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Taking the ups and downs at the rollercoaster of love: Associations between major relationship events and the Big Five personality traits

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Eva Asselmann and Jule Specht

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Abstract

Personality predicts how we interact with others, what partners we have, and how happy and lasting our romantic relationships are. At the same time, our experiences in these relationships may affect our personality. Who experiences specific major relationship events and how do these events relate to personality development? We examined this issue based on data from a nationally representative household panel study from Germany (N = 49,932). In this study, the occurrence of major relationship events (moving in with a partner, marriage, separation, and divorce) was assessed yearly and the Big Five personality traits were measured repeatedly in 2005, 2009, 2013, and 2017 with the BFI-S. We applied multilevel analyses to simultaneously model selection effects as well as different types of personality changes in the years before and after these events in the total sample and separately in women and men. Our findings revealed that less agreeable individuals were more likely to experience each of the examined relationship events. Moreover, each event was associated with personality changes, which only occurred after (not before) these events and considerably varied by event and gender. Individuals who moved in with a partner, got married, or separated from a partner primarily experienced changes in openness in the first thereafter, and individuals who separated from a partner or got divorced became less emotionally stable in the following years. However, there was little evidence for 'maturation' effects, except that individuals who moved in with a partner (especially men) became more conscientious in the following years.

Keywords: Personality development; partnership; love; relationship formation; relationship dissolution; longitudinal

Introduction

Social relationships shape our life. Being socially connected to other people is a basic need of human beings and relates to higher subjective well-being, better health, and longevity (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, Baker, Harris, & Stephenson, 2015; Valtorta, Kanaan, Gilbody, Ronzi, & Hanratty, 2016; Yang et al., 2016). Moreover, social experiences play a crucial role for personality development (Magnusson, 1990; Specht et al., 2014). Personality refers to individual differences in feelings, thoughts, and behavior (Allport, 1961) that can be well described with the Big Five personality traits openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability (McCrae & Costa, 2008).

In childhood, the parent-child relationship and other ties to family members and peers play a crucial role for personality development (Bowlby, 1969; Finn, Zimmermann, & Neyer, 2017). In adolescence and young adulthood, intimate relationships to romantic partners increase in importance (Collins, Welsh, & Furman, 2009; Neyer & Asendorpf, 2001; Neyer & Lehnart, 2007; Pusch, Mund, Hagemeyer, & Finn, 2019). Laypersons and researchers agree that romantic relationships can be a great source of happiness, but that starting, maintaining, and ending relationships can also be challenging (Lehnart & Neyer, 2006; Neyer & Asendorpf, 2001; Neyer & Lehnart, 2007).

Which people experience specific events in the domain of romantic relationships and how do these events relate to personality development? The Paradigm of Dynamic Transactionism (Magnusson, 1990) assumes that interpersonal experiences and personality are closely intertwined and reciprocally interact over time. Depending on their personality, individuals may actively select, create, change, and construe their social environment and be more or less likely to experience specific major relationship events (e.g., moving in with a partner, marriage, separation, or divorce). At the same time, such events may affect their feelings, thoughts, and behavior and lead to personality changes.

Personality development and major relationship events

Personality changes across the entire life span (Bleidorn, 2015; Donnellan, Hill, & Roberts, 2015; Specht, Egloff, & Schmukle, 2011). For example, the Big Five personality traits conscientiousness, agreeableness, and emotional stability have been found to increase in young adulthood (Bleidorn et al., 2013; Roberts & Mroczek, 2008; Roberts, Walton, & Viechtbauer, 2006), a pattern referred to as the maturity principle (Roberts, Wood, & Smith, 2005). Which factors drive these changes?

Endogenous theories

Endogenous theories such as Five-Factor Theory (McCrae & Costa, 2008) assume that personality primarily develops due to genetically determined biological factors and intrinsic maturation processes. According to these theories, personality traits are primarily genetically determined and may affect whether individuals select into specific environments and experience major relationship events. For instance, more conscientious, agreeable, and emotionally stable individuals might be more likely to start and maintain a serious and stable romantic relationship, move in with their partner, and get married. In contrast, less conscientious, agreeable, and emotionally stable individuals might be more likely to experience relationship distress and conflicts with their partner and thus to break up. Therefore, personality might differ between individuals who will or will not experience specific major relationship events (selection effects). However, endogenous theories do not assume that personality changes in reaction to these events.

Contextual theories

In contrast, contextual theories and research more strongly highlight the role of environmental factors for personality development (Bleidorn, Hopwood, & Lucas, 2018;

Denissen, Luhmann, Chung, & Bleidorn, 2019; Hutteman, Hennecke, Orth, Reitz, & Specht, 2014; Specht, 2017; Specht et al., 2014; Specht et al., 2011). As previously suggested, different developmental periods across the adult life span relate to age-specific life events, transitions, and developmental tasks (Havighurst, 1972; Hutteman et al., 2014; Baltes, 1987). Individuals typically have to establish new social roles in young adulthood, maintain these roles in middle adulthood, and prevent or compensate losses of existing roles in old age. For example, younger adults often start a serious romantic relationship and move in with their partner. They may get married and start a family in late young or early middle adulthood and possibly end their relationship or loser their partner by death later on. Though, especially in western societies, individual life course trajectories tend to be more diverse (Bleidorn et al., 2013). For example, some people do not engage in serious romantic relationships before middle adulthood, whereas others already get married and divorced when they are comparatively young.

Different major life events at the beginning (moving in with a partner and marriage) and in the end (separation and divorce) of romantic relationships are likely to modify, interrupt, or redirect their life (Bleidorn et al., 2018; Denissen et al., 2019; Luhmann, Hofmann, Eid, & Lucas, 2012; Specht, 2017). Therefore, they might be an important source of personality development. In line with the Social Investment Principle (Roberts & Wood, 2006), major relationship events should lead to changes in social roles, role demands, and behavioral expectations to behave in a more 'mature' way. Personality should develop due to increased psychological and behavioral investments in these roles (i.e., accumulated experiences in and higher commitment to these roles). For example, individuals who move in with their partner or get married might spend more time with their partner and increasingly commit. They have to develop a joint routine in everyday life and shared idea of their future, find an appropriate way to cope with daily hassles and conflicts, compromise, and so on.

According to the Social Investment Principle, individuals who experience such events should thus increase in conscientiousness, agreeableness, and emotional stability over time.

Associations between starting a relationship and personality

A series of longitudinal studies examined how starting a relationship was associated with personality differences and changes in young adulthood (Bleidorn et al., 2018; Lehnart, Neyer, & Eccles, 2010; Neyer & Asendorpf, 2001; Neyer & Lehnart, 2007; Pusch et al., 2019; Schwaba, Robins, Grijalva, & Bleidorn, 2019; Wagner, Becker, Lüdtke, & Trautwein, 2015). With respect to selection effects, these studies found that more extraverted (Neyer & Asendorpf, 2001; Wagner et al., 2015) and more conscientious (Pusch et al., 2019) individuals were more likely to start a relationship in the following years.

In terms of personality changes, previous research found that individuals who started a relationship more strongly decreased in openness (Pusch et al., 2019), more strongly increased in extraversion and conscientiousness (Neyer & Asendorpf, 2001; Wagner et al., 2015), or more strongly increased in emotional stability (Lehnart et al., 2010; Neyer & Asendorpf, 2001; Wagner et al., 2015) in the surrounding years (Lehnart et al., 2010; Neyer & Asendorpf, 2001; Neyer & Lehnart, 2007; Wagner et al., 2015).

Associations between moving in with a partner and personality

Longitudinal research also investigated associations between moving in with a partner and personality (Jonkmann, Thoemmes, Lüdtke, & Trautwein, 2014; Pusch et al., 2019; Specht et al., 2011). In terms of selection effects, these studies consistently found that more extraverted individuals were more likely to move in with a partner in the following years (Jonkmann et al., 2014; Pusch et al., 2019; Specht et al., 2011).

With respect to personality changes, young adults who moved in with a partner were found to increase more strongly in conscientiousness (Jonkmann et al., 2014) or to decrease more strongly in openness and increase more strongly in agreeableness (Pusch et al., 2019) in the surrounding years. In the Socio-Economic Panel Study (SOEP), a nationally representative household panel study from Germany, moving in with a partner was unrelated to personality development (Specht et al., 2011).

Associations between marriage and personality

Fewer studies examined whether personality differed between individuals who did or did not get married at a later point of time (selection effects). In the SOEP, less emotionally stable women (but not men) were more likely to get married in the following years (Specht et al., 2011).

With respect to personality changes, marriage has been primarily associated with a decrease in openness and extraversion in the surrounding years (Bleidorn et al., 2018; Costa, Herbst, McCrae, & Siegler, 2000; Denissen et al., 2019; Pusch et al., 2019; Specht et al., 2011). For example, Denissen and colleagues (2019) used data from a nationally representative household panel study from the Netherlands that was followed up over more than ten years. They found that individuals who got married during the study were more open than individuals who had gotten married prior to the study. Pusch and colleagues (2019) demonstrated that individuals who increased more strongly in openness were less likely to be married. Specht and colleagues (2011) found that individuals who got married decreased more strongly in openness and extraversion. Similarly, another study showed that women who got married versus divorced increased less strongly in openness and extraversion, whereas men who got married versus divorced increased more strongly in emotional stability and decreased less strongly in conscientiousness in the surrounding years (Costa et al., 2000).

However, other research found that marriage was unrelated to personality development (Neyer & Asendorpf, 2001).

Associations between separation and personality

With respect to separation, there was little evidence that personality differed between individuals who did or did not separate from a partner in the following years (Lehnart & Neyer, 2006; Neyer & Asendorpf, 2001; Neyer & Lehnart, 2007; Schwaba et al., 2019; Specht et al., 2011). However, one study evidenced that more extraverted and less agreeable individuals were more likely to break up (Pusch et al., 2019).

Findings concerning the role of romantic breakups for personality changes were largely inconsistent. Longitudinal research in young adults found that individuals who separated from a partner increased more strongly in extraversion (Neyer & Lehnart, 2007), increased less strongly in agreeableness and emotional stability (Lehnart & Neyer, 2006), or did not differ in their personality development from individuals without this experience (Neyer & Asendorpf, 2001; Pusch et al., 2019; Schwaba et al., 2019). In the SOEP, individuals who separated from a partner increased more strongly in agreeableness, and men (but not women) who broke up increased more strongly in openness as compared to their same-sex counterparts without this experience (Specht et al., 2011).

Associations between divorce and personality

With respect to divorce, there was little evidence that personality differed between individuals who did or did not get divorced at a later point of time. However, one study found that less socially responsible (a facet of conscientiousness) women were more likely to get divorced in the following years.

Findings concerning the role of divorce for personality changes were mixed. Specifically, previous research evidenced that individuals who got divorced more strongly increased in openness (Costa et al., 2000), more strongly decreased (Costa et al., 2000; Roberts & Bogg, 2004) or increased (Specht et al., 2011) in conscientiousness, more strongly increased (Costa et al., 2000) or decreased (Allemand, Hill, & Lehmann, 2015) in extraversion, less strongly increased in emotional stability (Costa et al., 2000), or did not differ in their personality development from individuals without this experience (Denissen et al., 2019; Schwaba et al., 2019).

Methodological challenges

Many previous studies focused on selective samples (especially young adults) or examined whether personality changes across two waves were associated with relationship events that may or may not have occurred between these waves. This impedes to distinguish between anticipation (personality changes before the respective event) and socialization (personality changes after the respective event) effects. However, such a distinction is crucial given the fact that anticipation and socialization effects may go in opposite directions (Asselmann & Specht, 2019; Denissen et al., 2019; Luhmann, Orth, Specht, Kandler, & Lucas, 2014). For example, individuals who separate from a partner or get divorced might experience increased conflicts and distress beforehand, but fewer hassles thereafter. Therefore, they might become less emotionally stable before, but more emotionally stable after these events. In this case, not distinguishing between anticipation and socialization effects may falsely suggest stability.

In addition, not only anticipation and socialization effects, but also post-event year effects (transient short-term personality changes in the first year after the respective event) need to be modeled (Asselmann & Specht, 2019; Denissen et al., 2019; Luhmann et al.,

2014). Individuals with positive relationship experiences (e.g., moving in with a partner and marriage) might feel particularly happy, whereas individuals with negative relationship experiences (e.g., separation and divorce) might feel particularly desperate shortly thereafter. Therefore, individuals who move in with a partner or get married might be more emotionally stable, whereas individuals who separate from a partner or get divorced might be less emotionally stable in the first year thereafter, but bounce back to their previous levels of emotional stability in the following years.

Besides, individuals with specific personality traits have been shown to be more or less likely to experience specific relationship events (Jonkmann et al., 2014; Neyer & Asendorpf, 2001; Pusch et al., 2019; Specht et al., 2011; Wagner et al., 2015). Therefore, selection effects (personality differences between individuals who will or will not experience the respective event) need to be taken into account.

The role of gender

In addition, gender is an important factor to consider. Although traditional gender role stereotypes lose in importance, women might tend to more strongly focus on their relationship and family than men (Rajadhyaksha, Korabik, & Aycan, 2015). As suggested by previous research (Davis, Shaver, & Vernon, 2003; Tamres, Janicki, & Helgeson, 2002), women might also more actively cope with relationship dissolution and, for example, more strongly engage in (novel) social activities thereafter. Therefore, the associations between relationship events and personality might vary by gender.

Aims

The aim of this study was (a) to examine associations between four different major relationship events (moving in with a partner, marriage, separation, and divorce) and the Big

Five personality traits and (b) to test whether these associations vary by gender. We used data from the SOEP (N = 49,932), a nationally representative household panel study from Germany with ongoing yearly assessments since 1984. In the SOEP, the occurrence of life events was assessed yearly and personality was measured repeatedly in 2005, 2009, 2013, and 2017 (Figure 1).

We aimed to simultaneously model selection effects and different types of personality changes in the years before and after each event. Therefore, we coded whether individuals did or did not experience the respective event. In individuals who experienced the event, we also coded how the time point of the event was temporarily related to the time point of the respective personality assessment. We then applied multilevel analyses and combined within- and between-person information to obtain fine-grained information on personality in individual years and months before and after each event.

In our models, we analyzed selection effects to investigate whether personality differed between individuals who did not experience the respective event and individuals who experienced the event at a later point of time. We modeled anticipation and socialization effects to examine linear personality changes in the three years before and three years after the event, respectively. Finally, we analyzed post-event year effects to test for transient short-term personality changes in the first year after the respective event.

Research questions

We addressed the following research questions: (1) Do the Big Five personality traits differ between individuals who will or will not move in with a partner, get married, separate from a partner, or get divorced, respectively (selection effects)? (2) Do the Big Five personality traits change in the three years before (anticipation effects) and three years after (socialization effects) these events, respectively? (3) Are there any transient short-term

personality changes in the first year after these events (post-event year effects)? (4) Do these effects (selection, anticipation, socialization, and post-event year) differ between women and men?

Methods

Study sample

We used data from the German Socio-Economic Panel Study (SOEP), a nationally representative household panel study from Germany with multistage probability sampling. The SOEP started in 1984 and is still ongoing. Here, we consider information until 2017, the most recent wave so far. Data are collected yearly and mostly stem from face-to-face interviews with all adult members of the target households.

The initial sample from 1984 was regularly replenished with new participants. This was done to counteract attrition, to increase the overall sample size, and to allow for detailed analyses of specific sub-samples. Therefore, panel members entered the study in different years and not all participants provided full information on life events and personality over the entire course of the study. Our statistical approach based on multilevel analyses enables to deal with this missingness. Table S1 specifies how the current sample of analysis (N = 49,932, see below) is composed and how many participants of the initial cohort and individual refreshment cohorts provided information on personality in 2005, 2009, 2013, and 2017, respectively.

More detailed information on the SOEP (including the sample structure, individual subsamples, and panel attrition) has been previously presented (Goebel et al., 2019; Kroh, Kühne, Siegers, & Belcheva, 2018) and is provided here: https://www.diw.de/en/soep. A detailed description of all procedures and measures collected in the SOEP can be found here: https://data.soep.de/soep-core. The SOEP data are available from the DIW Berlin after signing a contract on data distribution (https://www.diw.de/en/diw_02.c.222829.en/access.html). Because our study only involved secondary analyses of anonymized SOEP data provided by the DIW Berlin, ethical approval was not required.

Assessment of major relationship events

Since 1985, panel members were yearly asked whether and when (year and month) they had moved in with a partner, got married, separated from a partner (unmarried partner or husband/ wife) or got divorced in the current or previous year. We coded the time points at which participants experienced these relationship events in years and months from 1984 to 2017.

Assessment of the Big Five personality traits

The Big Five personality traits openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability were assessed in 2005, 2009, 2013, and 2017 with the BFI-S, a short version of the Big Five Inventory (John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991; John, Naumann, & Soto, 2008; Lang, John, Lüdtke, Schupp, & Wagner, 2011). The BFI-S contains 15 items (three items per trait), labeled from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). To maximize the validity of this short scale, heterogeneous items were selected per trait, which explains moderate internal consistencies (Lang et al., 2011). In our sample, the Cronbach's alphas for openness were $\alpha = .63$ in 2005, $\alpha = .62$ in 2009, $\alpha = .60$ in 2013, $\alpha = .60$ in 2017, and $\alpha = .61$ across all four waves. The Cronbach's alphas for conscientiousness were $\alpha = .62$ in 2005, $\alpha = .59$ in 2009, $\alpha = .58$ in 2013, $\alpha = .61$ in 2017, and $\alpha = .60$ across all four waves. The Cronbach's alphas for extraversion were $\alpha = .66$ in 2005, $\alpha = .66$ in 2009, $\alpha = .66$ in 2013, $\alpha = .66$ in 2017, and $\alpha = .66$ across all four waves. The Cronbach's alphas for agreeableness were $\alpha = .51$ in 2005, $\alpha = .50$ in 2009, $\alpha = .48$ in 2013, $\alpha = .51$ in 2017, and $\alpha = .50$ across all four waves. Cronbach's alphas for emotional stability were $\alpha = .60$ in 2005, $\alpha = .62$ in 2009, $\alpha = .62$ in 2013, $\alpha = .59$ in 2017, and $\alpha = .61$ across all four waves. The test-retest reliability, convergent validity (compared to the full BFI and NEO-PI-R), and discriminant validity of the BFI-S (compared to other validity criteria) have been shown to be

acceptable (Donnellan & Lucas, 2008; Gerlitz & Schupp, 2005; Hahn, Gottschling, & Spinath, 2012; Lang, 2005). Moreover, the five-factor structure of the BFI-S in the SOEP has been shown to be robust across three different modes of assessment (face-to-face interview, telephone interview, and self-administered questionnaire (Lang et al., 2011).

Statistical analysis

Sample set-up

Stata 14 (StataCorp, 2015) was used for the analyses. We considered individuals who provided data on at least one BFI-S item in 2005, 2009, 2013, or 2017. For each event, we distinguished between individuals who did (transition sample) and individuals who did not (control sample) experience the respective event between 2002 and 2017 (transition period). Because the Big Five personality traits were assessed in 2005 for the first time, we restricted the transition period to reach from 2002 (three years before the first personality assessment in 2005) to 2017 (the year of the last personality assessment so far). In other words, we only considered events that occurred between 2002 and 2017 when modeling selection effects and personality changes before and after the event (anticipation, socialization, and post-event year effects, see below). However, our models were adjusted for effects due to experiences of the respective event prior to the transition period (i.e., between 1984 and 2001; past-event effects, see below). (Though, please note that information on relationship events between 1984 and 2001 was only available for panel members who already participated in the SOEP in these years.)

Sample characteristics

There were 49,932 individuals who participated in any of the four personality assessments. More specifically, 21,043 (42.14 %), 20,722 (41.50 %), 19,081 (38.21 %), and

29,534 (59.15 %) individuals provided information on personality in 2005, 2009, 2013, and 2017, respectively. 28,156 (56.39 %) individuals participated in one, 10,195 (20.42 %) in two, 4,490 (8.99 %) in three, and 7,091 (14.20 %) in four personality assessments. On average, they participated in M = 1.81 (SD = 1.09) personality assessments. Our statistical approach based on multilevel analyses enables to deal with missing information at individual waves.

The total sample (N = 49,932) contained 5,025 (10.06 %) individuals who moved in with a partner, 4,130 (8.27 %) individuals who got married, 3,706 (7.42 %) individuals who separated from a partner, and 1,252 (2.51 %) individuals who got divorced during the transition period (transition samples). 9,594 (19.21 %) individuals experienced any of these events during the transition period. The pairwise overlap of these events was as follows: 1,871 (3.75 %) individuals moved in with a partner and got married, 1,464 (2.93 %) individuals moved in with a partner and separated from a partner, and 468 (0.94 %) individuals moved in with a partner and got divorced during the transition period. Moreover, 691 (1.38 %) individuals got married and separated from a partner, 389 (0.78 %) individuals got married and got divorced, and 754 (1.51 %) individuals separated from a partner and got divorced during the transition period.

Frequencies and percentages of individuals who provided information on personality in 2005, 2009, 2013, and 2017 as well as means and standard deviations for the number of personality assessments in the respective transition and control sample (per event) are presented in Table S2 to S5. As evidenced by Fisher's exact tests, a higher proportion of the respective transition than of the respective control sample provided information on personality in 2005 (p < .001), 2009 (p < .001), 2013 (p < .001), and 2017 (marriage: p < .001, divorce: p = .010). The only exception was that individuals who did (transition sample) versus did not (control sample) move in with a partner or separate from a partner during the

transition period, respectively, did not differ in their probability to provide information on personality in 2017 ($p > .010$).

Means and standard deviations for the Big Five personality traits in 2005, 2009, 2013, and 2017 as well as across all four waves in the respective transition and control sample (per event) are presented in Table S6 to S9. Correlations between the Big Five in the total sample are shown in Table S10.

The total sample contained 25,949 (51.97 %) women and 23,983 (48.03 %) men. Across all four waves, the total sample was aged $M = 48.99$ ($SD = 17.71$) years. Of the total sample, 2 899 (5.81 %) individuals had moved in with a partner, 2 751 (5.51 %) had gotten married, 1,496 (3.00 %) had separated from a partner, and 549 (1.10 %) had gotten divorced prior to the transition period (i.e., between 1984 and 2001). However, please note that the SOEP was regularly replenished with new participants who entered the panel in different years and only provided information on life events after they had entered the study (therefore, full information on the occurrence of individual events since 1984 was only available for the initial study sample).

Information on gender, age, and past experiences of the respective event in the respective transition and control sample (per event) is provided in Table S11. A higher proportion of individuals who did (transition sample) versus did not (control sample) move in with a partner, separate from a partner, or get divorced during the transition period was female ($p < .001$). Gender proportions did not differ between individuals who did (transition sample) and did not (control sample) get married during this time ($p > .010$).

Moreover, individuals of the respective transition sample were younger than individuals of the respective control sample (moving in with a partner: $t(90,378) = 84.13$, $p < .001$; marriage: $t(90,378) = 62.79$, $p < .001$; separation: $t(90,378) = 50.83$, $p < .001$; divorce: $t(90,378) = 8.91$, $p < .001$). A higher proportion of individuals who did (transition sample)

versus did not (control sample) move in with a partner or separate from a partner during the transition period had already experienced the respective event before the transition period (i.e., between 1984 and 2001; $p < .001$). In contrast, a lower proportion of individuals who did (transition sample) versus did not (control sample) get married or divorced during the transition period had already experienced the respective event before the transition period (i.e., between 1984 and 2001; $p < .001$). To account for these differences between individuals of the respective transition and control sample, our models were adjusted for gender, age, testing, and past-event effects (see below).

Analytical approach

Our analyses are similar to the approach introduced by Denissen and colleagues (2019). We used multilevel analyses with measurement occasions (Level 1) nested within persons (Level 2) nested within households (Level 3), built separate models per event and trait in the total sample as well as separately in women and men, and modeled the effects as fixed effects.

Specifically, we simultaneously regressed the standardized score of the respective Big Five personality trait on gender, linear, quadratic, and cubic age, a testing variable, a past-event variable, and four event-related predictors (selection, anticipation, socialization, and post-event year). These event-related predictors coded whether individuals did (transition sample) or did not (control sample) experience the respective event during the transition period and how the year and month of the event (in individuals of the transition sample) was temporarily related to the year and month of the respective personality assessment in 2005, 2009, 2013, and 2017. We used these event-related predictors to model selection effects and different types of personality changes in the years before and after the event (anticipation,

socialization, and post-event year effects). Table 1 summarizes how each predictor was defined and coded. Examples hereon are provided in Table S12.

Insert Table 1

Because each analysis refers to an individual research question, we did not adjust for multiple testing (Savitz & Olshan, 1995). However, we set the alpha level at .01 (two-sided testing).

Results

General results

Our models were adjusted for gender, linear, quadratic, and cubic age, and testing effects. In terms of gender, we found that men were less open (β = -0.109 to β = -0.110), less conscientious (β = -0.137 to β = -0.138), less extraverted (β = -0.145 to β = -0.147), and less agreeable (β = -0.283 to β = -0.285), but more emotionally stable (β = 0.425 to β = 0.427) than women. With respect to age, we found that older individuals were less open (β = -0.029 to β = -0.039 per ten years older), less extraverted (β = -0.074 to β = -0.082), less agreeable (β = -0.012 to β = -0.022), and less emotionally stable (β = -0.025 to β = -0.031) than younger individuals. In terms of testing effects, we found that openness (β = 0.014 to β = 0.015) and emotional stability (β = 0.040 to β = 0.043) increased, whereas conscientiousness (β = -0.065 to β = -0.069) and agreeableness (β = -0.049 to β = -0.056) decreased with repeated testing (Table 2 to 5).

Moreover, our models were adjusted for past-event effects. Such effects are important to consider, since individuals who experienced a specific event in the past might differ in their personality and probability to experience the same event again. Our findings revealed that individuals who had moved in with a partner prior to the transition period were less open (β = -0.095), less extraverted (β = -0.056), less agreeable (β = -0.128), and less emotionally stable (β = -0.065) than those who had not (Table 2). The same was true for individuals who had versus had not gotten married in the past (openness: β = -0.123, extraversion: β = -0.075, agreeableness: β = -0.066, emotional stability: β = -0.081; Table 3). Individuals who had separated from a partner prior to the transition period were less agreeable (β = -0.095) and less emotionally stable (β = -0.097) than those who had not (Table 4). No past-event effects were found for divorce (Table 5).

Moving in with a partner

Associations between moving in with a partner and personality in the total sample are shown in Table 2. We found significant selection effects on extraversion (β = 0.119), agreeableness (β = -0.077), and emotional stability (β = -0.076). That is, individuals who moved in with a partner were more extraverted, but less agreeable and less emotionally stable in the years before this experience as compared to controls (i.e., individuals who did not move in with a partner during the transition period). Moreover, a significant socialization effect on conscientiousness (β = 0.027 per year) indicated that individuals who moved in with a partner became gradually more conscientious in the three years after this event. Finally, significant post-event year effects on openness (β = 0.072) and conscientiousness (β = 0.073) indicated that individuals who moved in with a partner were more open and more conscientious in the first year thereafter as compared to all other years (Figure 2 (a) and (b)). No anticipation effects were found. That is, there was no evidence that personality changed in the three years before moving in.

In women (Table S13, upper part), only the selection effects on extraversion (β = 0.109), agreeableness (β = -0.095), and emotional stability (β = -0.102) reached statistical significance. That is, women who moved in with a partner were more extraverted, but less agreeable and less emotionally stable in the years before this experience as compared to female controls.

Similarly, men who moved in with a partner were more extraverted (β = 0.132) in the years before this experience as compared to male controls (selection effect, Table S13, lower part). In addition, men who moved in with a partner were more open (β = 0.142) and more conscientious (β = 0.127) in the first year thereafter as compared to all other years (post-event year effects; Figure 2 (c) and (d)).

Insert Table 2 and Figure 2

Marriage

In terms of marriage (Table 3), we found a significant selection effect on agreeableness (β = -0.095). That is, individuals who got married were less agreeable in the years before this experience as compared to controls (i.e., individuals who did not get married during the transition period). Moreover, a significant socialization effect on openness (β = -0.027 per year) indicated that individuals who got married became gradually less open in the first three years of their marriage (Figure 3). However, no anticipation or post-event year effects were found.

In women (Table S14, upper part), no associations between marriage and personality were found. In men (Table S14, lower part), only the selection effect on agreeableness (β = -0.127) reached statistical significance. That is, men who got married were less agreeable in the years before this experience as compared to male controls.

Insert Table 3 and Figure 3

Separation

As shown in Table 4, individuals who separated from a partner were less agreeable (β = -0.170) and less emotionally stable (β = -0.080) in the years before they broke up as compared to controls (i.e., individuals who did not separate from a partner during the transition period; selection effects). However, no anticipation, socialization, or post-event year effects were found, indicating that separation was unrelated to personality changes in the surrounding years.

In women (Table S15, upper part), there were significant selection effects on extraversion (β = 0.100), agreeableness (β = -0.154), and emotional stability (β = -0.105). That is, women who separated from a partner were more extraverted, less agreeable, and less emotionally stable in the years before their breakup as compared to female controls.

Moreover, women who separated from a partner were more open (β = 0.105) and more extraverted (β = 0.109) in the first year thereafter as compared to all other years (post-event year effects; Figure 4 (a) and (b)).

Similar to women, men who separated from a partner were less agreeable (β = -0.210) in the years before their breakup as compared to male controls (selection effect; Table S15, lower part). In addition, men who separated from a partner were less emotionally stable (β = -0.144) in the first year thereafter as compared to all other years (post-event year effect; Figure 4 (c)).

Insert Table 4 and Figure 4

Divorce

In terms of divorce (Table 5), a significant selection effect on agreeableness (β = -0.118) indicated that individuals who got divorced were less agreeable in the years before this experience as compared to controls (i.e., individuals who did not get divorced during the transition period). In addition, individuals who got divorced became gradually less emotionally stable in the three years thereafter (socialization effect: β = -0.076 per year; Figure 5 (a)). Though, no anticipation or post-event year effects were found.

In gender-specific analyses (Table S16), no selection effects were found, but both women (β = -0.074) and men (β = -0.081) who got divorced became gradually less emotionally stable in the three years after this event (socialization effects; Figure 5 (b) and (c)).

Insert Table 5 and Figure 5

Discussion

We used data from a nationally representative household panel study from Germany (N = 49,932) to examine associations between four major relationship events and the Big Five personality traits. Specifically, we investigated (a) whether personality differed between individuals who did or did not move in with a partner, get married, separate, or get divorced, (b) whether personality changed in the years before and after these events, and (c) whether these effects varied between women and men.

Main findings

Our main findings were as follows: First, especially agreeableness played an important role for the probability to experience each of the examined relationship events. Less agreeable individuals were more likely to move in with a partner, get married, separate from a partner, and get divorced. At first glance, this seems counterintuitive: Why should less agreeable individuals be more likely to move in with a partner and get married? Are they more likely to attract potential partners? Or do they have a stronger desire to have a partner (e.g., because they receive less support from family or friends)? We assume that less agreeable individuals experienced higher relationship distress and conflicts, were less satisfied with their relationships, and changed their partner more often (Donnellan, Conger, & Bryant, 2004; Heller, Watson, & Ilies, 2004; Malouff, Thorsteinsson, Schutte, Bhullar, & Rooke, 2010; Schaffhuser, Allemand, & Martin, 2014; Vater & Schröder- Abé, 2015). Therefore, they might have been more likely to experience both positive and negative events that typically occur at the beginning (moving in and marriage) and in the end (separation and divorce) of romantic relationships.

Second, each event was associated with average personality changes, which supports the idea that relationship events tend to have similar effects on different people. However,

effect sizes were small, which suggests that specific events may occur under different circumstances, may be processed differently, and may have different consequences for each individual. Specifically, individuals who moved in with a partner, got married, or separated from a partner primarily experienced short-term changes in openness in the first year after these events. In addition, individuals who separated from a partner or got divorced became less emotionally stable in the following years. However, we did not find any 'maturation' effects, except that individuals who moved in with a partner became more conscientious in the following years. That is, inconsistent with the Social Investment Principle (Roberts & Wood, 2006), there was little evidence that major relationship events were associated with an increase in conscientiousness, agreeableness, and/or emotional stability over time.

Third, personality changes only occurred after, but not before specific events. One might speculate whether personality changes among individuals with these events were primarily driven by novel social roles, role demands, and behavioral expectations that emerged from these events (Roberts & Wood, 2006). However, there was little evidence that personality already changed before these events, for example, because affected individuals anticipated or prepared for the event. Our findings hereon significantly extend previous research, given the fact that few prior studies in the field strictly distinguished between anticipation and socialization effects (Denissen et al., 2019; Luhmann et al., 2014).

Fourth, the associations between major relationship events and the Big Five personality traits considerably varied by gender. In line with previous research (Davis et al., 2003; Tamres et al., 2002), these findings suggest that women and men substantially differ in their ways to deal with relationship challenges and changes and underscore the importance to account for gender-specific effects.

Fifth, although one might expect that moving in and marriage are quite similar events, their associations with the Big Five personality traits differed in large parts. The same was

true for separation and divorce. Typically, these events occur at different stages at the beginning and in the end of romantic relationships, respectively. This might explain our findings and emphasizes the need to distinguish between specific events instead of broader event categories in research on personality development (Specht et al., 2011).

Associations between moving in with a partner and personality

In line with previous evidence (Jonkmann et al., 2014; Pusch et al., 2019; Specht et al., 2011), we found that more extraverted women and men were more likely to move in with a partner. In this respect, it is plausible to assume that more outgoing and sociable individuals were more likely to find and more willing to share their life with a spouse.

Moreover, especially less agreeable and less emotionally stable women were more likely to move in with a partner. Possibly, less agreeable and less emotionally stable women experienced higher relationship distress, were in less stable relationships, and more often changed their partner (Donnellan et al., 2004; Heller et al., 2004; Malouff et al., 2010; Schaffhuser et al., 2014; Vater & Schröder- Abé, 2015). As such, they might have been more likely to start a new relationship and move in with a partner during the transition period. In addition, especially less emotionally stable women might have strived to live in a stable relationship and be with a partner to rely on.

Consistent with previous research (Jonkmann et al., 2014), we further found that individuals who moved in with a partner became more conscientious in the following years, and this was true especially for men. On average, men tend to be less conscientious than women (Bleidorn et al., 2013; Denissen et al., 2019; Specht et al., 2011). Possibly, men often strived to meet their female partner's expectations on orderliness and cleanliness, especially in the first year of cohabitation.

Associations between marriage and personality

With respect to marriage, we found that less agreeable men were more likely to get married and that individuals who got married became less open in the following years. This latter finding is consistent with previous evidence (Costa et al., 2000; Denissen et al., 2019; Pusch et al., 2019; Specht et al., 2011) and might be explained by the possibility that married individuals tended to increasingly focus on their partner and family and to be less open to novel and unconventional ideas and experiences (Schwaba et al., 2019).

However, no other associations between marriage and personality were found, possibly because the meaning and impact of this even has changed considerably in western societies. In the SOEP, many people lived with their partner before or without getting married, and the judicial act of marriage might have had little impact on their daily life, feelings, thoughts, and behavior.

Associations between separation and personality

In terms of separation, we found that less agreeable women and men as well as more extraverted and less emotionally stable women were more likely to separate from a partner. These results are in line with recent findings that more extraverted and less agreeable individuals were more likely to break up (Pusch et al., 2019). Possibly, less agreeable individuals more often argued with their partner, more extraverted women more strongly strived to assert their own needs, and less emotionally stable women more frequently expressed negative feelings and thoughts toward their partner. This might have led to higher relationship distress, including an increased risk of relationship dissolution (Donnellan et al., 2004; Heller et al., 2004; Malouff et al., 2010; Schaffhuser et al., 2014; Vater & Schröder-Abé, 2015).

Moreover, separation was associated with transient short-term personality changes that differed between women and men. Women who separated from a partner were more open and more extraverted, whereas men who separated from a partner were less emotionally stable in the first year after this experience. As suggested by previous research, men tend to more strongly focus on their partner (Stronge, Overall, & Sibley, 2019), whereas women tend to more actively cope with romantic breakups and more strongly engage in novel social activities thereafter (Davis et al., 2003; Tamres et al., 2002). This might explain whey especially men were less emotionally stable in the first months of being separated.

Associations between divorce and personality

In terms of divorce, we found that both women and men who got divorced became less emotionally stable in the following years. Possibly, affected individuals were particularly vulnerable to enter a vicious cycle of unpleasant feelings and hassles after this stressful experience. This might have led to increased distress, anxiety, and depression over time. In sum, our results do not support the idea that this stressful experience might trigger personality growth (Tashiro, Frazier, & Berman, 2006), but rather point toward destabilizing effects.

Strengths and limitations

Our study benefits from several strengths. We used data from the SOEP, a socio-demographically diverse household panel study from Germany that covers the entire adult lifespan. The sample size was large, the occurrence of major relationship events was assessed yearly, and personality was measured repeatedly in four waves over a period of 13 years. This enabled us to simultaneously model selection effects as well as different types of personality changes before and after moving in, marriage, separation, and divorce in the total sample and separately in women and men.

Though, our study is not without limitations. First, because the SOEP primarily focuses on socio-economic changes, personality was measured with a short scale (BFI-S). The BFI-S has been shown to be acceptable in terms of its psychometric properties (Gerlitz & Schupp, 2005; Hahn et al., 2012; Lang, 2005). Nonetheless, it is less reliable than other, more comprehensive measures.

Second, the SOEP was regularly replenished with refreshment cohorts that entered the study in different years. Therefore, not all panel members provided information on personality at all four waves. In order to deal with this missingness, we applied multilevel analyses. Specifically, we distinguished between individuals who did not experience the respective event (control samples) and individuals who experienced the respective event in different years and months over the course of the study (transition samples). In these individuals, we coded the time point of the event relatively to the time point of the respective personality assessment in 2005, 2009, 2013, and 2017. This provided us with fine-grained information on personality in individual years and months before and after the respective event. Based on these data, we built different event-related predictors to simultaneously model selection, anticipation, socialization and post-event year effects. However, it has to be noted that within- and between-person information was combined to model these changes. Moreover, in refreshment cohorts that entered the panel in different years, information on relationship events in the preceding years was missing.

Third, we adjusted all our models for past-event effects, that is, effects due to previous experiences of the same event prior to the transition period (that started in 2002). However, information on such previous experiences of the same event was only available for participants who already took part in the SOEP prior to the transition period. Moreover, individuals who repeatedly experienced the same event (e.g., marriage) might have processed

these repeated events differently (Luhmann & Eid, 2009). Additional research is needed to examine the role of such repeated experiences in further detail.

Fourth, our findings stem from a nationally representative sample of Germany and might not be generalizable to other populations outside of Germany.

Conclusions

Our findings suggest that especially agreeableness plays an important role to experience both positive and negative relationship events, given that less agreeable individuals were more likely to experience all of the examined events. At the same time, all of the examined events were associated with personality changes that exclusively occurred after, not before these events and varied considerably by event and gender. More specifically, individuals who moved in with a partner, got married, or separated from a partner primarily changed in openness in the first year after these experiences, Individuals who separated from a partner or got divorced became less emotionally stable in the following years. However, we found little evidence for 'maturation' effects, with the exception that individuals who moved in with a partner (especially men) became more conscientious in the following years.

In sum, our findings in terms of selection effects and event-related personality changes support the idea of the Paradigm of Dynamic Transactionism (Magnusson, 1990) that major life events in the domain of romantic relationships and personality are closely intertwined and reciprocally interact over time. On one hand, specific personality traits (especially lower agreeableness) predispose to experience specific relationship events. On the other hand, these events relate to changes in people's feelings, thoughts, and behavior and might thus be an important source of personality development.

There are several ways to explain our findings. It is plausible to assume that various individual and environmental factors at different levels mediate, but also moderate the associations between individual relationship events and the Big Five personality traits (Bleidorn et al., 2013; Lavner, Weiss, Miller, & Karney, 2018; Le, Dove, Agnew, Korn, & Mutso, 2010; O'Meara & South, 2019; Solomon & Jackson, 2014). Future research is needed to examine the role of such factors concerning the individual (e.g., attachment styles), the relationship (e.g., length and quality), and the social environment (e.g., culture and religion) in higher detail.

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Table 1

Description and coding of individual predictors

Predictor	Description	Coding
Gender (Level 2)	• Gender effects	• Coded with 0 for females • Coded with 1 for males • Mean-centered
Linear age (Level 1)	• Linear age effects	• Age at the respective personality assessment (divided by 10 [a]) • Mean-centered
Quadratic age (Level 1)	• Quadratic age effects	• Linear age variable [2]
Cubic age (Level 1)	• Cubic age effects	• Linear age variable [3]
Testing (Level 1)	• Effects due to repeated personality assessments	• Coded with 0 for the first personality assessment • Coded with 1 for the second personality assessment • Coded with 2 for the third personality assessment

		• Coded with 3 for the fourth personality assessment • Mean-centered
Past-event (Level 2)	• Effects due to previous experiences of the respective event prior to the transition period	• Coded with 1 for individuals of the transition and control sample who experienced the respective event prior to the transition period • Coded with 0 for individuals of the transition and control sample who did not experience the respective event prior to the transition period
Selection (Level 1)	• Personality differences between individuals who did not experience the respective event (control sample) and individuals who prospectively experienced the respective event at a later point of time during the transition period (transition sample)	• Coded with 0 for personality assessments in individuals of the control sample • Coded with 1 for personality assessments in individuals of the transition sample before they experienced the respective event • Coded with 2 for personality assessments in individuals of the transition sample in the month of and after the respective event (only category 1 versus 0 were compared)
Anticipation (Level 1)	• Linear personality changes in individuals of the transition sample in the three years before they experienced the	• Coded with the time span (in years) between the respective personality assessment and the event in individuals of the transition sample in the three years before they experienced the respective event

	respective event	• Coded with 0 for personality assessments in individuals of the control sample and all other personality assessments in individuals of the transition sample
Socialization (Level 1)	• Linear personality changes in individuals of the transition sample in the three years after they experienced the respective event	• Coded with the time span (in years) between the respective personality assessment and the event in individuals of the transition sample in the three years after they experienced the respective event • Coded with 0 for personality assessments in individuals of the control sample and all other personality assessments in individuals of the transition sample
Post-event year (Level 1)	• Transient short-term personality changes in individuals of the transition sample in the first year after they experienced the respective event	• Coded with 1 for personality assessments in individuals of the transition sample in the first year after the event • Coded with 0 for personality assessments in individuals of the control sample and all other personality assessments in individuals of the transition sample

Note: [a] the linear age variable was divided by 10 to ensure that the effects of linear, quadratic, and cubic age would not become too small to be displayed rounded at three decimals.

Table 2

Associations between moving in with a partner and personality in the total sample (N = 49,932) [1]

	Openness	Conscientiousness	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Emotional stability
	β	*β*	*β*	*β*	*β*
Coefficient	*(SE)*	*(SE)*	*(SE)*	*(SE)*	*(SE)*
Intercept	0.080*	0.174*	0.054*	0.030*	0.033*
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Gender	-0.110*	-0.137*	-0.146*	-0.284*	0.426*
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.008)
Linear age	-0.037*	-0.002	-0.079*	-0.022*	-0.031*
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Quadratic age	-0.008*	-0.057*	-0.011*	0.003*	-0.003*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Cubic age	-0.004*	0.011*	0.002*	0.005*	0.002*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Testing	0.015*	-0.065*	0.003	-0.049*	0.043*

	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Past-event	-0.095*	0.023	-0.056*	-0.128*	-0.065*
	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Selection	0.037	-0.005	0.119*	-0.077*	-0.076*
	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.025)
Anticipation	0.017	-0.021	-0.006	-0.015	-0.032
	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.017)	(0.016)
Socialization	0.022	0.027*	0.014	0.007	-0.020
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.009)
Post-event year	0.072*	0.073*	0.033	0.062	-0.011
	(0.026)	(0.027)	(0.025)	(0.027)	(0.026)

Note. β = standardized β-coefficient from multilevel mixed-effect models. Standard errors are in parenthesis. * $p < 0.01$. [1] Includes 5,025 individuals who did (transition sample) and 44,907 individuals who did not (control sample) move in with a partner during the transition period.

Table 3

Associations between marriage and personality in the total sample (N = 49,932) [1]

	Openness	Conscientiousness	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Emotional stability
	β	*β*	*β*	*β*	*β*
Coefficient	*(SE)*	*(SE)*	*(SE)*	*(SE)*	*(SE)*
Intercept	0.085*	0.173*	0.060*	0.025*	0.031*
	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Gender	-0.110*	-0.137*	-0.147*	-0.283*	0.427*
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.008)
Linear age	-0.039*	-0.002	-0.082*	-0.019*	-0.028*
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.004)
Quadratic age	-0.009*	-0.057*	-0.010*	0.003*	-0.004*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Cubic age	-0.004*	0.011*	0.002*	0.005*	0.002*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Testing	0.014*	-0.067*	0.003	-0.051*	0.043*

	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Past-event	-0.123*	0.023	-0.075*	-0.066*	-0.081*
	(0.019)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Selection	-0.017	0.032	0.012	-0.095*	-0.044
	(0.023)	(0.024)	(0.023)	(0.024)	(0.023)
Anticipation	0.017	0.012	0.006	-0.009	-0.030
	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.015)
Socialization	-0.027*	0.002	-0.004	-0.018	-0.008
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Post-event year	0.057	0.008	-0.015	0.007	0.029
	(0.027)	(0.028)	(0.026)	(0.029)	(0.028)

Note. β = standardized β-coefficient from multilevel mixed-effect models. Standard errors are in parenthesis. * $p < 0.01$. [1] Includes 4,130 individuals who did (transition sample) and 45,802 individuals who did not (control sample) get married during the transition period.

Table 4

Associations between separation and personality in the total sample (N = 49,932) [1]

	Openness	Conscientiousness	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Emotional stability
	β	*β*	*β*	*β*	*β*
Coefficient	*(SE)*	*(SE)*	*(SE)*	*(SE)*	*(SE)*
Intercept	0.059*	0.177*	0.039*	0.018*	0.026*
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Gender	-0.109*	-0.138*	-0.145*	-0.285*	0.425*
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.008)
Linear age	-0.029*	-0.003	-0.074*	-0.015*	-0.026*
	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.004)
Quadratic age	-0.006*	-0.057*	-0.008*	0.004*	-0.003*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Cubic age	-0.005*	0.011*	0.002*	0.005*	0.002*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Testing	0.007	-0.067*	-0.003	-0.056*	0.040*

	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Past-event	-0.001	-0.032	0.015	-0.095*	-0.097*
	(0.023)	(0.022)	(0.023)	(0.022)	(0.022)
Selection	0.016	-0.045	0.060	-0.170*	-0.080*
	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.025)
Anticipation	-0.004	-0.006	0.008	-0.015	-0.000
	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.015)	(0.017)	(0.016)
Socialization	0.000	-0.000	0.008	-0.003	-0.014
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.010)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Post-event year	0.044	0.017	0.060	-0.016	-0.057
	(0.029)	(0.030)	(0.028)	(0.031)	(0.029)

Note. β = standardized β-coefficient from multilevel mixed-effect models. Standard errors are in parenthesis. * $p < 0.01$. [1] Includes 3,706 individuals who did (transition sample) and 46,226 individuals who did not (control sample) separate from a partner during the transition period.

Table 5

Associations between divorce and personality in the total sample (N = 49,932) [1]

	Openness	Conscientiousness	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Emotional stability
	β	*β*	*β*	*β*	*β*
Coefficient	*(SE)*	*(SE)*	*(SE)*	*(SE)*	*(SE)*
Intercept	0.063*	0.171*	0.047*	0.009	0.023*
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Gender	-0.110*	-0.137*	-0.147*	-0.284*	0.426*
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.008)
Linear age	-0.032*	-0.002	-0.078*	-0.012*	-0.025*
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Quadratic age	-0.006*	-0.057*	-0.009*	0.004*	-0.003*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Cubic age	-0.005*	0.011*	0.002*	0.005*	0.002*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Testing	0.008	-0.069*	-0.001	-0.056*	0.040*

	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Past-event	0.008	0.010	-0.035	-0.048	-0.063
	(0.036)	(0.035)	(0.038)	(0.035)	(0.036)
Selection	-0.082	-0.034	0.019	-0.118*	-0.075
	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.041)	(0.040)
Anticipation	-0.059	-0.030	-0.025	-0.039	0.019
	(0.026)	(0.028)	(0.025)	(0.028)	(0.027)
Socialization	0.005	-0.026	0.006	-0.026	-0.076*
	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.019)	(0.018)
Post-event year	-0.019	-0.055	0.005	0.022	-0.040
	(0.050)	(0.052)	(0.049)	(0.053)	(0.051)

Note. β = standardized β-coefficient from multilevel mixed-effect models. Standard errors are in parenthesis. * $p < 0.01$. [1] Includes 1,252 individuals who did (transition sample) and 48,680 individuals who did not (control sample) get divorced during the transition period.

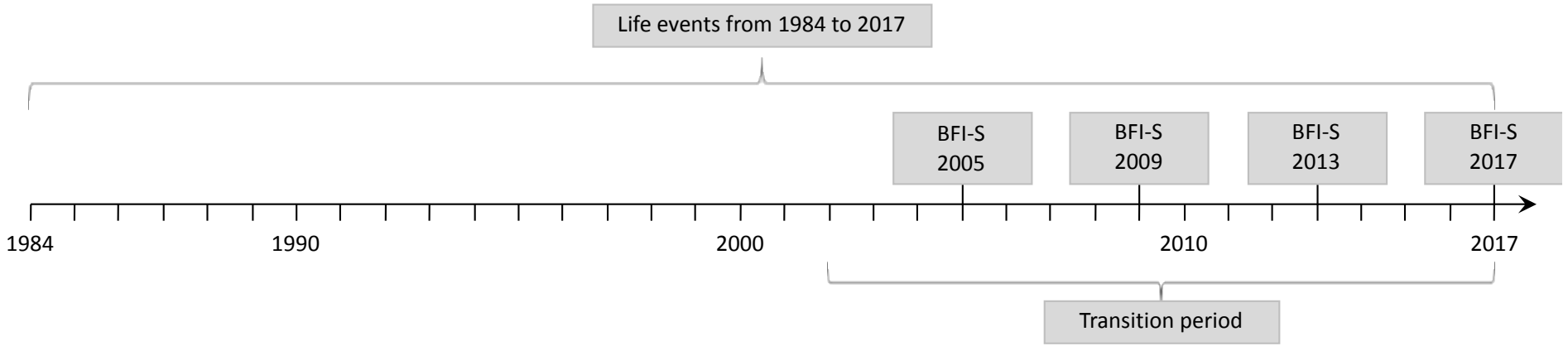
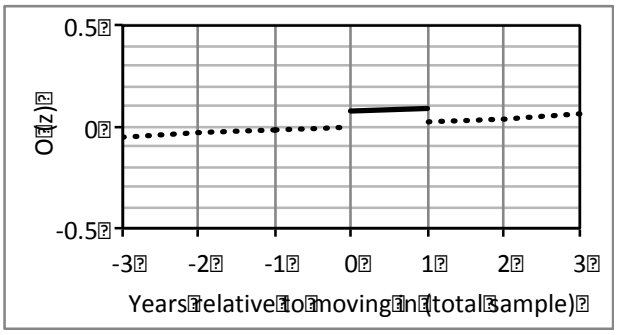


Figure 1: Study design with information on when life events in the domain of romantic relationships and personality were assessed.

(a)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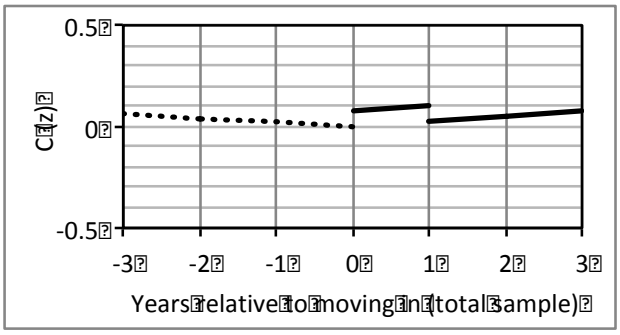
0
1
2
3
Years relative to moving in (total sample)

(b)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-3
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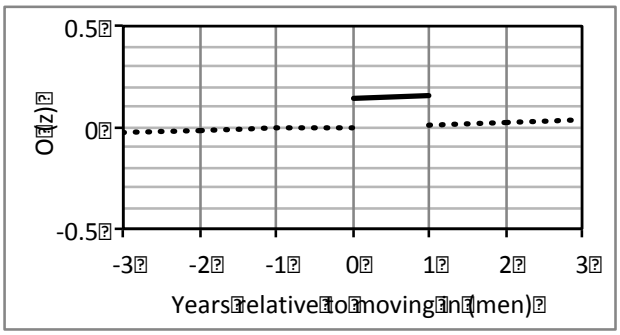
-1
0
1
2
3
Years relative to moving in (total sample)

(c)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-3
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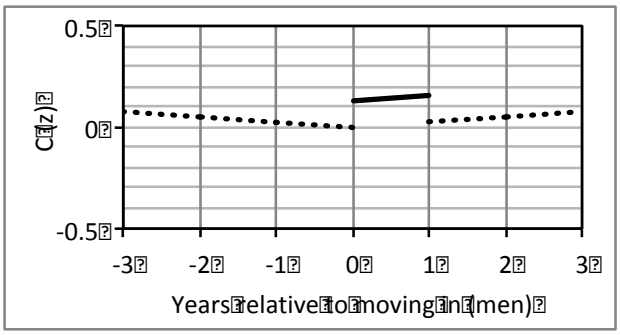
0
1
2
3
Years relative to moving in (men)

(d)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0
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-3
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1
2
3
Years relative to moving in (men)

Figure 2: Changes in (a) openness and (b) conscientiousness in the total transition sample as well as changes in (c) openness and (d) conscientiousness in men of the transition sample from three years before until three years after moving in with a partner.

Note. O = Openness. C = Conscientiousness. The first line indicates changes in openness/ conscientiousness in the three years before moving in with a partner. It is based on the coefficient of the anticipation effect, multiplied by the time until the event. The second line indicates changes in openness/ conscientiousness in the first year after moving in with a partner. It is based on the coefficient of the post-event year effect and the coefficient of the socialization effect, multiplied by the time after the event. The third line indicates changes in openness/ conscientiousness in the second and third year after moving in with a partner. It is based on the coefficient of the socialization effect, multiplied by the time after the event.

A continuous line is shown when any of the effects during the respective time frame reached statistical significance. Specifically, the second line was drawn continuous when the post-event year effect reached statistical significance. The second and third line were drawn continuous when the socialization effect was statistically significant.

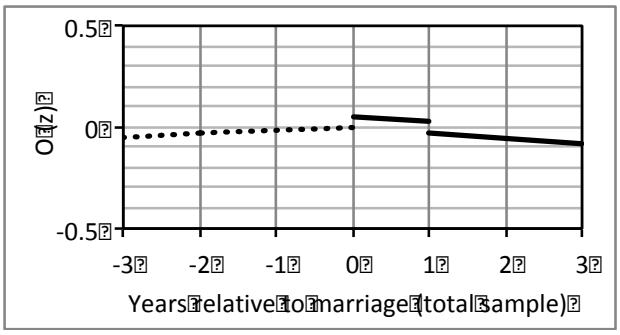
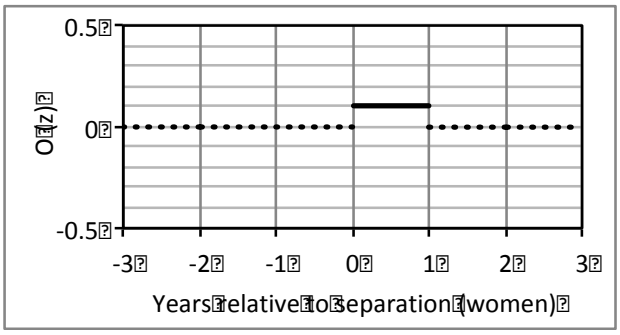


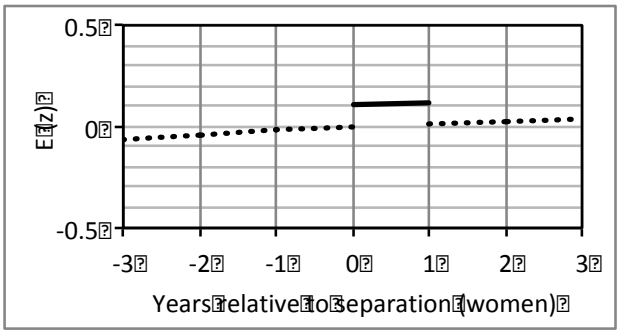
Figure 3: Changes in openness in the total transition sample from three years before until three years after marriage.

Note. O = Openness. A detailed figure description is provided in Figure 2.

(a)



(b)



(c)

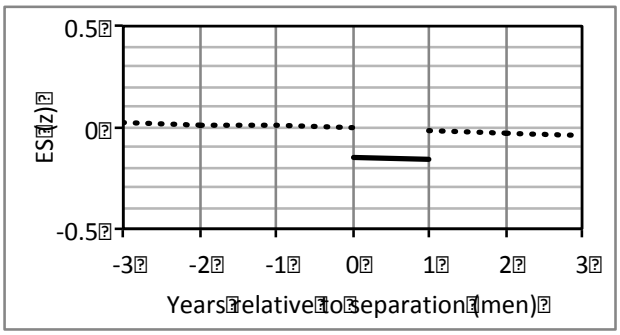
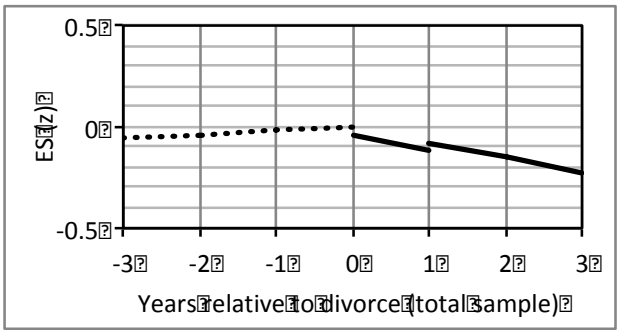


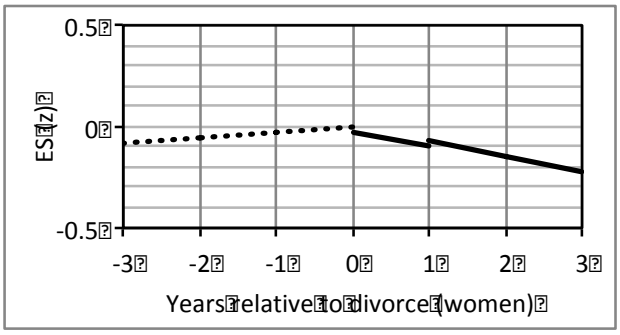
Figure 4: Changes in (a) openness and (b) extraversion in women of the transition sample as well as changes in (c) emotional stability in men of the transition sample from three years before until three years after separation.

Note. O = Openness. E = Extraversion. ES = Emotional stability. A detailed figure description is provided in Figure 2.

(a)



(b)



(c)

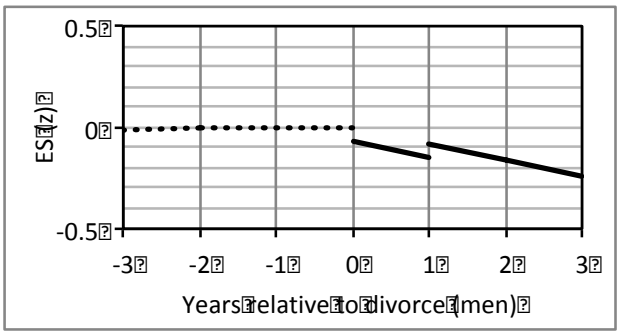


Figure 5: Changes in emotional stability in (a) the total transition sample, (b) women of the transition sample, and (c) men of the transition sample from three years before until three years after divorce.

Note. ES = Emotional stability. A detailed figure description is provided in Figure 2.

Table S1

Sample composition of the total sample and individuals who provided information on the Big Five personality traits in 2005, 2009, 2013, and 2017, respectively (N = 49,932)

	Total sample (*N* = 49,932)		Personality assessment in 2005 (*N* = 21,043)		Personality assessment in 2009 (*N* = 20,722)		Personality assessment in 2013 (*N* = 19,081)		Personality assessment in 2017 (*N* = 29,534)	
Subsample of the SOEP	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
A, original sample (west)	6,014	12.04	5,141	24.43	4,144	20.00	3,271	17.14	2,529	8.56
B, 1984 migration	1,631	3.27	1,413	6.71	951	4.59	584	3.06	367	1.24
C, 1990 original sample (east)	3,746	7.50	3,299	15.68	2,743	13.24	2,084	10.92	1,608	5.44
D, 1994/5 migration	833	1.67	734	3.49	551	2.66	388	2.03	270	0.91
E, 1998 refreshment	1,360	2.72	1,237	5.88	1,009	4.87	134	0.70	102	0.35
F, 2000 refreshment	8,452	16.93	7,348	34.92	5,714	27.57	4,255	22.30	3,189	10.80
G, 2002 high-income	2,189	4.38	1,871	8.89	1,467	7.08	1,245	6.52	972	3.29
H, 2006 refreshment	1,908	3.82	0	0.00	1,711	8.26	1,311	6.87	987	3.34

I, 2009 innovation sample	2,432	4.87	0	0.00	2,432	11.74	0	0.00	0	0.00
J, 2011 refreshment	4,073	8.16	0	0.00	0	0.00	3,722	19.51	2,896	9.81
K, 2012 refreshment	2,271	4.55	0	0.00	0	0.00	2,087	10.94	1,591	5.39
L1, 2010 birth cohorts	1,958	3.92	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1,958	6.63
L2, 2010 family types	2,303	4.61	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	2,303	7.80
L3, 2011 family types	976	1.95	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	976	3.30
M1, 2013 migration	2,478	4.96	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	2,478	8.39
M2, 2015 migration	929	1.86	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	929	3.15
M3, 2016 refugees	1,212	2.43	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1,212	4.10
M4, 2016 refugees/ family	1,447	2.90	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1,447	4.90
N, 2017 refreshment	3,720	7.45	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	3,720	12.60

Table S2

Frequencies and percentages of those who participated in the respective personality assessment in 2005, 2009, 2013, and 2017 as well as means and standard deviations for the number of personality assessments in individuals who did (transition sample, N = 5,025) or did not (control sample, N = 44,907) move in with a partner during the transition period (N = 49,932)

	Personality assessment in 2005 (*N* = 21,043)		Personality assessment in 2009 (*N* = 20,722)		Personality assessment in 2013 (*N* = 19,081)		Personality assessment in 2017 (*N* = 29,534)		Number of personality assessments	
Sample	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*M*	*SD*
Control sample (*N* = 44,907)	18,607	41.43	17,939	39.95	16,372	36.46	26,555	59.13	1.77	1.07
Transition sample (*N* = 5,025)	2,436	48.48	2,783	55.38	2,709	53.91	2,979	59.28	2.17	1.16
Moved in with partner in 2002 (*N* = 348)	339	97.41	267	76.72	174	50.00	110	31.61	2.56	1.14
Moved in with partner in 2003 (*N* = 418)	408	97.61	297	71.05	215	51.44	166	39.71	2.60	1.26
Moved in with partner in 2004 (*N* = 352)	352	100.00	243	69.03	166	47.16	122	34.66	2.51	1.24
Moved in with partner in 2005 (*N* = 321)	225	70.09	256	79.75	164	51.09	120	37.38	2.38	1.15
Moved in with partner in 2006 (*N* = 319)	195	61.13	273	85.58	186	58.31	138	43.26	2.48	1.13

Moved in with partner in 2007 (*N* = 312)	183	58.65	288	92.31	188	60.26	131	41.99	2.53	1.10
Moved in with partner in 2008 (*N* = 298)	148	49.66	291	97.65	172	57.72	129	43.29	2.48	1.12
Moved in with partner in 2009 (*N* = 263)	134	50.95	207	78.71	171	65.02	121	46.01	2.41	1.14
Moved in with partner in 2010 (*N* = 291)	116	39.86	160	54.98	199	68.38	162	55.67	2.19	1.10
Moved in with partner in 2011 (*N* = 339)	89	26.25	121	35.69	251	74.04	225	66.37	2.02	1.01
Moved in with partner in 2012 (*N* = 320)	57	17.81	88	27.50	262	81.88	220	68.75	1.96	0.99
Moved in with partner in 2013 (*N* = 332)	63	18.98	90	27.11	185	55.72	284	85.54	1.87	1.09
Moved in with partner in 2014 (*N* = 293)	50	17.06	78	26.62	138	47.10	256	87.37	1.78	1.06
Moved in with partner in 2015 (*N* = 300)	40	13.33	67	22.33	115	38.33	280	93.33	1.67	1.01
Moved in with partner in 2016 (*N* = 379)	36	9.50	54	14.25	110	29.02	375	98.94	1.52	0.95
Moved in with partner in 2017 (*N* = 140)	1	0.71	3	2.14	13	9.29	140	100.00	1.12	0.42

Note. M = Mean. SD = Standard Deviation.

Table S3

Frequencies and percentages of those who participated in the respective personality assessment in 2005, 2009, 2013, and 2017 as well as means and standard deviations for the number of personality assessments in individuals who did (transition sample, N = 4,130) or did not (control sample, N = 45,802) get married during the transition period (N = 49,932)

	Personality assessment in 2005 (*N* = 21,043)		Personality assessment in 2009 (*N* = 20,722)		Personality assessment in 2013 (*N* = 19,081)		Personality assessment in 2017 (*N* = 29,534)		Number of personality assessments	
Sample	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*M*	*SD*
Control sample (*N* = 45,802)	18,803	41.05	18,189	39.71	16,666	36.39	26,948	58.84	1.76	1.07
Transition sample (*N* = 4,130)	2,240	54.24	2,533	61.33	2,415	58.47	2,586	62.62	2.37	1.19
Got married in 2002 (*N* = 251)	241	96.02	200	79.68	134	53.39	101	40.24	2.69	1.19
Got married in 2003 (*N* = 238)	234	98.32	182	76.47	116	48.74	77	32.35	2.56	1.16
Got married in 2004 (*N* = 294)	294	100.00	217	73.81	155	52.72	110	37.41	2.64	1.21
Got married in 2005 (*N* = 265)	224	84.53	227	85.66	154	58.11	101	38.11	2.66	1.11
Got married in 2006 (*N* = 262)	215	82.06	222	84.73	150	57.25	103	39.31	2.63	1.16

Got married in 2007 (*N* = 251)	175	69.72	235	93.63	166	66.14	125	49.80	2.79	1.07
Got married in 2008 (*N* = 250)	149	59.60	244	97.60	138	55.20	99	39.60	2.52	1.13
Got married in 2009 (*N* = 246)	149	60.57	230	93.50	159	64.63	124	50.41	2.69	1.14
Got married in 2010 (*N* = 302)	121	40.07	177	58.61	198	65.56	193	63.91	2.28	1.18
Got married in 2011 (*N* = 319)	109	34.17	150	47.02	230	72.10	253	79.31	2.33	1.16
Got married in 2012 (*N* = 275)	78	28.36	105	38.18	208	75.64	212	77.09	2.19	1.11
Got married in 2013 (*N* = 264)	71	26.89	106	40.15	181	68.56	212	80.30	2.16	1.16
Got married in 2014 (*N* = 239)	67	28.03	88	36.82	151	63.18	215	89.96	2.18	1.20
Got married in 2015 (*N* = 247)	46	18.62	64	25.91	129	52.23	235	95.14	1.92	1.12
Got married in 2016 (*N* = 361)	62	17.17	79	21.88	138	38.23	360	99.72	1.77	1.13
Got married in 2017 (*N* = 66)	5	7.58	7	10.61	8	12.12	66	100.00	1.30	0.82

Note. M = Mean. SD = Standard Deviation.

Table S4

Frequencies and percentages of those who participated in the respective personality assessment in 2005, 2009, 2013, and 2017 as well as means and standard deviations for the number of personality assessments in individuals who did (transition sample, N = 3,706) or did not (control sample, N = 46,226) separate from a partner during the transition period (N = 49,932)

	Personality assessment in 2005 (*N* = 21,043)		Personality assessment in 2009 (*N* = 20,722)		Personality assessment in 2013 (*N* = 19,081)		Personality assessment in 2017 (*N* = 29,534)		Number of personality assessments	
Sample	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*M*	*SD*
Control sample (*N* = 46,226)	19,023	41.15	18,649	40.34	17,085	36.96	27,282	59.02	1.77	1.07
Transition sample (*N* = 3,706)	2,020	54.51	2,073	55.94	1,996	53.86	2,252	60.77	2.25	1.21
Separated in 2002 (*N* = 186)	179	96.24	137	73.66	91	48.92	67	36.02	2.55	1.21
Separated in 2003 (*N* = 251)	245	97.61	170	67.73	134	53.39	101	40.24	2.59	1.28
Separated in 2004 (*N* = 269)	269	100.00	185	68.77	129	47.96	94	34.94	2.52	1.25
Separated in 2005 (*N* = 245)	227	92.65	194	79.18	144	58.78	113	46.12	2.77	1.22
Separated in 2006 (*N* = 245)	209	85.31	200	81.63	121	49.39	82	33.47	2.50	1.13

Separated in 2007 (*N* = 205)	171	83.41	184	89.76	133	64.88	95	46.34	2.84	1.12
Separated in 2008 (*N* = 204)	143	70.10	197	96.57	106	51.96	73	35.78	2.54	1.15
Separated in 2009 (*N* = 188)	120	63.83	178	94.68	107	56.91	71	37.77	2.53	1.14
Separated in 2010 (*N* = 251)	101	40.24	151	60.16	165	65.74	156	62.15	2.28	1.19
Separated in 2011 (*N* = 254)	88	34.65	113	44.49	174	68.50	167	65.75	2.13	1.13
Separated in 2012 (*N* = 301)	85	28.24	109	36.21	206	68.44	222	73.75	2.07	1.11
Separated in 2013 (*N* = 227)	60	26.43	74	32.60	129	56.83	184	81.06	1.97	1.16
Separated in 2014 (*N* = 219)	47	21.46	62	28.31	119	54.34	189	86.30	1.90	1.12
Separated in 2015 (*N* = 232)	34	14.66	52	22.41	109	46.98	211	90.95	1.75	1.04
Separated in 2016 (*N* = 326)	36	11.04	59	18.10	111	34.05	324	99.39	1.63	1.01
Separated in 2017 (*N* = 103)	6	5.83	8	7.77	18	17.48	103	100.00	1.31	0.78

Note. M = Mean. SD = Standard Deviation.

Table S5

Frequencies and percentages of those who participated in the respective personality assessment in 2005, 2009, 2013, and 2017 as well as means and standard deviations for the number of personality assessments in individuals who did (transition sample, N = 1,252) or did not (control sample, N = 48,680) get divorced during the transition period (N = 49,932)

	Personality assessment in 2005 (*N* = 21,043)		Personality assessment in 2009 (*N* = 20,722)		Personality assessment in 2013 (*N* = 19,081)		Personality assessment in 2017 (*N* = 29,534)		Number of personality assessments	
Sample	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*M*	*SD*
Control sample (*N* = 48,680)	20,273	41.65	19,938	40.96	18,379	37.75	28,749	59.06	1.79	1.08
Transition sample (*N* = 1,252)	770	61.50	784	62.62	702	56.07	785	62.70	2.43	1.24
Got divorced in 2002 (*N* = 74)	73	98.65	57	77.03	31	41.89	23	31.08	2.49	1.15
Got divorced in 2003 (*N* = 82)	81	98.78	59	71.95	39	47.56	34	41.46	2.60	1.28
Got divorced in 2004 (*N* = 91)	91	100.00	65	71.43	45	49.45	45	49.45	2.70	1.30
Got divorced in 2005 (*N* = 95)	81	85.26	77	81.05	56	58.95	41	43.16	2.68	1.18
Got divorced in 2006 (*N* = 88)	74	84.09	73	82.95	62	70.45	47	53.41	2.91	1.14

Got divorced in 2007 (*N* = 80)	62	77.50	72	90.00	53	66.25	37	46.25	2.80	1.07
Got divorced in 2008 (*N* = 67)	45	67.16	65	97.01	37	55.22	26	38.81	2.58	1.13
Got divorced in 2009 (*N* = 78)	55	70.51	76	97.44	52	66.67	37	47.44	2.82	1.14
Got divorced in 2010 (*N* = 85)	52	61.18	62	72.94	57	67.06	56	65.88	2.67	1.26
Got divorced in 2011 (*N* = 101)	42	41.58	46	45.54	65	64.36	76	75.25	2.27	1.18
Got divorced in 2012 (*N* = 84)	28	33.33	32	38.10	54	64.29	65	77.38	2.13	1.18
Got divorced in 2013 (*N* = 87)	28	32.18	36	41.38	51	58.62	70	80.46	2.13	1.23
Got divorced in 2014 (*N* = 85)	22	25.88	24	28.24	43	50.59	78	91.76	1.96	1.24
Got divorced in 2015 (*N* = 65)	16	24.62	19	29.23	29	44.62	60	92.31	1.91	1.21
Got divorced in 2016 (*N* = 63)	16	25.40	16	25.40	22	34.92	63	100.00	1.86	1.24
Got divorced in 2017 (*N* = 27)	4	14.81	5	18.52	6	22.22	27	100.00	1.56	1.12

Note. M = Mean. SD = Standard Deviation.

Table S6

Means and standard deviations for the Big Five personality traits in 2005, 2009, 2013, and 2017 as well as across all four waves in individuals who did (transition sample, N = 5,025) or did not (control sample, N = 44,907) move in with a partner during the transition period

	2005		2009		2013		2017		Grand-mean	
Big Five personality trait	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Openness										
Control sample	4.47	1.23	4.38	1.23	4.57	1.20	4.75	1.23	4.56	1.23
Transition sample	4.68	1.16	4.50	1.16	4.64	1.12	4.70	1.15	4.63	1.15
Conscientiousness										
Control sample	5.92	0.95	5.84	0.96	5.85	0.93	5.80	0.96	5.85	0.95
Transition sample	5.76	0.95	5.70	0.94	5.72	0.90	5.71	0.91	5.72	0.92
Extraversion										
Control sample	4.80	1.14	4.75	1.14	4.83	1.11	4.95	1.15	4.84	1.14
Transition sample	5.07	1.15	4.92	1.15	5.00	1.12	5.02	1.17	5.00	1.15
Agreeableness										
Control sample	5.46	0.98	5.36	0.99	5.41	0.96	5.51	1.00	5.44	0.99

Transition sample	5.44	0.97	5.29	0.95	5.31	0.95	5.33	1.00	5.34	0.97
Emotional stability										
Control sample	4.04	1.22	4.18	1.22	4.24	1.22	4.23	1.24	4.17	1.23
Transition sample	4.06	1.26	4.11	1.23	4.23	1.24	4.13	1.28	4.14	1.25

Note. M = Mean. SD = Standard Deviation.

Table S7

Means and standard deviations for the Big Five personality traits in 2005, 2009, 2013, and 2017 as well as across all four waves in individuals who did (transition sample, N = 4,130) or did not (control sample, N = 45,802) get married during the transition period

	2005		2009		2013		2017		Grand-mean	
Big Five personality trait	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Openness										
Control sample	4.48	1.23	4.39	1.23	4.57	1.19	4.75	1.22	4.57	1.23
Transition sample	4.62	1.15	4.45	1.18	4.61	1.14	4.65	1.17	4.58	1.16
Conscientiousness										
Control sample	5.91	0.95	5.83	0.96	5.84	0.93	5.80	0.97	5.84	0.95
Transition sample	5.83	0.91	5.76	0.93	5.78	0.86	5.75	0.89	5.78	0.90
Extraversion										
Control sample	4.81	1.14	4.76	1.14	4.84	1.11	4.95	1.15	4.85	1.14
Transition sample	4.96	1.16	4.86	1.17	4.94	1.13	4.97	1.17	4.93	1.16
Agreeableness										
Control sample	5.46	0.99	5.36	0.98	5.41	0.97	5.51	1.00	5.44	0.99

Transition sample	5.41	0.94	5.25	0.99	5.32	0.93	5.31	0.97	5.32	0.96
Emotional stability										
Control sample	4.04	1.22	4.17	1.22	4.23	1.22	4.22	1.24	4.17	1.23
Transition sample	4.08	1.23	4.20	1.21	4.24	1.22	4.20	1.25	4.18	1.23

Note. M = Mean. SD = Standard Deviation.

Table S8

Means and standard deviations for the Big Five personality traits in 2005, 2009, 2013, and 2017 as well as across all four waves in individuals who did (transition sample, N = 3,706) or did not (control sample, N = 46,226) separate from a partner during the transition period

	2005		2009		2013		2017		Grand-mean	
Big Five personality trait	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Openness										
Control sample	4.47	1.22	4.38	1.22	4.56	1.19	4.74	1.22	4.56	1.22
Transition sample	4.70	1.15	4.59	1.21	4.73	1.17	4.79	1.18	4.70	1.18
Conscientiousness										
Control sample	5.91	0.95	5.82	0.96	5.83	0.93	5.80	0.96	5.84	0.95
Transition sample	5.80	0.93	5.76	0.93	5.79	0.91	5.71	0.95	5.76	0.93
Extraversion										
Control sample	4.80	1.14	4.75	1.14	4.83	1.11	4.94	1.15	4.84	1.14
Transition sample	5.06	1.13	4.97	1.19	5.05	1.15	5.09	1.17	5.04	1.16
Agreeableness										
Control sample	5.46	0.98	5.36	0.98	5.40	0.97	5.51	1.00	5.44	0.99

Transition sample	5.37	0.98	5.26	0.97	5.36	0.94	5.34	0.98	5.33	0.97
Emotional stability										
Control sample	4.04	1.22	4.18	1.22	4.23	1.22	4.22	1.24	4.17	1.23
Transition sample	4.00	1.24	4.13	1.26	4.25	1.26	4.18	1.27	4.14	1.26

Note. M = Mean. SD = Standard Deviation.

Table S9

Means and standard deviations for the Big Five personality traits in 2005, 2009, 2013, and 2017 as well as across all four waves in individuals who did (transition sample, N = 1,252) or did not (control sample, N = 48,680) get divorced during the transition period

	2005		2009		2013		2017		Grand-mean	
Big Five personality trait	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Openness										
Control sample	4.49	1.22	4.39	1.22	4.58	1.19	4.74	1.22	4.57	1.22
Transition sample	4.63	1.15	4.52	1.21	4.67	1.16	4.80	1.17	4.65	1.18
Conscientiousness										
Control sample	5.90	0.95	5.81	0.96	5.83	0.93	5.79	0.96	5.83	0.95
Transition sample	5.94	0.87	5.95	0.82	5.92	0.85	5.84	0.90	5.91	0.86
Extraversion										
Control sample	4.82	1.14	4.77	1.14	4.85	1.11	4.95	1.15	4.86	1.14
Transition sample	5.03	1.12	4.94	1.15	4.98	1.12	4.97	1.19	4.98	1.15
Agreeableness										
Control sample	5.46	0.98	5.35	0.98	5.40	0.96	5.50	1.00	5.43	0.98

Transition sample	5.42	0.98	5.36	0.96	5.37	0.98	5.37	1.00	5.38	0.98
Emotional stability										
Control sample	4.05	1.22	4.17	1.22	4.23	1.22	4.22	1.24	4.17	1.23
Transition sample	3.88	1.21	4.13	1.27	4.23	1.28	4.19	1.30	4.11	1.27

Note. M = Mean. SD = Standard Deviation.

Table S10

Correlations between the Big Five personality traits across all four waves

	Openness	Conscientiousness	Extraversion	Agreeableness
Big Five personality trait	*r*	*r*	*r*	*r*
Conscientiousness	.16			
Extraversion	.36	.19		
Agreeableness	.14	.31	.09	
Emotional stability	.07	.10	.16	.12

Table S11

Gender, age, and past experiences of the respective event prior to the transition period in individuals of the respective transition and control samples

	Control sample		Transition sample	
Women (N, %)				
Moving in	23,224	51.72	2,725	54.23
Marriage	23,786	51.93	2,163	52.37
Separation	23,757	51.39	2,192	59.15
Divorce	25,212	51.79	737	58.87
Age (grand-mean, M, SD)				
Moving in	50.75	17.61	36.10	12.28
Marriage	50.25	17.92	38.59	11.43
Separation	49.93	17.89	39.72	12.56
Divorce	49.08	17.91	46.17	9.98
Past experience (prior to the transition period) (N, %)				
Moving in	2,488	5.54	411	8.18

Marriage	2,574	5.62	177	4.29
Separation	1,156	2.50	340	9.17
Divorce	519	1.07	30	2.40

Note. M = Mean. SD = Standard Deviation.

Table S12

Coding of the event-related predictors (examples)

Sample	Personality assessment in 2005 (*N* = 21,043)				Personality assessment in 2009 (*N* = 20,722)				Personality assessment in 2013 (*N* = 19,081)				Personality assessment in 2017 (*N* = 29,534)			
	Select	Ant	Soc	Post-year	Select	Ant	Soc	Post-year	Select	Ant	Soc	Post-year	Select	Ant	Soc	Post-year
Control sample	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transition sample																
Event in 2002	2	0	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Event in 2003	2	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Event in 2004	2	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Event in 2005	2	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Event in 2006	1	-1	0	0	2	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Event in 2007	1	-2	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Event in 2008	1	-3	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Event in 2009	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Event in 2010	1	0	0	0	1	-1	0	0	0	0	3	0	2	0	0	0
Event in 2011	1	0	0	0	1	-2	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	0

Event in 2012	1	0	0	0	1	-3	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0
Event in 2013	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0
Event in 2014	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	-1	0	0	2	0	3	0
Event in 2015	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	-2	0	0	2	0	2	0
Event in 2016	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	-3	0	0	2	0	1	0
Event in 2017	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	1

Note. Select = Selection. Ant = Anticipation. Soc = Socialization. Post-year = Post-event year. Examples are given for full years only. More fine-grained information on years and months was used in the analyses.

Table S13

Associations between moving in with a partner and personality in women (N = 25,945) [1] *and men (N = 23,983)* [2]

	Women				
	Openness	Conscientiousness	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Emotional stability
Coefficient	*β* *(SE)*	*β* *(SE)*	*β* *(SE)*	*β* *(SE)*	*β* *(SE)*
Intercept	0.117*	0.215*	0.133*	0.152*	-0.147*
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Linear age	-0.031*	0.006	-0.080*	0.014	-0.030*
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Quadratic age	-0.008*	-0.050*	-0.015*	0.002	-0.010*
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Cubic age	-0.006*	0.008*	0.002*	0.003*	0.003*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Testing	0.016*	-0.053*	0.012*	-0.059*	0.042*
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)

Past-event	-0.071*	0.047	-0.016	-0.104*	-0.065*
	(0.024)	(0.022)	(0.024)	(0.022)	(0.023)
Selection	0.032	-0.030	0.109*	-0.095*	-0.102*
	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.035)	(0.035)
Anticipation	0.027	-0.021	-0.022	-0.040	-0.031
	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.022)
Socialization	0.027	0.023	0.027	0.005	-0.018
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.012)
Post-event year	0.023	0.011	0.019	0.068	-0.083
	(0.035)	(0.036)	(0.034)	(0.036)	(0.036)

	Men				
	Openness	Conscientiousness	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Emotional stability
Coefficient	*β* *(SE)*	*β* *(SE)*	*β* *(SE)*	*β* *(SE)*	*β* *(SE)*
Intercept	0.015	0.120*	-0.041*	-0.125*	0.227*

	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Linear age	-0.039*	-0.018*	-0.079*	-0.064*	-0.034*
	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.006)
Quadratic age	-0.008*	-0.062*	-0.006*	0.005*	0.002
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Cubic age	-0.002	0.016*	0.003*	0.009*	0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Testing	0.005	-0.083*	-0.010	-0.043*	0.043*
	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.004)
Past-event	-0.164*	-0.012	-0.102*	-0.161*	-0.065*
	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.024)
Selection	0.031	-0.030	0.132*	-0.078	-0.045
	(0.035)	(0.036)	(0.035)	(0.037)	(0.035)
Anticipation	0.008	-0.027	0.012	0.008	-0.037
	(0.022)	(0.024)	(0.022)	(0.025)	(0.022)
Socialization	0.012	0.028	-0.002	0.006	-0.020

	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.013)
Post-event year	0.142*	0.127*	0.056	0.047	0.065
	(0.037)	(0.040)	(0.037)	(0.041)	(0.037)

Note. β = standardized β-coefficient from multilevel mixed-effect models. Standard errors are in parenthesis. * $p < 0.01$. [1] Includes 2,725 women who did (transition sample) and 23,224 women who did not (control sample) move in with a partner during the transition period. [2] Includes 2,300 men who did (transition sample) and 21,683 men who did not (control sample) move in with a partner during the transition period.

Table S14

Associations between marriage and personality in women (N = 25,945) [1] *and men (N = 23,983)* [2]

	Women				
	Openness	Conscientiousness	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Emotional stability
Coefficient	*β* *(SE)*	*β* *(SE)*	*β* *(SE)*	*β* *(SE)*	*β* *(SE)*
Intercept	0.121*	0.215*	0.137*	0.147*	-0.150*
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Linear age	-0.032*	0.006	-0.082*	0.016*	-0.025*
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Quadratic age	-0.008*	-0.050*	-0.014*	0.003	-0.011*
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Cubic age	-0.006*	0.008*	0.002*	0.003*	0.003*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Testing	0.014*	-0.053*	0.011*	-0.062*	0.042*
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)

Past-event	-0.118*	0.046	-0.049	-0.040	-0.092*
	(0.024)	(0.023)	(0.024)	(0.023)	(0.024)
Selection	-0.018	0.017	0.021	-0.080	-0.064
	(0.032)	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.032)
Anticipation	0.011	0.003	-0.012	-0.007	-0.016
	(0.020)	(0.021)	(0.020)	(0.021)	(0.021)
Socialization	-0.034	0.002	-0.010	-0.010	0.006
	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Post-event year	0.030	0.004	0.005	-0.023	0.026
	(0.037)	(0.038)	(0.036)	(0.038)	(0.038)

	Men				
	Openness	Conscientiousness	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Emotional stability
Coefficient	*β* *(SE)*	*β* *(SE)*	*β* *(SE)*	*β* *(SE)*	*β* *(SE)*
Intercept	0.023*	0.116*	-0.029*	-0.129*	0.227*

	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Linear age	-0.042*	-0.016	-0.084*	-0.061*	-0.033*
	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.006)
Quadratic age	-0.008*	-0.061*	-0.007*	0.005*	0.002
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Cubic age	-0.001	0.016*	0.003*	0.009*	0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Testing	0.005	-0.086*	-0.009	-0.046*	0.043*
	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.004)
Past-event	-0.156*	0.003	-0.104*	-0.092*	-0.068*
	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.025)	(0.024)
Selection	-0.037	-0.003	0.003	-0.127*	-0.009
	(0.033)	(0.034)	(0.033)	(0.035)	(0.033)
Anticipation	0.023	0.019	0.028	-0.013	-0.045
	(0.022)	(0.024)	(0.022)	(0.024)	(0.022)
Socialization	-0.021	-0.001	0.003	-0.031	-0.022

	(0.014)	(0.015)	(0.014)	(0.015)	(0.014)
Post-event year	0.098	0.001	-0.037	0.041	0.039
	(0.039)	(0.041)	(0.039)	(0.043)	(0.039)

Note. β = standardized β-coefficient from multilevel mixed-effect models. Standard errors are in parenthesis. * $p < 0.01$. [1] Includes 2,163 women who did (transition sample) and 23,786 women who did not (control sample) get married during the transition period. [2] Includes 1,967 men who did (transition sample) and 22,016 men who did not (control sample) get married during the transition period.

Table S15

Associations between separation and personality in women (N = 25,945) [1] *and men (N = 23,983)* [2]

	Women				
	Openness	Conscientiousness	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Emotional stability
Coefficient	*β* *(SE)*	*β* *(SE)*	*β* *(SE)*	*β* *(SE)*	*β* *(SE)*
Intercept	0.100*	0.221*	0.119*	0.148*	-0.155*
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Linear age	-0.022*	0.004	-0.074*	0.018*	-0.023*
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Quadratic age	-0.006*	-0.050*	-0.012*	0.003	-0.010*
	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.002)
Cubic age	-0.007*	0.008*	0.002	0.003*	0.003*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Testing	0.010	-0.053*	0.007	-0.064*	0.038*
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)

Past-event	-0.019	0.005	-0.014	-0.096*	-0.120*
	(0.031)	(0.029)	(0.031)	(0.029)	(0.031)
Selection	0.038	-0.067	0.100*	-0.154*	-0.105*
	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.034)
Anticipation	0.000	-0.024	0.021	0.002	0.006
	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.020)	(0.022)	(0.021)
Socialization	-0.002	-0.010	0.014	-0.008	-0.013
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.015)	(0.014)
Post-event year	0.105*	0.001	0.109*	-0.028	0.007
	(0.039)	(0.039)	(0.037)	(0.040)	(0.040)

	Men				
	Openness	Conscientiousness	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Emotional stability
Coefficient	*β* *(SE)*	*β* *(SE)*	*β* *(SE)*	*β* *(SE)*	*β* *(SE)*
Intercept	-0.010	0.119*	-0.054*	-0.146*	0.222*

	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.008)
Linear age	-0.032*	-0.016	-0.077*	-0.054*	-0.032*
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.006)
Quadratic age	-0.005*	-0.061*	-0.004	0.007*	0.003
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Cubic age	-0.002*	0.016*	0.003*	0.008*	0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Testing	-0.005	-0.086*	-0.016*	-0.052*	0.040*
	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.004)
Past-event	-0.028	-0.076	0.055	-0.110*	-0.078
	(0.035)	(0.035)	(0.036)	(0.035)	(0.033)
Selection	-0.039	-0.063	0.004	-0.210*	-0.053
	(0.037)	(0.039)	(0.038)	(0.040)	(0.037)
Anticipation	-0.012	0.015	-0.007	-0.045	-0.009
	(0.024)	(0.026)	(0.024)	(0.027)	(0.024)
Socialization	-0.003	0.012	-0.000	0.004	-0.013

	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.017)
Post-event year	-0.034	0.030	0.000	-0.013	-0.144*
	(0.044)	(0.047)	(0.044)	(0.048)	(0.044)

Note. β = standardized β-coefficient from multilevel mixed-effect models. Standard errors are in parenthesis. * $p < 0.01$. [1] Includes 2,192 women who did (transition sample) and 23,757 women who did not (control sample) separate from a partner during the transition period. [2] Includes 1,514 men who did (transition sample) and 22,469 men who did not (control sample) separate from a partner during the transition period.

Table S16

Associations between divorce and personality in women (N = 25,945) [1] *and men (N = 23,983)* [2]

	Women				
	Openness	Conscientiousness	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Emotional stability
Coefficient	*β* *(SE)*	*β* *(SE)*	*β* *(SE)*	*β* *(SE)*	*β* *(SE)*
Intercept	0.102*	0.216*	0.129*	0.136*	-0.161*
	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.008)
Linear age	-0.024*	0.005	-0.078*	0.023*	-0.020*
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Quadratic age	-0.006*	-0.050*	-0.013*	0.003	-0.010*
	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.002)
Cubic age	-0.007*	0.008*	0.002*	0.002*	0.003*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Testing	0.009	-0.054*	0.009	-0.066*	0.037*
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)

Past-event	-0.045	0.018	-0.048	-0.019	-0.063
	(0.050)	(0.046)	(0.050)	(0.046)	(0.049)
Selection	-0.077	-0.017	0.037	-0.128	-0.119
	(0.053)	(0.052)	(0.052)	(0.053)	(0.054)
Anticipation	-0.044	-0.024	-0.017	-0.023	0.029
	(0.035)	(0.036)	(0.033)	(0.036)	(0.036)
Socialization	0.005	-0.019	0.035	-0.050	-0.074*
	(0.023)	(0.024)	(0.022)	(0.024)	(0.024)
Post-event year	0.008	-0.100	0.062	0.059	-0.025
	(0.065)	(0.066)	(0.063)	(0.067)	(0.067)

	Men				
	Openness	Conscientiousness	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Emotional stability
Coefficient	*β* *(SE)*	*β* *(SE)*	*β* *(SE)*	*β* *(SE)*	*β* *(SE)*
Intercept	-0.008	0.111*	-0.049*	-0.153*	0.223*

	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Linear age	-0.035*	-0.014	-0.079*	-0.051*	-0.032*
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Quadratic age	-0.005*	-0.061*	-0.005*	0.007*	0.003
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Cubic age	-0.002	0.016*	0.003*	0.008*	0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Testing	-0.003	-0.089*	-0.015*	-0.051*	0.041*
	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.004)
Past-event	0.062	0.008	-0.021	-0.090	-0.092
	(0.056)	(0.055)	(0.057)	(0.056)	(0.053)
Selection	-0.101	-0.136	0.001	-0.126	-0.037
	(0.061)	(0.063)	(0.061)	(0.065)	(0.060)
Anticipation	-0.085	-0.052	-0.041	-0.062	0.004
	(0.040)	(0.043)	(0.039)	(0.044)	(0.040)
Socialization	0.005	-0.032	-0.030	0.003	-0.081*

	(0.026)	(0.028)	(0.026)	(0.029)	(0.026)
Post-event year	-0.068	0.001	-0.081	-0.024	-0.069
	(0.080)	(0.085)	(0.079)	(0.087)	(0.080)

Note. β = standardized β-coefficient from multilevel mixed-effect models. Standard errors are in parenthesis. * $p < 0.01$. [1] Includes 737 women who did (transition sample) and 25,212 women who did not (control sample) get divorced during the transition period. [2] Includes 515 men who did (transition sample) and 23,468 men who did not (control sample) get divorced during the transition period.