across responses on Days 2-9. None of the means comparing the election and comparison samples are significantly different from each other. Paired t-tests were used to compare stressor forecasts and number of daily stressors in the election sample from before the election to after the election and in the comparison sample from Days 2-7 to Days 8-9. Numbers with matching superscripts are significantly different from each other at $p < .05$.

Table 2

Unstandardized Coefficients (and Standard Errors) of Multilevel Models of Negative Affect

Fixed Effects	Model 1: Forecasted Stressors	Model 2: Actual Stressors	Model 3: Forecasted Stressors	Model 4: Actual Stressors
Neg. Affect, β_0				
Intercept, γ_{00}	1.15* (0.54)	1.41* (0.55)	1.08* (0.53)	1.39* (0.55)
Age, γ_{01}	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.02(0.02)	-0.02(0.02)
Avg. Stressors, γ_{02}	-0.03 (0.10)	-0.02 (0.12)	-0.05(0.09)	-0.03(0.12)
Neuroticism, γ_{03}	0.33*** (0.09)	0.38*** (0.09)	0.35***(0.09)	0.40***(0.09)
Chronic Cond., γ_{04}	0.03 (0.03)	0.04 (0.03)	0.03(0.03)	0.04(0.03)
Life Event Strs., γ_{05}	0.05 (0.07)	0.05 (0.09)	0.06(0.08)	0.04(0.08)
Gender, γ_{06}	-0.17 (0.11)	-0.18 (0.11)	-0.16(0.11)	-0.20(0.11)
Sample, γ_{07}	0.22 (.0.21)	0.15 (.12)	0.21 (0.20)	0.15 (0.12)
Pre/post slope, β_1				
Intercept, γ_{10}	-0.07 (0.13)	0.06 (0.051)	-0.04(0.16)	0.06(0.06)
Sample, γ_{11}	-0.46*(0.23)	-0.25* (0.11)	-0.38 (0.29)	-0.24* (0.11)
Stressor slope, β_2				
Intercept, γ_{20}	0.27***(0.06)	0.12***(0.04)	0.28***(0.06)	0.12***(0.04)
Sample, γ_{21}	-0.01 (0.10)	0.03 (0.05)	-0.003 (0.10)	0.03 (0.05)
Pre/post x Stressor slope, β_3				
Intercept, γ_{30}	0.08 (0.07)	-0.01 (0.10)	0.06(0.11)	-0.05 (0.14)
Sample, γ_{31}	0.22 (0.12)	0.50***(0.15)	0.17 (0.19)	0.52* (0.21)
Random Effects				
Between-person (τ_{00})	0.21** (.04)	0.24*** (.04)	0.20***(.04)	0.23***(.04)
Within-person (σ^2)	0.25***(.01)	0.24***(.01)	0.22***(.01)	0.24***(.01)
Interaction Slope variance (τ_{11})			0.05** (.02)	0.08 (.07)
R^2 between-person	30%	20%	33%	23%
R^2 within-person	5%	6%	16%	8%

Note. *$p < .05$, **$p<.01$, ***$p<.001$. In Models 1 and 3 stressors (i.e., avg. stressors, stressor slope, Pre/post x Stressor slope) refer to *forecasted* stressors. Chronic Cond. = Chronic Conditions, Life Event Strs. = Life Event Stress, pre/post refers to days before the election in the election subsample or Days 2-7 in the comparison subsample (0) and days after the election in the election subsample or Days 8-9 in the comparison sample (1). Sample refers to the election subsample (0) and the comparison subsample (1). Interaction Slope variance refers to variance around the Pre/post x Stressor slope.

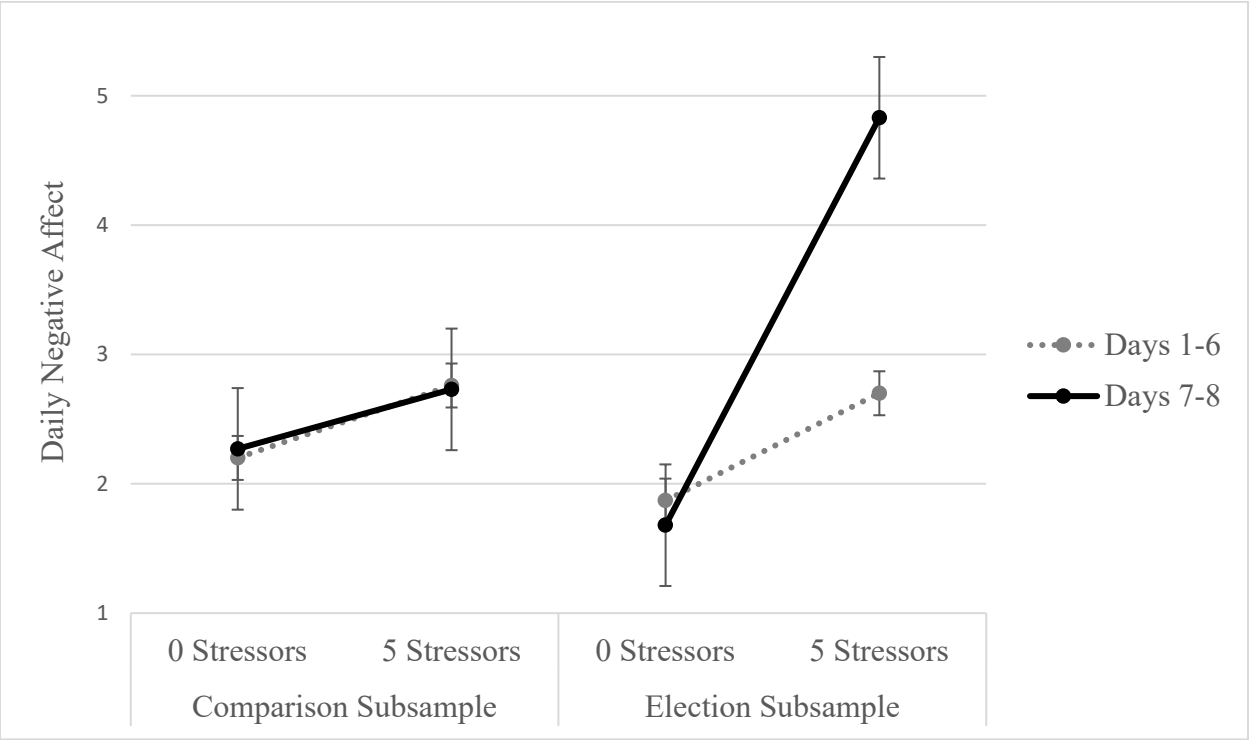

Figure 1. The three-way interaction of Pre/post days x Stressors x Sample (Models 2 and 4) was decomposed by splitting the interaction based on sample (Election vs. Comparison). Points were plotted using 0 stressors and 5 stressors to represent the observed range of daily stressors. Points were adjusted for between-person differences in age, average stressor exposure, neuroticism, life event stressors, chronic health conditions, and gender. There was no change in reactivity in the comparison sample, but there was a significant within-person increase in reactivity to daily stressors after the election in the election subsample.