

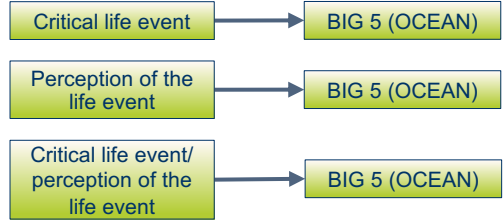
# Does mindset matter?

## 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,  $\mu(\text{age})=16.99$ ,  $sd=1.74$ , 68.27% women

#### Items for the critical life events

- Did you graduate from school yet?
- Did you move out from home yet?

Yes  No

- If yes, how did you perceive graduating from school?
- If yes, how did you perceive moving out from home?

very negative   very positive

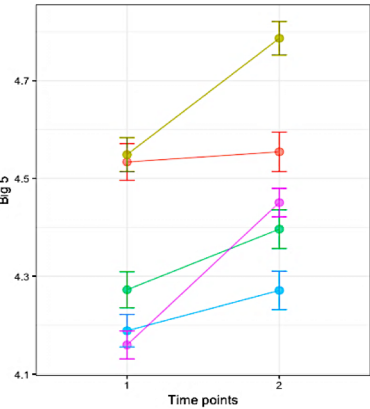
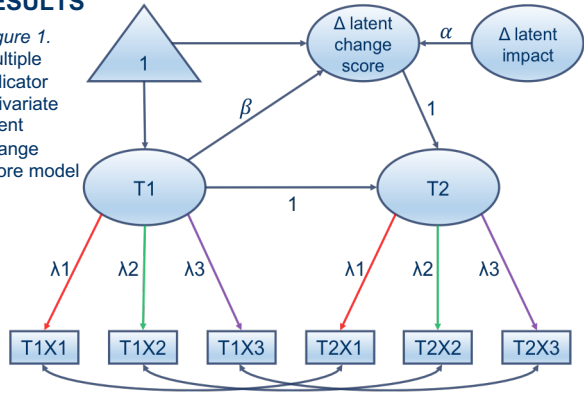


Figure 2. Mean change of Big5 with error bars

### RESULTS

Figure 1. Multiple indicator univariate latent change score model



- All latent mean scores (Figure 2) raised upon the second time wave
- Intercepts of the change factors show that scores except for N. significantly increased, e.g. E.: ( $\chi^2(10)=16.493, p=.086$ , RMSEA=.024, CFI=.997, SRMR=.022,  $\mu\Delta=.649, p(\mu\Delta)=.000$ )
- The chosen life events had no significant impact on change of personality traits, e.g. E.: ( $\chi^2(16)=18.797, p=.279$ , RMSEA=.013, CFI=.999, SRMR=.021,  $\alpha=-.020, p(\alpha)=.653$ )
- Results indicate a significant impact on personality change in N. for those who positively evaluated graduation from school ( $\chi^2(14)=70.024, p\leq.000, \alpha=.058, p(\alpha)=.045$ ). Also, there was a not significant tendency for Extraversion ( $\chi^2(16)=20.561, p=.196, \alpha=.114, p(\alpha)=.052$ )
- This tendency could also be shown for E. when mindset X perception of graduating from school was tested ( $\chi^2(16)=28.466, p=.196, \alpha=-.094, p(\alpha)=.060$ ). For all of the other Big5 traits no effects appeared significant ( $p>.05$ )

### DISCUSSION

- 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.
- Critical life event → Big 5.** Results indicate **no general impact of the two chosen life events** to contribute to an impact on change in personality traits. Assuming that adolescence is still a time of critical change, other certain life events or just the sum of them might account for personality development.
- 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 acting and decision making after graduation, **leading to continuing greater increase in extraversion/ neuroticism.**
- Mindset.** No significant results were found for a moderating role of the interaction term mindsetXcritical life event. Again, more research needs to be done concerning the choice of certain life events and their interplay.

Literature  
 McCrae, R. R., Costa P. T., Jr., Ostendorf, F., Angleitner, A., Hrebickova, M., Avia, M. D., et al. (2000). Nature over nurture: Temperament, personality, and life span development. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 78, 173–186.  
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