Does mindset matter? How critical life events influence personality: The moderating role of mindset

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THEORY
People who believe their core qualities can develop (growth mindset) instead of being fixed by nature (fixed mindset) suffer from less anxiety and distress in the face of critical life events. Thus, mindset may act like a buffer for critical events due to subjective perceptions of the life event. In the present study we investigated the impact of critical life events on personality and the moderating role of mindset in the context of how critical life events are perceived.

METHOD
Sample
T1: 2016–2017, N=16216, online survey
T2: 2018, N=1679, online survey
Without careless responders: n=1078, aged 14–21, μ(AGE)=16.99, sd=1.74, 68.27% women

Items for the critical life events
1. Did you graduate from school yet?
2. Did you move out from home yet?

DISCUSSION
1. Maturity principle. We replicated findings on the maturity principle (see, e.g. McCrae et al., 2000, Roberts, Wood, & Caspi, 2008) assuming that Extraversion, Agreeableness, Openness for experience, Conscientiousness and emotional stability increase typically between the late teens and early adulthood.
2. Critical life event → Big 5. Results indicate no general impact of the two chosen life events to contribute for an impact on change in personality traits. Assuming that adolescences is still a time of critical change, other certain life events or just the sum of them might account for personality development.
3. Perception of the life event → Big 5. When participants with high scores on Extraversion experienced graduating from school positively, greater positive change in extraversion was noted. In turn, participants who experienced graduating from school negatively, high scores on neuroticism lead to greater increase in neuroticism. Taking into account the Social Investment Theory (Roberts, Wood and Smith, 2005) people invest in their social roles. This might result in terms of how positive/ negative emotions influence action and decision making after graduation, leading to continuing greater increase in extraversion/ neuroticism.
4. Mindset. No significant results were found for a moderating role of the interaction term mindset×critical life event. Again, more research needs to be done concerning the choice of certain life events and their interplay.