#### Background

- **Neuroticism** is characterized by negative emotionality and stress reactivity, and is a robust predictor of distress (Barlow et al., 2013)
- Neuroticism can be viewed as a stable personality trait
  - It is important to identify the **mechanisms** that link neuroticism to distress. One such mechanism is **coping**, which can be defined as **personality in action under** stress (Bolger, 1990)
- Individuals with **higher neuroticism** are:
  - more likely to use maladaptive coping with stressors
  - less likely to use adaptive coping strategies
- less likely to **perceive control** over their stressors (Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007)
- Research on coping is **limited** by the use of retrospective, cross-sectional measures, which are prone to biases (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010)

## **Specific Aims**

- Examine how neuroticism and distress levels correlated to participant's daily use of adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies.
- Examine coping over a **14-day period** using a longitudinal, daily diary design

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## Relations Among Neuroticism, Coping, and Distress

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### Method

### Participants

• Students recruited from undergraduate psychology classes (N = 260) Most identified as White/European American (71%) and female (74%) Mean age = 21 years old (SD = 3.49)

### Materials

<u>Personality</u>: Big Five-Short Form

Stressors: Checklist of 9 stressors Stressor severity: 4-pt rating of severity of stressor severity

Coping: Coping Strategies Inventory-Short Form; R-COPE for rumination

Distress: CCAPS-34

**Smartphone app** for daily diaries

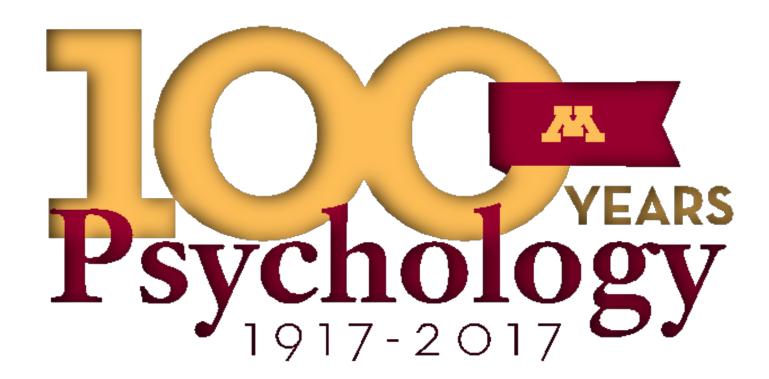
### Procedure

Pre-diary (T1): Participants completed the personality measure online

Diaries: Participants were notified at 9pm every evening for 14 nights via the smartphone app.

Asked to complete brief, daily survey that assessed: Coping, stressor severity, and number of stressors

Post-diary (T2): Participants completed the distress measure online



## **Results** (*r* values)

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Daily Maladaptive	Neuroticism (T1)	Distress (T2)
Problem Avoidance	.16*	.34**
Wishful Thinking	.32**	.43**
Self Criticism	.31**	.49**
Social Withdrawal	.18**	.36**
Daily	Neuroticism	Distress (T2)
Adaptive	<b>(T1)</b>	
Express Emotions	.01	03
Cognitive Restructuring	17**	24**
Problem Solving	33**	43**
Social Support	02	13
Mean stressor severity rating	.33**	.39**
Average number of stressors per day	.19**	.40**
Present Control	38**	44**
Neuroticism (T1) & Distress (T2)	.57**	

(\* p < .05; \*\* p < .01)



Neuroticism was positively correlated with the use of maladaptive strategies across all time points (Neuroticism and daily maladaptive coping  $r = .36^{**}$ ) Neuroticism was associated with: • greater use of daily maladaptive coping strategies • less use of daily adaptive coping strategies • Participants with higher levels of **neuroticism** had **more stressors** (r = .19)and perceived them as more stressful (r = .33Regarding maladaptive coping strategies, participants reported using wishful thinking most frequently and problem avoidance least frequently Maladaptive coping strategies were more strongly related to **distress levels** than were adaptive strategies Strengths Longitudinal design Daily measures of coping Limitations The sample was primarily comprised of

Given recent evidence of **personality** change after interventions (Roberts et al., 2017), coping interventions that target the identified maladaptive strategies in this study may be one way to reduce neuroticism and distress levels

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#### Discussion

White and female undergraduate students

#### Implications