

“NARRATIVES OF REDEMPTION” –
CONSUMERS’ IDENTITY RE-CONSTRUCTION
AFTER HAVING OVERCOME A SPELL OF
POVERTY.

STEPHAN, Julius Michael

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Department of Marketing
Strathclyde Business School
University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, UK

May 2020

This thesis is the result of the author's original research. It has been composed by the author and has not been previously submitted for examination, which has led to the award of a degree.

The copyright of this thesis belongs to the author under the terms of the United Kingdom Copyright Acts as qualified by University of Strathclyde Regulation 3.50. Due acknowledgement must always be made of the use of any material contained in, or derived from, this thesis.

Signed: Julius Stephan

Date: May 2020

Abstract

This study illustrates how consumers produce different culturally constituted accounts of assigning meaning to a past traumatic event, such as slipping into poverty. Positioned in Consumer Culture Theory's (CCT) consuming identity stream of research, it addresses a gap in the literature on tracing long-termed identity formation following disruption. As such, the study's originality stems from offering a focus on the temporary nature of relative income poverty and its implications on consumers' identity (re)-construction. Both a narrative theoretical lens and methodology were deployed to explore the cumulative impact of such multiple transitions over time (downward and upward) on identity re-construction. Following others who have drawn consumption insights from autobiographic work (Hirschman, 1990; Turley and O'Donohoe, 2012; O'Donohoe, 2015), published autobiographies from German poverty survivors were analysed and informed subsequent long (narrative) interviews with 14 transient poor informants, including book authors.

Findings obtained from analysis of both autobiographical work and interviews make three broad contributions to consumer research. Firstly, the study reveals that consumers having undergone major disruptions in their assumptive worlds make use of different past selves by, for example, rejecting or revisiting them in order to construct their present and future post-trauma consuming identities. Secondly, the findings shift the perspective on traumatised consumers from restoring what was lost during a disconcerting life event (Caldwell and Henry, 2017; Thompson, Henry and Bardhi, 2018) to transformative identity construction in terms of enduringly leaving behind pre-crisis selves. Thirdly, this study demonstrates that (transient) low-income consumers form an important part of voluntary simplicity theorisations.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to sincerely thank both my supervisors, Dr. Kathy Hamilton and Dr. Aliakbar Jafari, for their constant intellectual and emotional support, patience and guidance throughout my doctoral research. In particular, I appreciated their time invested in commenting on ideas and drafts and their clear and encouraging advices given. From the very first moment when I started working with them on this project, I have always had a good feeling and could not have asked for a better supervisory team. I truly hope to maintain a vital relationship with both of my supervisors in the future.

I would also like to thank Wendy Tabrizi, Head of the Markting Department at Aston Business School, for supporting me while I had been in the final stages of submitting my thesis. Furthermore, the loving support I received from my friends and family was extraordinary and the completion of this thesis is mainly indebted to them. Especially, I would like to thank my dad who has always been there for me despite having experienced various difficulties over the last few years. I have always enjoyed the many discussions with him about my research, which have helped me to structure my thoughts effectively. Last but not least, I would like to express my gratitude to those who have participated in this study and their willingness to share their life stories with me.

List of Conference Publications

This study's findings were presented at different international conferences and published in their proceedings. Furthermore, the research was presented at various research seminars. As such, the development of this study was the result of helpful comments, illuminating insights and suggestions as well as critical feedback from numerous academics outside of Strathclyde University. In this regard, I would like to especially thank – in no particular order – the following scholars: Prof. Guliz Ger, Prof. Russell Belk, Dr. Roberta Sassateli, Dr. Jack Tillotson, Prof. Stephanie O'Donohoe, Prof. John Schouten, Prof. Eric Arnould, Prof. Darach Turley, Prof. Steven Miles, Dr. Susann Dunnett, Dr. Leen Vandecasteele, Dr. Leighanne Higgins, and the anonymous reviewers of my conference publications. The research was presented at the following conferences:

- Stephan, J., Hamilton, K. and Jafari, A. (2018) "Riches to Rags to Riches - Consumers' identity re-construction after having overcome a spell of poverty", in **European Advances in Consumer Research**, Ghent, Proceedings.
- Stephan, J., Hamilton, K. and Jafari, A. (2016) "Like a Phoenix from the Ashes" - Being (sustainably) happy after overcoming a spell of poverty, in 41st **Annual Macromarketing Conference**, Dublin, Proceedings.
- Stephan, J. (2015) "Cast Away awhile" – Consumers' (re-)construction of identity after having escaped a spell of financial hardship and its influence on symbolic brand consumption, in **Academy of Marketing (AM)**, Limerick, Proceedings.
- Stephan, J.M. (2014) "Understanding Person-Brand Relationship Dynamics in cases of consumers transitioning into poverty and escaping from it. An explorative study of the transitory poor in Germany and their brands", in **European Marketing Academy (EMAC)**, Valencia, Proceedings.

Table of contents

	<u>Page</u>
List of tables	ix
List of figures	x
List of illustrations	xi
Chapter One: Introducing the Research	1
Research Rationale & Positioning the Study	1
Research Aim & Questions	5
Research Methodology	6
Structure of the Thesis	7
Chapter Two: Identity Projects in Consumer Culture Theory	10
Transitional Consumers and Identity Transformations.....	13
Horizontal (Identity) Transitions.....	14
Coping with Vertical (Status) Transitions.....	22
Challenging Underpinning Assumptions	34
The Storied Consumer Self.....	37
Narratives of Growth and Decline	41
Growth and Decline Narratives as Cultural Phenomena.....	47
Chapter Summary & Gaps in the Literature	57
Chapter Three: Dynamic Poverty in Germany.....	60
Concepts of Poverty	63
Relative Poverty Dynamics – Structure vs. Individualisation	65
Causes of Poverty Transitions and At-Risk Groups	74
Micro-Level Perspectives.....	74

Macro-Level Perspectives	79
Chapter Summary & Research Questions	84
Chapter Four: Methodology	87
Underpinning Philosophical Paradigm	87
Narrative Research Approach	90
Conducting the Study	97
Pre-Understanding of Temporary Poverty	97
Sampling Procedures	100
Autobiographies	108
Long (Narrative) Interviews	112
Data Analysis	119
Developing Sub-themes, Themes and Typologies	121
Trustworthiness of the Research	129
Chapter Summary	132
Chapter Five: Findings	134
The Redemptive Consumers	134
Downward Mobility as a Negative Experience	141
“Keeping up Appearances”	143
“Hitting Rock Bottom”	152
Finding meaning in Downward Mobility	157
Positive Adjustments to Downward Mobility	168
Retrieval of Past Self	175
Downward Mobility as Driver for Enduring Identity Transformation	185
Self-Controlled Consumption	193

Non-Materialistic Consumption.....	202
Generative Consumption.....	211
The Resilient Survivors.....	221
Seeking Distance from Poverty Experience.....	224
Resuming Pre-Poverty lifestyle.....	236
Chapter Summary	241
Chapter Six: Conclusion	243
Theoretical Implications	243
Role of Past Selves in the Re-Construction of Consumer Identity after Disruption	244
From Restorative to Transformative Consumer Identity Re- Construction	247
From Accidental to Voluntary Simplification.....	252
Practical Implications for Strategic Marketing and Social Policy Makers	260
Limitations of the Research and Potential Areas for Future Research	264
The Research's Impact on the Researcher's Self and Learning Outcomes	270
Conclusion	274
References	275
Appendix.....	313

Due to issues of copyright the appendix is not included in the digital version of this thesis and some written parts from chapters 4 And 5 have been redacted.

List of tables

	<u>Page</u>
Table I. Selection of studies on person-centred horizontal transitions.....	17
Table II. Key studies on vertical transitions (downward) and identity issues	27
Table III. Poverty occurrence and persistence (as a percentage of the total population of each country under investigation).	71
Table IV. Factors contributing to the transition into and out of poverty.	75
Table V. Overview of autobiography sample selected for narrative analysis ...	102
Table VI. Overview of informants	106
Table VII. Combination of content-based and narrative (structural) coding	124
Table VIII. Overview of informants' affiliation to cultural typologies	128
Table IX. Examples of consumers' retrieval of past selves during poverty	184

Due to issues of copyright Table V. is not included in the digital version of this thesis and Table VI. has been redacted.

List of figures

	<u>Page</u>
<i>Figure 1.</i> Lifecycle of poverty	67
<i>Figure 2.</i> Median adjusted household incomes for men and women in Belgium, Germany, Sweden and the UK from five years before to five years after separation.	79
<i>Figure 3.</i> Redemptive consumer typology	126
<i>Figure 4.</i> Resilient survivor typology	127

List of illustrations

	<u>Page</u>
<i>Illustration 1.</i> Recruitment signs posted in newspapers and public spaces (in German)	105
<i>Illustration 2.</i> Exemplary field notes from August 2015	117
<i>Illustration 3.</i> Old women's magazine article (in German) used for auto-driving	118
<i>Illustration 4.</i> Adaptation of the drawing inside of Peter's old schoolbag	178
<i>Illustration 5.</i> Picture of Peter's old  Explorer from the 1970s	180
<i>Illustration 6.</i> Example of a bread for the world charity tin.	181

Due to issues of copyright Illustration 1. has been redacted and Illustrations 3., 4. and 5. are not included in the digital version of this thesis.

Chapter One: Introducing the Research

Research Rationale & Positioning the Study

In the 2000 Hollywood blockbuster “Cast Away”, Tom Hanks plays a Federal Express executive, involuntarily spending four years stranded on a desert island before escaping back to civilisation. The movie’s storyline is divided into three parts: the opening section introducing Hank’s character as an affluent, yet rushed, overworked and overweight white male American Manager; the middle section beginning with a tragic plane crash, which is followed by a chronicle of his life on the island he had stranded on as a gruelling challenge without companionship; and the final section showing the character’s escape from the island and his return to the US as a changed man. Especially, the ending scenes of this fictional tale intriguingly depict how his shipwreck experience has transformed the character. After having re-entered his old, fast-paced world, the protagonist exhibits a new Zen-like state of calm coupled with a degree of hesitation and resistance towards the ubiquitous material abundance he is confronted with, and that stands in stark contrast to his forced frugality on the island. Despite an overly dramatic and exaggerated Hollywood storyline, Hank’s character in “Cast Away”, nevertheless, offers a thought provoking and colourful account of how a traumatic life experience may impact upon one’s sense of self, and identity-related consumption practices within consumer culture.

Within the last three decades consumer researchers interested in the relationships between consumption and identity (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) have acknowledged this fruitfulness of exploring transitional phenomena, spaces and places, as well as the experiences of the individual or group in flux and evolution

(Schouten, 1991; Gentry, Kennedy, Paul and Hill., 1995; Davies and Fitchett, 2004; Schau, Gilly and Wolfinbarger, 2009; Cody and Lawlor, 2011; Hirschman, Ruvio and Belk, 2012; Ourahmoune, 2016). As such, and in light of the Hollywood-inspired opening vignette of this chapter, an increased interest has been devoted to vulnerable consumer populations and their transitional pathways (Baker, Labarge and Baker, 2015). Here, consumers' encounters of traumatic life experiences, such as illness (Pavia and Mason, 2004), natural hazard events (Sayre, 1994), divorce (Caldwell and Henry, 2017; Thompson et al., 2018), bereavement (Turley and O'Donohoe, 2012; O'Donohoe, 2015), homelessness (Barrios, Piacentini and Salciuviene, 2012), or involuntary job loss (Roberts, 1991; Elliott, 1995) have been considered. Some of these forced life transitions (Barrios et al., 2012) oftentimes go hand in hand with losses of meaningful possessions, housing, social standings (status), or economic resources, which may, in turn, lead to existential crises and a shattered sense of self (Baker et al., 2015). Especially, regarding those who have descended in social status, experiencing first-time financial hardship and associated limited consumption opportunities, it has been shown how consumers adapt differently to these unpleasant circumstances. In this sense, consumers' coping can be as varied as protecting one's threatened identity (Roberts, 1991; Thompson et al., 2018), restoring it (recovering what was lost before the critical event; Caldwell and Henry, 2017), and/or transforming one's self (through re-interpreting one's pre-transition identity; Hamilton and Catterall, 2006a; Barrios et al., 2012; Caldwell and Henry, 2017).

Without neglecting the importance and fruitfulness of researching (newly) impoverished consumer populations, this study claims that only a lopsided account of marketplace vulnerability experiences and identity issues has been provided. This is

so as previous research has restrictively tied adaptations to life adversities to downward social mobility.

Referring back to the prefacing modern Robinson Crusoe example and his altered behaviours after having escaped the island to his old world, it would be equally worthwhile to explore what happens after moving out of a period of financial and identity strain. Are adaptive strategies associated with having achieved self-growth (Tennen and Affleck, 2002; Hamilton and Catterall, 2006a; Caldwell and Henry, 2017), or, conversely, grieving a former good life through consumption (Thompson et al., 2018), only situational? Or do they form part of a longer-termed and enduring self-transformation process? Such a broad question may only be answered when looking at the entire life course movie (Leisering and Buhr, 2012; Ourahmoune, 2016), by considering multiple turns in the road (e.g. downward and subsequent upward mobility; McAdams and Bowman, 2013) and their cumulative impact upon one's (social) identity construction (What have I become after all this happened? How has it influenced me in the way I consume? And with whom do I identify now, or not?).

In fact, longitudinal studies in sociological poverty research have illustrated that poverty is oftentimes only transient in nature. Especially, "risky life events" (Vandecasteele, 2010), such as becoming unemployed, periods of sickness, marital dissolution, or economic recessions (Quelch and Jocz, 2009; Sassatelli, 2015) constitute temporary poverty-inducing and traumatic events (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004; Mathur, Moschis and Lee, 2008), which, yet, can be actively overcome by many of those inflicted by them (Bane and Ellwood, 1986, Jenkins, 1999; Leisering and Buhr, 2012). Therefore, in light of new social risks (Beck, 1992; Bonoli, 2007), and a proliferation of transient types of downward social mobility and poverty in Euro-

American societies, with periods of both feast and famine being potential features of many people's life trajectories (Gabriel and Lang, 2008), gaining an understanding of how consumers exit from poverty spells and how it forms their identities is pivotal for consumer research on traumatised consumers.

Overall, this study intends to fill a research gap in the field of consumer identity research. It responds to calls made in terms of extending knowledge on long-termed identity formation following disruptive life events (Cherrier and Murray, 2007; Schau et al., 2009; Baker et al., 2015). The study, thus, situates itself within the broad interpretivist brand of organisation and theorisation named Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) and its identity projects research programme (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). CCT "addresses the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace and cultural meanings" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005:868). As such, the basic assumption is that people's lives are situated in a culturally constituted world, and this cultural constitution largely takes place in and through commercial marketplaces (McCracken, 1988; Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Hence, CCTs unique perspective on how both culture and the social reality are formed in acquisition, usage, and disposal of market-mediated goods has ample impact upon people's identities and ways of life. Theorists within CCT "study in specific consumption contexts to generate new constructs and theoretical insights to extend existing theoretical formulations" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005: 869). These contexts often facilitate an uncovering of processes in terms of why things emerge, develop, grow, or terminate over time (Giesler and Thompson, 2016), which are, in turn, critical for consumer identity theorisations (Arnould, Price and Moisio, 2006). For example, ageing may be a contextual event, which sets in motion consumers' identity transformations and

developments towards leading a more vibrant lifestyle as a retiree compared to one's past working life (Schau et al., 2009). Such contextual events resulting in theories of change regarding consumers' identities and concomitant consumption practices are embedded in narratives or stories (Shankar, Elliott and Goulding, 2001; Cherrier and Murray, 2007; Ourahmoune, 2016).

This research follows CCTs tradition of viewing consumers' identities, including their developments and changes over the life course, as structured in terms of coherent, culturally-constituted narratives (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Ahuvia, 2005; Giesler and Thompson, 2016). In this sense, the study aims to consider how consumers' identities and related lifestyles after having overcome a traumatic life event, such as a tip into poverty (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004; Mathur et al., 2008), are narratively interconnected with their pre-crisis lives, and their experiences while being poor in order to trace long-term processes of identity construction and change.

Research Aim & Questions

This research follows one core aim. It seeks to explore whether or not and how disrupted individuals' identities and relations to consumption objects (goods, possessions, services) and practices change when they enter and exit poverty. Based on this main aim, the study addresses the following key questions:

- 1) What are consumers' adaptive strategies when they transition into and out of poverty
- 2) Do they experience any identity shifts in both situations?
- 3) In what way, if at all, do consumption practices to manage their lifestyles and relations to consumption objects change?

Research Methodology

This study is guided by the interpretivist paradigm prevalent in CCT research (Arnould, Press, Salminen and Tillotson, 2019). In light of the above highlighted biographic/dynamic approach to poverty and long-term narrative identity construction considering important turning points in life (McAdams and Bowman 2013), a qualitative two-step narrative approach to data collection has been deployed. Following others who have drawn consumption insights from analysis of autobiographic work (Hirschman, 1990; Brown, 2005; Turley and O'Donahoe, 2012; O'Donahoe, 2015; Klein, Lowrey and Otnes, 2015), a purposive sample of five published autobiographies from both German men and women was analysed. These data sources include people's life stories and their experiences of routes into and out of precarious income conditions. Analysis has been particularly based on consumption-related content from the books and associated narrative structures in terms of plotline, temporal and causal sequences of selected events informing present and envisioned future identities.

Preliminary findings from this method informed the second phase of the research in which long interviews (McCracken, 1988) with 14 male and female informants, including four book authors, have been conducted. The purpose of complementing autobiographical data with interviews from the same people was to further validate long-term processes of identity (re-)construction and lifestyle (alterations) by tracing them over time. Informants have dealt with both temporary (between a few months and a few years) and recurrent phases of substantial drops in income over their life courses.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis report is divided into six different chapters, including the current introductory section. The following section provides an outline of these chapters.

Chapter Two reviews, discusses, and challenges underpinning assumptions regarding literature on consumers' life transitions and their impact upon consumption within CCTs identity projects stream of research. It further highlights the importance of narrative identity construction to understand people's consumption practices and relation to market-mediated goods following life transitions. Moreover, the relevance of culture informing personal narratives will be shown and discussed against the consumer literature on consumers dealing with unpleasant and traumatic life events, such as becoming downwardly mobile. Finally, there is a summary of core literature gaps that this study seeks to address.

Chapter Three introduces dynamic poverty in Germany as the empirical context of the research. It provides a brief overview of conceptualisations of the poverty construct in a wealthy nation, such as Germany. This is followed by discussing main causes of poverty entries as well as exits accounting for the biographic approach to understanding transient poverty. Both a micro and macro-social perspective when elaborating on the phenomenon of transitory poverty will be adopted. The chapter will conclude with an outline of my understanding of German dynamic poverty within the scope of this research and how it relates to the literature on consumers' (forced) life transitions, and the gap in the research identified.

Chapter Four discusses the research methodology of this study. It begins by highlighting the underlying philosophical paradigm underpinning this study, before

summarising the narrative methodological approach this research adopts. The chapter further illustrates the purposive sampling methods and frames, as well as data collection tools in terms of autobiographies and long interviews, which were used to address the research aim and questions concerning long-termed identity construction after overcoming a disruptive life event. It illustrates the data analysis procedures in detail, and addresses issues associated with trustworthiness (validity).

Chapter Five discusses the findings of the research in relation to its main objective and stated research questions. It showcases two differing identity narrative pathways of poverty survivors that are grounded in opposing storylines (plots) and cultural discourses. Firstly, within redemptive consumer narratives, people progress from a bad life scene (poverty experience) to a good one (post-poverty life). Here, they emphasise a critical reflexivity towards consumer culture and materialistic outlooks upon life brought about by a temporary poverty experience. These individuals' narrative identities are reflective of therapeutic socio-cultural discourses surrounding the promotion of self-knowledge, personal growth, and moral development through finding benefit in adverse life circumstances. Secondly, within Resilient Survivor narratives consumers progress from a good life scene (pre-poverty lives) to a bad one (poverty experience). Contrary to Redemptive Consumers, these individuals' stories reject past transitory poor selves that had been marked by financial and material constraint and, hence, restrict consumers' market choices. In turn, they revive pre-poverty consuming middle-class selves in their post-poverty lives. Their narratives are largely entrenched in consumer culture's marketplace ideology and a neoliberal subjectivity of viewing the marketplace as a core therapeutic function to attain a happy life.

Chapter Six is the conclusion of the thesis. Firstly, it demonstrates how the findings translate into core theoretical contributions to both consumer identity research and the broader humanistic socio-psychological literature. Secondly, practical implications for both Strategic Marketing as well as policy-making at the institutional level (e.g. job centres) will be offered. Thirdly, both methodological, and contextual limitations will be highlighted, which, in turn, provide avenues for future research on investigating long-termed and processual identity construction of consumers mastering difficult life events. Finally, an overview of the core learning outcomes of having undertaken this study and the research journey's impact on my own researcher identity is discussed.

Chapter Two: Identity Projects in Consumer Culture

Theory

Identity as a concept is complex. Due to different social science research streams, such as philosophy, anthropology, sociology, psychology, or social psychology constantly engaging in identity discourse and working with various definitions (Larsen and Patterson, 2018), offering a unified conceptualisation of identity is beyond the scope of this literature review. However, identity is something that many people feel they intuitively understand. At its most basic conceptualisation, identity is associated with the human capacity to know who one is. This reflexive self-understanding has also been referred to as self-conception, self-definition, self-identity, the self, or simply “I” (Mittal, 2006; Jenkins, 2014). Furthermore, identity equally involves the knowledge about who others are, others knowing who one is, or one’s belief of how others see one’s own identity (social self-concept; Sirgy, 1982). Additionally, identity poses the question of who one (not) identifies with referred to as social identity (Jenkins, 2014). Hence, identity always has a personal, social/relational, or collective and cultural facet (Sedikidis and Brewer, 2001). Throughout this research study, the terms identity and self will be used interchangeably at the personal/individual level. The term social identity is deployed to reflect one’s relationships with others.

From a historical perspective, one’s identity was an unproblematic concept (Kellner, 1992). Structural constraints determined pre-fixed, solid and stable self- and social identities over the life course (Gabriel and Lang, 1995; Goulding, Shankar and Elliott, 2002; Gabriel, 2015). For example, being a hunter, a member of a tribe, aristocracy, clergy or peasantry involved already defined and immovable social roles that usually

translated into unitary, stable and foreseeable life trajectories and identities (Kellner, 1992; McCracken, 2008). Additionally, normative, regulatory institutions of socialisation, such as the family, workplace (profession), nation-state or church were responsible for holding together both society and its stratified social systems of “collective habituation” (Shankar, Whittaker and Fitchett, 2006; Veer and Shankar, 2011).

In today’s secular Euro-American societies, yet, these traditional (social) structuring orders and identity templates (family, social class, work, etc.), which cast people into relatively defined roles, hierarchies and power relations are seen to dissolve (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; McAlexander, Dufault, Martin and Schouten, 2014). As a consequence, societies have become more “individualised” and “reflexive” in regards to making sense of the question “who one is?”. According to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) this new social formation has resulted in the proliferation of “do-it-yourself biographies”, which, in turn, are translated into “dynamic”, “fluid”, “pluralistic” or even “fragmented” identities and lifestyles at the micro(-social) level (Markus and Nurius, 1986; Giddens, 1991; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Bauman, 2005; Gabriel, 2015). Such noncommittal fragmented lives (Firat and Shultz, 1997), for Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002), and, more recently, Gabriel (2015) have brought an unprecedented degree of choice in almost all aspects of life (e.g. concerning religion/spirituality, occupancy, family, gender, body shape and even life or death¹), which has equally propelled peoples’ empowerment to shape and express who they wish to be in different social settings. Beck and Beck-

¹ When speaking of choice in relation to decisions of life and death “marketised” fields such as medicine offering prenatal diagnosis or intensive end-of-life care play an increasingly important role (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; McAlexander et al., 2014).

Gernsheim (2002:5) sum up that all is “(...) *becoming decidable down to the small print; once fragmented into options, everything must be decided*”. In this sense, identity is no longer conceptualised as a given “thing”. Rather, it has been considered a project, which has to be worked on continuously – or reflexively monitored, organised, and managed (Giddens, 1991). Simply put, identity is not something that someone has, yet something that an individual does (Jenkins, 2014:5). Following this reasoning, market-mediated meanings and images, which have colonised many of the aforementioned areas of social life in the form of branded goods, leisure pursuits or services (McAlexander et al., 2014) are considered to serve as a stable and omnipresent locus for actively and creatively fashioning and communicating (various) personal and social identities, life-goals and concomitant lifestyles (Shankar, Elliott and Fitchett, 2009; Gabriel, 2015).

Within interpretive consumer research’s brand of organisation and theorisation, Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), and its most prominent research domain focusing on consumer identity projects (Arnould and Thompson, 2005), it has been widely acknowledged that people use the commercial marketplace to enable their identities (Arnould et al., 2019). One of the central tenets of this research stream rests on the assumption that consumers are what they consume. Additionally, consumers communicate to others and get validated by them who they are through consumption of products, possessions, services, experiences, or ideas mediated by the marketplace (Levy, 1959; Belk, 1988; Goulding et al., 2002; Shankar et al., 2009).

More recently, considering the highlighted postmodern dynamic conception of identity (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) as a type of project that can be actively made and also remade over courses of consumers’ lifetimes (Schau et al., 2009), CCT research

has included more studies on consumer life transitions under its consuming identities label. Here, the changes in identity brought about by important turning points in life (e.g. adolescence, adulthood, parenthood, retirement), often inspiring new modes of consumption (e.g. buying a minivan signifying parenthood), have been increasingly acknowledged (Schau, 2018). Moreover, forced and unpleasant life transitions (e.g. losing one's home, becoming income poor, or downwardly mobile; Sayre, 1994; Hamilton and Catterall, 2006a; Barrios et al., 2012; Thompson et al., 2018) and how consumers actively cope through protecting, re-constructing or transforming their threatened selves using consumption have infiltrated CCTs identity projects theoretical sphere. The following sections will further highlight how (involuntary) life transitions impact upon identity and consumption.

Transitional Consumers and Identity Transformations

People pass a series of life events throughout their lives. These events involve transitions between various social roles, places, or social standings (social status). Transitions are conceptualised as a break, or discontinuity in an individual's life space or path (Hopson and Adams, 1976; Hemetsberger, Bauer, von Wallpach and Broger, 2013), which can change their perceptions of self, associated consumption routines, lifestyles and the symbolic meanings they draw from consumption objects (Mathur, Moschis and Lee 2003; Mathur et al., 2008).

As indicated above, within CCTs identity project stream of research (Arnould and Thompson, 2005), "*the fruitfulness of exploring (...) experiences of the individual or group in flux and evolution*" has been increasingly acknowledged (Cody and Lawlor, 2011:208). Despite its growing popularity, the body of literature on transitional

consumers, yet, has always appeared to be eclectic (Thomsen and Sørensen, 2006). In order to make sense of this fragmented stream of research Ulver and Ostberg (2014) offer two broad categorisations, which they term horizontal and vertical transitions, or movements. These transition categories will be presented in the following and used to group a selection of relevant studies under the two umbrella terms.

Horizontal (Identity) Transitions

Firstly, Ulver and Ostberg (2014) refer to what they call horizontal (identity) transitions. This category largely subsumes unidirectional, “person-centred” transition research (Hirschman et al., 2012:372) in terms of studying defined turning points in life (e.g. changing schools, becoming a mother, or entering retirement) and concomitant engagements in consumption. Here, it has been found that 1) identity-based consumption phenomena and transformations occur in light of significant life events and 2) significant consumption acts across the consumption lifecycle (acquisition, consumption, disposition) contribute to, symbolise, or, occasionally, hamper identity changes during life transitions (Schouten, 1991; Thomsen and Sørensen, 2006, Voice Group, 2010).

These views of transition in consumer research are often theoretically enabled by the works of van Gennep (1960), or Turner (1974). According to van Gennep (1960) important (horizontal) life passages generally consist of three stages that individuals pass sequentially: 1) the separation stage where a person disengages from the previous social role or standing, 2) a liminal stage characterised by an ambiguous and disordered self due to being “betwixt and between” (Turner, 1974), and 3) the incorporation stage in which the person integrates the self with the new role. In

particular, the middle-stage of liminality has been deployed and extended by consumer researchers to shed light on ritualised before-and-after transformations where consumers change their appearances (Schouten, 1991), and playfully engage in ritualistic behaviours as well as consumption changes (Cody and Lawlor, 2011) in order to facilitate the tightrope walk to a new self (Cody, 2012). Others, by contrast, also show the dark side of liminality when contending that liminal consumption can make the transition to a new identity worse (Thomsen and Sørensen, 2006; Voice Group, 2010). For example, Thomsen and Sørensen (2006) in their study on new mothers found that these consumers were insecure and unexperienced in their new roles resulting in disposing of baby-related products in order to not be perceived as a kind of mother they did not want to be.

Nevertheless, rites of passage and notions of liminality have been argued to fall short in understanding longer-termed and continuous horizontal self-transformations, such as aging (Schau et al., 2009), building one's career (Castilhos and Fonseca, 2016), or visiting a tourist destination at different times over the life course (Ourahmoune, 2016). Instead, the ontologically different perspective of coherent life narratives, or narrative identity construction (McAdams, 2006; Rojas-Gaviria and Bluemelhuber, 2010) has been privileged in some of these cases. Here, the separation from past selves and roles is less clear-cut as proposed by van Gennep (1960) who, in his theory, posits a renunciation of the past to build a new life story from scratch with a new self. Narratives, by contrast, deal continuously with the past without ever abandoning it, simultaneously harmonising with future anticipated selves in order to construct a coherent present and meaningful identity following life events (McAdams, 2006). The

importance of narratives for understanding self-transformations related to life events will be further elaborated upon later in this chapter.

On the following pages, an exemplary selection of recent consumer identity change studies with different identity transition perspectives is presented in Table 1. The table illustrates the variety of theoretical perspectives by either drawing upon rites of passage linear stage models (e.g. Schouten, 1991; Noble and Walker, 1997; Voice Group, 2010; Cody, 2012) or narrative theorisations (Schau et al., 2009; Ourahmoune, 2016) to shed light on processes of transition from one role or lifestage to another within the horizontal movements category. Existing studies have investigated transitions from school to University life (Noble and Walker, 1997), becoming a mother (Fisher and Gainer, 1993; Voice Group, 2010), or an empty nester (Hogg, Curasi and Maclaran, 2004), entering adulthood (Cody, 2012), and retirement (Schau et al., 2009) amongst other empirical contexts. Some of these studies highlighted will be further drawn upon throughout this literature review chapter.

Table I.

Selection of studies on person-centred horizontal transitions

Author (Year)	Method	Transition Study Topic	Journal
Schouten (1991)	Ethnographic Interviews with nine key informants and supplemental information derived from relatives or friends of the key informants	Using theories of liminality and the self, this study charts how consumers undergoing a life transition are prone to using commercial forms of surgical alterations as a self-imposed personal rite of passage. Further, plastic surgery is used as a symbolic act that may assist individuals in reintegrating a self-concept made ambiguous in the course of a major life transition (e.g. when transitioning to womanhood).	Journal of Consumer Research (JCR)
Fisher & Gainer (1993)	Participant observation in eight baby showers followed by semi-structured interviews with five informants	Drawing on theories of liminality and rites of passage this study shows how transitions into motherhood are facilitated by traditional baby showers, yet, may be complicated by different, modernised versions, such as workplace baby showers in that tensions between the new and old identity role may be further heightened.	Association for Consumer Research (ACR)

Author (Year)	Method	Transition Study Topic	Journal
Noble & Walker (1997)	Hypothetico-deductive approach to data collection taking the form of a survey instrument answered by three different groups of students (liminal, n=164; pre-liminal, n= 126; post-liminal, n=169)	Investigating the transition from school to college and its psychological effects this study draws on theories of liminality and the extended self concept to depict how particular self-extending objects that symbolise past relationships are maintained during a phase of self-discrepancy in order to create stability. At the same time, there is a propensity to consume and display objects that represent the new role in an exaggerated manner (e.g. backpack).	Psychology and Marketing
Price, Arnould & Curasi (2000)	Eighty semi-structured interviews with older consumers ranging in age from 65-95 and seven depth interviews with older consumer ranging in age from 55 to 82 that mainly focused on narratives of special possessions	In the context of “growing old”, certain acts of voluntary disposition of cherished possessions (e.g. gifting to relatives) assist consumers in reviewing their life and coming to grips with mortality where bequests of cherished objects may transcend the perishability of the body and serves as a way of achieving symbolic immortality.	JCR

Author (Year)	Method	Transition Study Topic	Journal
Hogg, Curasi & Maclaran (2004)	Multi-method qualitative approach to data collection taking the form of 18 semi-structured interviews followed by a netnographic participant observation via online bulletin boards.	Mothers in transition from having housefuls of dependent children to empty nests experience ambiguity of (mother role) identity, which is negotiated through a shift from production-oriented tasks within the household (e.g. cooking for children) to consumption-oriented tasks in order to accomplish a revised mothering identity that takes into account the physical distance between her and the children (e.g. preparing care packages, buying things for dorms).	Consumption, Markets and Culture (CMC)
Schau et al. (2009)	Multi-method qualitative approach taking the form of semi-structured in-depth interviews with 65 informants probing for narratives on life projects and life themes in addition to naturalistic observation in at least three senior centres and netnography via discussion threads in three online forums for older US citizens	Consumers transitioning into retirement weave rich life narratives across time orientations (who they were, are and will be) and focus on identity-centred forms of consumption by entering a period of identity renaissance during which they may revive past selves through acts of consumption that had been stalled during their working lives. Further, experimentations with entirely novel forms of self-expression may be undertaken.	JCR

Author (Year)	Method	Transition Study Topic	Journal
VOICE Group (2010)	Multi-method qualitative approach to data collection taking the form of phenomenological interviewing with 25 new mothers across four countries who were interviewed towards the end of pregnancy and shortly after the birth of child; in addition diaries and photographs of consumption activities of informants were part of data collection as well as reflexive accounts of researchers' own transitions into motherhood	As opposed to viewing consumption as a helping hand through liminality and significant turning points in life, this study emphasises the complicating aspects of consumption in transitional phases in that first-time mothers-to-be may also have negative consumption experiences, which render the transition a complicated and confusing process (e.g. when lack of baby-related product knowledge is bound up with perceived feelings of being an inadequate mother).	CMC

Author (Year)	Method	Transition Study Topic	Journal
Cody & Lawlor (2011); Cody (2012)	Multi-method qualitative approach to data collection using two sets of individual depth interviews with 15 tweens aged 11-12 as well as personal diaries from informants, E-collages, accompanied shopping trips and the researcher's diary	Taking into account the liminal state of "Tweens", that is young consumers who are "betwixt and between" the socio-cultural identities of child and teenager, this study charts that liminal consumption – theorised as a fruitful darkness – entails several dichotomous consumption enactments that are reflective of those who are essentially no longer, but not yet (e.g. maintaining child-like activities in the realm of the private vs. consuming liminal products such as lip gloss or body sprays that yet do not step too far over the threshold of engaging with teen products like deodorant or perfumes).	Marketing Theory/Journal of Consumer Culture
Ourahmoune (2016)	Longitudinal and narrative approach to data collection in terms of ethnographic research in Punta Cana from 2003 to 2014 followed by unstructured interviews with 16 repeat visitors prompting narrations of identity change in relation to the tourism experience	Investigating Western consumers' narratives of identity transformations through the repeat experience of travel to Punta Cana (Dominican Republic), this study reveals different aspects of motivation and resistance towards identity alterations through the transformative flux fostered by the tourism experience (e.g. enduring identity transformation vs. situational identity transformation).	Journal of Business Research

Coping with Vertical (Status) Transitions

Apart from the above charted horizontal transitions, Ulver and Ostberg (2014) point to a second, more nuanced categorisation, which they term vertical transitions. Here, it is assumed that consumers who undergo a change in social status may also be subject to an identity change, or identity conflict/strain – in particular, when it comes to mismatches between one's identity and status position during transitions (identity-status incongruence). With regard to these identity-status incongruences Ulver and Ostberg (2014) draw upon Bauman's (2001) thesis of liquid modernity and the suggested proliferation of social mobility throughout one's lifetime (Gabriel and Lang, 2008). These intragenerational mobility dynamics (Sorokin, 1959; Vandecastelle, 2011) have, for example, been reflected in the new social tribe of the downwardly mobile, that is those who plunge down the social ladder every year due job loss, economic downturns, divorce and resultant experiences of financial hardships, and poverty for the first time (Newman, 1998; Betzelt and Bode, 2018). Ulver and Ostberg (2014), hence, assume that (middle-class) consumers will increasingly suffer from identity and status mismatches due to shifting personal economic conditions and its consequences (e.g. involuntarily giving up accustomed lifestyles and entering new social and consumption fields, Newman, 1998; Schreurs, Martens and Kok, 2012; Betzelt and Bode, 2018).

In fact, a small but growing number of studies that often, yet not exclusively (for exceptions see Fournier, 1998; Schreurs et al., 2012), falls under the umbrella of vulnerability research in consumer culture (Baker et al., 2015) has taken such downward movements in light of forced life transitions and related identity issues and transformations into account.

Within this context, Barrios et al. (2012) define forced life transitions as 1) stressful events with high emotional costs that 2) force people to enter a self-transformation pathway characterised by uncertainty. For example, becoming income poor is such a forced life transition, since consumers' feelings of poverty and distress may be accentuated due to being accustomed to higher pre-transition consumption levels and more comfortable lifestyles (Hamilton and Catterall, 2006a; Wendt, 2011). Consumer researchers have considered these descents in socio-economic status in light of involuntary job loss and family disruptions (Roberts, 1991; Elliott, 1995; Hamilton and Catterall, 2006a; Thompson et al., 2018), losing one's home (Barrios et al., 2012), or becoming a "nouveau pauvre" middle-class consumer who claims to feel poor relative to one's own life history (Ulver-Sneistrup and Ostberg, 2011; Chen and Nelson, 2017). In these studies researchers have sought to unpack consequent (social) identity strains and (re-) configurations of the self in light of adaptations to limited consumption opportunities and new and unfamiliar settings (e.g. moving to a smaller home; Saatcioglu and Ozanne, 2013).

Broadly speaking, these adaptations can be classified as problem-focused and emotion-focused coping mechanisms (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). In this sense, coping refers to actions (problem-focused) and thoughts (emotion-focused) that enable individuals to handle difficult and threatening situations, solve problems and reduce stress (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). In the context of downward mobility and associated traumatic experiences, such as a tip into poverty (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 1995, 2004), consumers deploy several problem-focused strategies, such as disposition of possessions, seeking social and/or financial support from others, finding creative alternatives outside of the marketplace (e.g. cutting one's own hair, or buying second-

hand), foregoing conspicuous consumption (for a contrary example see Roberts, 1991), or putting emphasis on the consumption of intangible possessions, such as spaces and valuing relationships with people instead of material possessions (Hamilton and Catterall, 2006a; Wendt, 2011). Such behavioural strategies are oftentimes interwoven with well-documented emotion-based coping mechanisms within consumer poverty research (Hibbert and Piacentini, 2003; Karanika and Hogg, 2016) in terms of re-evaluating the importance ascribed to material possessions and money as a means of self-definition and/or prioritising non-material goals, such as social relationships, memories, or religious beliefs (Hill, 1991; Barrios et al., 2012). Following this reasoning, self-identity may become subject to change, which may surface through questioning one's own previous lifestyle and privileging instead immaterial assets, such as health, social connections or newly acquired traits (Hamilton and Catterall, 2006a; Wendt, 2011; Barrios et al., 2012).

This is partially akin to the abstract existential approach to reflexivity outlined by Thompson et al. (2018) where consumers' introspective understanding of themselves in the world (reflexivity) is composed of agentic (ability to drive change) identity shaping in consumption. As highlighted earlier such a volitional-agentic ethos of existential reflexivity has been mostly placed in situations of ontological security (Giddens, 1991) where consumers make free identity and lifestyle choices against the background of relative economic stability (Schouten, 1991; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Cherrier and Murray, 2007; Schau et al., 2009), which forms an important prerequisite of the consumer identity projects stream of research within CCT (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). These authors (Thompson et al., 2018), however, argue, that existential reflexivity may also be applied to threatened identities during a

crisis event, such as becoming downwardly mobile (Hamilton and Catterall, 2006a; Karanika and Hogg, 2016). Hence, Thompson et al. (2018:4) put (emotional) coping strategies adopted during such a phase on equal footing with existential reflexivity as they help consumers to “allay their anxieties, and to buttress their besieged just-world beliefs”.

Conversely, (the same) researchers have also indicated that consumers who have taken an economic and social downhill journey may “grieve their former good life” (Ulver-Sneistrup and Ostberg, 2011:226) and be reluctant to identify with newly experienced less-well off lifestyles and social spheres (Hamilton and Catterall, 2006a; Saatcioglu and Ozanne, 2013; Thompson et al., 2018). Here, consumers may envision self-defining consumption practices consistent with their pre-transition lifestyles (e.g. taking again regular holidays, Hamilton and Catterall, 2006a), and aim to preserve former pre-event selves through consuming objects, which symbolise the past (e.g. by mimicking furniture from a previous, more affluent life; Ulver-Sneistrup and Ostberg, 2011). Against this backdrop of striving to preserve one’s threatened pre-event self, Thompson et al. (2018) have introduced the concept of reactive reflexivity. Their study on former upper-middle class women who have become downwardly mobile implies the refusal to alter pre-event habituated and self-relevant aesthetic taste standards (Bourdieu, 1984) in relation to present conditions of economic necessity. Hence, these women express non-identification with the adverse social context and a hope to regain a former social standing through discordant performances of taste (e.g. refusing to engage in budgeting strategies in order to maintain consumption tastes emblematic of their lost social standing, Thompson et al., 2018).

Extending the work of Roberts (1991), Caldwell and Henry (2017) combine these two highlighted broad consumer adaptations to economic constraints and related threatened identities following a traumatic experience, such as becoming downwardly mobile (losing one's social status). In their study on divorced women, these authors show that coping strategies may be, on the one hand, restorative, that is trying to recover what was lost by the family break-up. Here, for instance, to bolster self-esteem, and recover one's own happiness also radiating across children of divorce, consumers engaged in fashion purchases, or going to the gym. On the other hand, adaptation strategies may be transformative, that is detaching oneself from pre-divorce co-dependent identities, and trying to turn oneself into a better self while grappling with downward mobility (e.g. reflected in activities, such as taking up formal education, taking public speaking courses, or travelling overseas).

Table II. provides a summary of consumer studies making references to vertical status transitions (downward) due to life events triggering an income reduction and/or poverty experience. At the same time, the above highlighted identity strains as well as transformational pathways are further thematised.

Table II.

Key studies on vertical transitions (downward) and identity issues

Author (Year)	Method	Vertical Transition Topic & Identity Issues/Transformation	Journal
Roberts (1991)	Case study reports of two former steel workers after having been laid off using a qualitative multi-method approach in terms of participant observation, naturalistic observation (e.g. homes including photography) and several in-depth interviews	Investigating the consequences of status descent and lowered income due to job loss in a US context, this study charts two different cases of protecting and re-defining self- and social identities supported by theories of symbolic self-completion and the extended self (e.g. Paul's inward turn translating into a hermit-like lifestyle vs. Mark's engagement with consumption in expensive cars to save face, at the same time cutting back in other areas)	ACR

Author (Year)	Method	Vertical Transition Topic & Identity Issues/Transformation	Journal
Fournier (1998)	Modified life history cases obtained through phenomenological interviewing with three women taking into account important life transitions (e.g. divorce)	In the broader context of exploring subjective meanings of US consumers' lived experiences with brands, this study briefly discusses how a case of a descent in social status (from married middle-class housewife to working-poor single mother) leads to identity strains, self-reformulation and revised brand consumption (e.g. from loyal consumer of brands to seemingly vulnerable multi-brand purchasing behaviours that yet help to negotiate pressing concerns integral to the single-mother experience and financial strains)	JCR
Hamilton & Catterall (2006a)	30 in-depth at-home family interviews in a UK context with particular attention given to two families who experienced a recent transition into relative income poverty	Exploring families' recent transitions into relative income poverty (e.g. due to job loss) this study advances understandings of coping with forced dispositions of possessions and detrimental effects on identity construction in that indications are given related to consequent altered lifestyles where material possessions may no longer play a pivotal role in consumers' self-definition and defining oneself to others (e.g. more emphasis may be put on places and social relationships)	Marketing Review

Author (Year)	Method	Vertical Transition Topic & Identity Issues/Transformation	Journal
Ulver-Sneistrup & Ostberg (2011)	Phenomenological, long and ethnographic interviews with 35 informants from three different countries (Sweden, Turkey and US) in combination with ethnographic observation both in informants' homes and during activities chosen by the consumers	Exploring how consumers' experiences of descending in (sociocultural) status throughout their life course (e.g. due to job loss) affects identity construction, this study reveals three different consumption strategies in terms of 1) developing an unclassifiable identity anchoring oneself permanently in a liminal state, 2) hiding and halting identity development in the hope to ascend in status again and 3) straightforward reconstruction of past selves due to grieving a lost identity position (e.g. by mimicking furniture from the past)	Research in Consumer Behaviour
Schreurs et al. (2012)	In-depth interviews with 15 informants who had experienced an income reduction of at least 25% with all but one informant having started to live with less financial resources at least 5 years prior to the study	Inquiring about Dutch consumers' experiences and practices following an involuntary (e.g. due to dismissal, debt, illness) and voluntary (e.g. downshifting) phase of "living with less" economic capital this study proposes a holistic "Transformation Model" that, independent of voluntary or involuntary downshifting, emphasises the transformation process as being a primarily positive experience in that it contributes to self-growth, gratitude for possessions and immaterial assets such as health or social relations	Qualitative Market Research

Author (Year)	Method	Vertical Transition Topic & Identity Issues/Transformation	Journal
Barrios et al. (2012)	Retrospective biographical narratives obtained through long interviews with 15 homeless informants coupled with an ethnographical study in the context of volunteering for a charity that supports homeless individuals	Through exploring UK consumers' first-time experiences of homelessness, this study attempts to understand transitions into a restrictive consumption context that is characterised by uncertainty and loss of possessions triggering different (mal)adaptive consumption strategies (e.g. alcohol consumption to cope with trauma and anxieties) as well as reformulations of the self in the wake of adapting to street life forcing individuals simultaneously to reinterpret their past and future envisioned identity narratives (e.g. from being a pre-transition "couch potato" to becoming "a strong-minded person" who envisions living in a new home)	Research in Consumer Behaviour

Author (Year)	Method	Vertical Transition Topic & Identity Issues/Transformation	Journal
Saatcioglu & Ozanne (2013)	Over a period of 18 months 40 in-depth formal interviews with US mobile home residents were conducted coupled with informal observations of the trailer park community	Explores how consumption practices of working-class consumers are shaped by different moral identities. This study advances understandings of the fluidity of identity construction in light of either upward or downward mobility within the micro-context of a mobile home community in that, for example, those who are on an upward life trajectory from a troubled past (e.g. poverty) leverage their consumerism and refurbished trailers in the park as symbolic markers of achieving the good life through hard work, at the same time distancing themselves from their past lives and others in the park who resemble their former lifestyle of destruction. By contrast, those who have experienced a decline from a lower middle-class life to an economically insecure life in the trailer park try to preserve their past conceptions of the self by imagining a future in fixed-site homes and viewing their trailer park stay as a layover.	JCR

Author (Year)	Method	Vertical Transition Topic & Identity Issues/Transformation	Journal
Caldwell & Henry (2017)	21 face-to-face in-depth interviews with divorced women from a Western context.	Explores the impact of a traumatic event, such as marital break-up and associated downward mobility upon coping strategies and self-change. In order to re-gain control of disrupted identities brought about by the divorce and loss of social status, these consumers agentically engage in restorative (trying to recover what was lost before marital break-up) and transformative (expanding far beyond what was before pre-divorce) consumption practices.	Psychology and Marketing

Author (Year)	Method	Vertical Transition Topic & Identity Issues/Transformation	Journal
Thompson et al. (2018)	In-depth interviews with a total of 33 Australian women in the aftermath of a divorce and downward mobility supplemented with in-home observations of participants' current living conditions within less affluent socio-cultural spaces compared to pre-divorce life circumstances	Introducing the concept of reactive reflexivity into culturally-laden consumer research, this study finds that downwardly mobile consumers refuse to give up identity projects embedded in (upper-) middle-class domesticity and related accustomed lifestyles from pre-divorce lives by drawing upon possessions as material reminders of pre-divorce lives. Further, they deploy discordant performances of taste (e.g. refusing to buy at cheaper retail outlets, and instead saving money to buy more expensive furniture) in order to avoid being marked by tastes for necessity posed by their materially impoverished circumstances and to maintain a fit with their former pre-divorce consuming selves.	JCR

Challenging Underpinning Assumptions

Within research forming part of horizontal (identity) transitions, main emphasis has been put on studying one particular life event and resultant identity-based consumption alterations (e.g. when becoming an empty nester; Hogg et al., 2004). Equally, when looking more closely at the second categorisation in terms of vertical status transitions and concomitant identity fluidities, consumers' studied life trajectories are mainly downwards and remain static (e.g. when transitioning into states of relative or absolute forms of poverty; Hamilton and Catterall, 2006a; Ulver-Sneistrup and Ostberg, 2011; Barrios et al., 2012; Thompson et al., 2018). Saatcioglu and Ozanne's (2013) research on the unfixedness of identity construction in the context of trailer park residents' volatile life trajectories represents an exception, however. These researchers also consider those who have experienced upward social mobility and concomitant identity transformations, which are reflected in altered modes of consumption and social distinction (Bourdieu, 1984). Nonetheless, upward and downward social mobility is only charted in a binary either-or manner restricted to a narrowly defined group of working-class consumers (e.g. the "reluctant emigrants" who have suffered from a decline in social status or the "nesters" who have experienced an improvement from a whole past life of deprivation).

Hence, little is still known in consumer research about temporary manifestations of traumatic experiences, such as downward mobility and resulting financial hardship and/or relative income poverty (Wendt, 2011). Here, middle-class consumers' responses to subsequent movements out of first-time experiences of economic deprivation have been neglected. This contextual oversight results in a gap in the

literature on the long-term impacts of consumers' coping and related self-change processes in the wake of forced life transitions.

Following this line of reasoning, Schreurs et al. (2012:199-200) briefly indicate in the last stage ("postlude") of their (in)voluntary downshifting transformational model that: *"[t]he experience of living with less provoked changes that continued even when the financial position improved (...). In this sense, the transformation can be seen as an ongoing process."* Similarly, others who have explored the transformational processes of those facing loss and a threatened identity due to downward mobility and economic constraint have indicated that these unpleasant experiences "had changed them in many ways for the better" (Caldwell and Henry, 2017:769), changed one's perspective (Hamilton and Catterall, 2006a), or triggered a long-lasting "gain of knowledge" (Wendt, 2010:132). Within this context, Baker et al. (2015) acknowledge that individuals going through a phase of vulnerability and trauma may seek personal transformation and lasting change. However, these researchers have called for detailed research exploring how and when a temporary phase of vulnerability creates uplifting and enduring changes. This is echoed by Cherrier and Murray (2007) who have shown that mundane life events, such as changing careers, or watching a (PETA) video on animal cruelty, trigger a long-termed identity transition process towards perceived self-authenticity and self-actualisation. Such an identity change is, then, reflected in leading less materialistic and simpler lifestyles compared to one's pre-event lifestyles. However, similar to Baker et al. (2015), these authors acknowledge that theoretical knowledge of such identity change processes in contexts of consumers facing adversities (e.g. when becoming unemployed) remains largely amiss. Hence, it is not

well understood how consuming identities are sustainably altered following forced life transition, or if there are, in fact, no identity transformations.

Building upon this latter point of potential non-existent self-change processes following adversarial life circumstance, Saatcioglu and Ozanne (2013) mention in passing that one of their downwardly mobile families who had been reluctant to identify with the newly experienced less-well of lifestyle and social sphere successfully made their way out of a phase of deprivation in the trailer park. Here, they briefly summarise the family's new life in a fixed-site home as more secure and comfortable emphasising their regained (consumer) freedom and consumerism. Consequently, consumption responses to transitions out of relative poverty and deprivation may be quite different from each other, thereby requiring more attention by consumer researchers.

One explanation why researchers have shied away from such a consideration of multiple transitions over time is the inherent temporal and longitudinal dimension of identity transformation and (re-)construction (Ourahmoune, 2016). Ulver and Ostberg's (2014) study may be seen as an exception in this regard, since they attempt to consider multiple vertical transitions (upward and downward) and the consequent challenges imposed upon identity construction throughout their informants' life course. Yet, their interpretation of these status movements tends to be highly subjective. For example, they consider one of their informant's childhood memories of recognising that her family is poor relative to their friends' families as a descent in status shaking an already established self-concept of security. Additionally, when Ulver and Ostberg (2014; see also Ulver-Sneistrup and Ostberg, 2011) consider more objectively defined declines of status in terms of informants' households being down

to subsistence level due to job loss or the birth of a child, a subsequent upward movement is blanked out.

My belief that this contextual neglect of multiple, interconnected life events over time and the cumulative and long-term impact upon consumers' identity change processes and construction remain underappreciated has been the main impetus for the current research project. Hence, this study follows the suggestion of Shankar et al. (2001:28) who claim that a "*narrative perspective would ideally be suited to a longitudinal study of consumption behaviour*". Against this background, the weaving of life narratives across time considering important (multiple) "turns in the road" (McAdams and Bowman 2013) may apply to consumers' retrospective accounts of previously experienced forced life transitions. Such a narrative perspective may further illuminate self-construction and consumer behaviours in one's post-event life considering the influence of past difficult life transitions on one's present and future self. In the following section, a more detailed overview of narrative identity work in consumer research will be provided, and how it informs the current research.

The Storied Consumer Self

Authors from various disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, educational research, anthropology and, more recently, consumer behaviour have argued that life stories (coherent narratives) are a basic mode of thought through which people make sense of the world in general and themselves in particular (Bruner, 1986; Belk, 1988; Polkinghorne, 1991; Shankar et al., 2001; Escalas and Bettmann, 2000; Sarbin, 2003; McAdams, 2006; Ourahmoune, 2016). Sarbin (2003:23) goes so far as to suggest "that we live in a story-shaped world; that our lives are guided by a narratory principle",

thereby advocating an ontology (“reality”) of narrative identity construction or the storied self. Building upon Sarbin and other narrative theorists, such as Bruner (1986) and Polkinghorne (1991), McAdams (2006), a psychologist, has turned assumptions of selves plotting themselves in and across time into a life-story model of identity. His model states that life stories do not solely consist of recapitulations of past events and episodes, yet that “*adult identity is an evolving and implicit narrative of the self that reconstructs the past and anticipates the future in such a way as to confer on the chaos of (post) modern life a modicum of direction, vitality, and followability*” (McAdams and Bowman, 2013:454).

According to this definition a narrative consists of retrospective meaning-making. This meaning-making involves the proactive and creative shaping and ordering of past experience into a meaningful whole in order to see the consequences of actions and separate events over time, thereby giving meaning to lives in the past, present and anticipated future (Polkinghorne, 1991).

To further illustrate such a conception of time organisation, also known as ‘causal coherence’ (Habermas and Bluck, 2000) or retro-causality (Rojas-Gaviria and Bluemelhuber, 2010) in life narratives where one event caused, led up to, transformed or was/is to some extent meaningful to other events in one’s life, McAdams (2011) provides a fictive example: An adolescent girl may explain why she disagrees with her parent’s liberal political values or why she feels shy around boys in terms of personal experiences from the past that she has selected and reconstructed to render her personal narrative coherent. Moreover, the girl will likely share her account with others and monitor the feedback she receives in order to assess if her attempt at constructing a coherent narrative identity has been successful. This latter notion is supported by

Goffman (1959) who claims that people do not talk to give information, yet give shows and present dramas to an audience, which does not suggest that presented identities lack from authenticity, yet are situated and accomplished with an audience in mind. Thus, the response of the audience is embedded in the art of narrative (Bauman, 1986). As such, then, any person's particular narrative identity is a co-authored, psychosocial construction in which significant others (e.g. loved ones, teachers, antagonists), communities and even events affecting a nation (e.g. 9/11, Adler and Poulin, 2009) are incorporated into a person's self-identity (McAdams, 2006).

Within CCT-informed research, this notion of formulating a desire for coherent psychosocial identity narratives (through integrating meaningful consumption activities into the self) within the context of fragmented postmodern societies has been largely corroborated (Belk, 1988; Thompson and Hirschman, 1995; Escalas and Bettman, 2000; Murray, 2002; Ahuvia, 2005; Schau et al., 2009; Shankar et al., 2009; Rojas-Gaviria and Bluemelhuber, 2010; Ourahmoune, 2016). Accordingly, Ahuvia (2005) reveals how consumers use their loved objects and activities to forge a coherent self-narrative in the face of identity conflicts triggered by the multitude of different possible identities available to them in postmodernity (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). This researcher finds that one's meaningful possessions and consumption activities deployed in daily life serve as mementos of key events or relationships in the life narrative, helping to reconcile these identity conflicts.

In Schau et al's (2009) study on identity-related consumption of older people having entered retirement, these authors more explicitly consider that identity is a "dynamic tapestry" by working through past, present and future life projects simultaneously in the wake of a key life transition, such as becoming a pensioner. To further exemplify

this, they show how one of their informant's donation to a high school's gymnasium reflects mature consumers' complex consumption inspirations and enactments crossing time orientations. For example, these researchers suggest that their informant's donation compensates for unequal sports opportunities for females experienced in the past, letting their family know that they care for them in the present, and improve the chances for young females who want to become athletes in the future. Moreover, with this individual case, Schau et al. (2009) reinforce how individual life stories may expand the protagonist from an *"I"* to a *We*". This is in consonance with the earlier mentioned notion of developing personal stories of a particular life, which cannot be isolated from the social sphere (Smith and Sparkes, 2008). Most importantly, yet, this study further accentuates that people constantly re-write and revise their personal narratives, thereby echoing Polkinghorne (1991:145) who claims that achieving narrative coherence of events and actions in one's life story is not a "once-and-for-all-feat". By contrast, achieving a coherent identity narrative is an ongoing and evolving task open to constant re-configuration (Ricoeur, 1985), especially in the wake of major shifts in people's assumptive worlds associated with key life transitions, such as graduation, marriage, parenthood, divorce, social mobility or retirement (Rojas- Gaviria and Bluemelhuber, 2010; McAdams and Bowman, 2013). Hence, in their study, Schau et al. (2009) showcase that aging is not about the inevitable end, yet rather about the evolving self. Here, (older) consumers reconstruct their past and anticipate the future in order to provide their lives with unity, purpose and meaning often including (newly acquired, revised or revived) aspects of consumption.

Narratives of Growth and Decline

Drawing upon aforementioned narrative theories and studies, other culturally-oriented consumption theoreticians (Shankar et al., 2009; Rojas-Gaviria and Bluemelhuber, 2010; Ourahmoune, 2016) have further advanced such an understanding of how Western consumers build dynamic identity narratives over time. In this sense, it has been shown how those stories which come to comprise people's very identities change and function – socially and culturally – as the storyteller journeys across life (McAdams, 2011).

Ourahmoune (2016) suggests that through the repeat experience of travel to a Caribbean tourist location (Punta Cana) as a package tourist, taking into account personal turning points interwoven with their travels (e.g. getting married to a local, quitting one's job at home), consumers experiment with several types of identity transformation and consumption (alterations) across time. This is so as past events and actions are re-construed differently from each other to cobble together coherent identity narratives. More precise, this research exemplifies how the same object of consumption – the travel package – is reconfigured differently across time triggering different forms of consumption that match current consumers' "plots", or narrative structures (Ricoeur, 1985; Escalas and Bettman, 2000; Shankar et al., 2001). Here, narrative structures of two of the study's informants' identities differ in so far as they retrospectively unfold from positive to negative and vice versa. For example, regarding the former plot (from positive to negative life scene), one of the cases presented in this study perceived the tourist location, initially, as a positive life scene ("dream vacation") that has, yet, been turned into something negative due to social disapproval from friends at home leading to an identity crisis. As a consequence, the travel

experience was stopped (and with it also many consumption practices that were undertaken at home in relation to the tourist destination) in order to get her old life back. Yet, the current restored self is still negatively influenced by viewing the former positive Caribbean experience as an “addiction” (Ourahmoune, 2016:6). By contrast, a different case from this author’s study makes salient a narrative identity plot (structure) progressing from bad to good where the travel experience is viewed as a movement of enduring transcendence of the self (e.g. by leaving behind an unsatisfactory and difficult life in one’s home country to happily settle in the tourist destination adopting a local lifestyle).

These differing identity narratives that adopt contrasting plots (narrative structures) partially corroborate with Frye (1957) who identified four core mythic plots that people use to make sense of their identity in fabled forms, such as comedy, romance, tragedy, and satire. As such, romantic plots consist of a series of episodes in one’s story in which the narrator experiences challenges or threats and through a series of struggles emerges victorious (Gergen and Gergen, 1988). By contrast, tragedy informed narrative structures are failures in achieving a given point or goal state (Gergen and Gergen, 1988), where the protagonist is doomed by fatal flaw with internal battles and self-confrontation leading to an ambiguous end (Stern, 1995). Equally, Frank (2013) in an illness narrative genre studying patients who suffer from “deep illness” (drawing also upon his own illness experience) has led him to propose a three-fold narrative typology that partially resembles the aforementioned plotlines. In this sense, he refers to quest, restitution and chaos narrative genres. Within quest narratives stories are organised thematically around an individual’s sense of having achieved a new self, which is based upon one’s own illness experience. Further, one

has the belief of having undergone a learning process, which might benefit others in similar situations in the future. The tales of restitution are similar in that they are infused with viewing illness as an aberrancy in their normal lives, yet contrary to quest narratives, this typology (of illness experience) projects a future where one returns to being the same she or he was before the illness event. Through such a mode of emplotment (Mishler, 1995) people intend to erase an unpleasant episode from one's life. Chaos narratives, by contrast, are types of counter-narratives (Frank, 2013). These stories lack a clear plot and are characterised by uncertainty and confusion where narrative coherence may not be achieved due to not being able to fully understand what happened (Frank, 2013) resembling narratives of regression (Gergen and Gergen, 1988) and tragedy (Frye, 1957).

Although not explicitly drawing upon aforementioned plots of tragedy and romance, regression and progression, quest and chaos, these narrative structures can be equally found in McAdams' (2006) redemption and contamination taxonomic system. In redemption, the protagonist's life story progresses from a bad, or difficult life scene, often following adverse life events, to a good and triumphant one. These stories of redemption trigger a process of growth, fulfilment and self-authenticity amongst other things. Hence, self-transformation in terms of redemption helps to move one's identity narrative forward and is appreciated as such. By contrast, narratives of contamination encode the reverse movement from an emotionally positive, or good experience, to an emotionally negative, or bad outcome. Here, the bad ruins, spoils, sullies, or contaminates the good that precedes it. Further, contamination sequences may be expressions of decline or stagnation in one's plot, since the storytellers fall backward, lose ground, or circle over the same ground again and again (e.g. when a man goes

into tailspin whenever he feels that he is not getting the respect he deserves from others, which is owed to the fact that it has always been like this since his little brother ridiculed him for being a bad athlete, way back in school; McAdams, 2006; McAdams and Bowman, 2013).

Although, Ourahmoune (2016) in her consumer study briefly acknowledges these plots, which she has also referred to as stasis or progression, no other study in CCT, as far as I am concerned, has used the concepts of redemption and contamination to explore (disrupted) consuming identity narratives. Hence, against the background of this study, it is worthwhile to consider these story forms as a metaphorical and theoretical template (Arnould et al., 2006). By gleaning insights into how such plots are appropriated into life narratives of those having faced forced life transitions and identity threats in the past, longer-termed self-change processes may be traced and explained in contexts other than mundane life events (Cherrier and Murray, 2007; Ourahmoune, 2016).

What the findings of Ourahmoune's study (2016) and Schau et al. (2009) before her further imply, then, is that through such an emphasis on the importance of temporality in studying individual consumer identities and being able to revise one's personal life narratives through adopting differing plots (Stern, 1995; McAdams, 2006; Frank, 2013) certain limitations and difficulties when focusing upon situational consumption may be overcome. For example, when adopting a temporary Punk self during adolescence that resists an upper-class socialisation, this identity may not last a consumer's lifetime (Shankar et al., 2009). Following this logic, earlier suggested weaknesses of a "betwixt and between" perspective as well as "past-future, before-after" reasonings prevalent in rites of passage and liminality theorisations (van

Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1974; Rojas-Gaviria and Bluemelhuber, 2010) in terms of grasping consumers' cross-sectional self-assemblages may equally be tackled. More precise, within rites of passage adaptations of exploring consumers' transitional pathways and identity fluidities, these theories require consumers to pass through a liminal phase between two existential planes (Schouten, 1991; Fisher and Grainer, 1993; Noble and Walker, 1997; Hogg et al., 2004; Voice Group, 2010; Cody and Lawlor, 2011), eventually, striving to abandon the past in order to become a new self. An example, of this process would be a drug-addicted person entering a rehabilitation facility who emerges 28 days later in a clean and sober state (Hirschman et al., 2012). By contrast, narrative reasoning of identity (transformations) deal continuously with the past without ever abandoning it entirely (Schau et al., 2009; Rojas-Gaviria and Bluemelhuber, 2010). In this sense, the individual that is telling her/his story with the aim to construct a coherent identity narrative, is not only talking about the past, yet deciding what to make of it at the moment of the narrative (Bruner, 2004). For example, the above-mentioned drug addict having become sober may now be subject to re-story their life in terms of detailing the years of addiction as comprising a painful but necessary course of development. Hence, a progressive narrative identity infused with the rhetoric of a redemption plot is constructed. In this sense, a reconstructed past is built into their current identity as a drug-free person envisaging a future to continue to stay sober (McAdams, 2006).

Prima facie, this difference may appear to be somewhat trivial and tautological. However, the rationale of this research study is to extend snapshot-like (one-point-in-time) theoretical explorations of those who have experienced a forced life transition (Hamilton and Catterall, 2006a; Wendt, 2011; Barrios et al., 2012; Saatcioglu and

Ozanne, 2013; Caldwell and Henry, 2017; Thompson et al., 2018). These studies fail to capture more nuanced, holistic and long-termed identity change processes as their (coping-induced) consumption may also only be of temporary nature and is varied (Stephan, Hamilton and Jafari, 2018). Thus, the creative weaving of life narratives across time considering the cumulative impact of multiple and interwoven turning points (McAdams and Bowman, 2013) upon identity construction, may also apply to consumers' retrospective plots of overcoming traumatic experiences. Certain material losses associated with forced transition contexts (e.g. loss of employment) may be experienced as either a tragedy or as an epiphany, depending on whether or not they are storied within frameworks of self-change (Cherrier and Murray, 2007), and illustrating redemption or contamination plots (McAdams, 2006).

With further reference to such plots of redemption and contamination (McAdams, 2006) informing people's narrative identities, it has been argued that these stories are not just about individuals themselves or significant others. By contrast, they are also the stories of the culture within which their lives are deeply enmeshed. Following this logic, theorists (Polkinghorne, 1991; Riessman, 1993; Frank, 2013) have drawn attention to existing cultural narratives, metanarratives, or master narratives (Somers, 1994; Hammack, 2009). Such overarching cultural narratives are contemporary dramas that are based in myth, fables, literature, popular entertainment, metaphors or images that are especially resonant in a given culture and in which humans are embedded in as actors. In this sense, narrative identity does not solely draw upon the imagination and integration to shape selected facts into a good story. Narrative identity is equally empowered or constrained by certain cultural realities in play. *"Each culture provides a panoply of stories about how to live, and people pick and appropriate those*

stories that seem to work best for them, ignoring and resisting many others”
(McAdams, 2006: 290-291).

In the following section, these person-culture co-constitutions in regards to (consumers’) narrative identity construction will be further highlighted. Here, especially, identity narratives of contamination and redemption as a reflection of cultural histories, and current socio-cultural circumstances will be discussed. Further, the question as to how culturally informed narratives increase sensitivities to the social and symbolic systems in consumer culture shaping lifestyle-relevant choices (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) will be weaved into the following discussion of relevant literature.

Growth and Decline Narratives as Cultural Phenomena

Narratives of contamination, tragedy or chaos, which regress and decline from a positive life scene to an emotionally bad outcome, often following turning point moments in life, have been considered as ancient story forms or cultural myths (Frye, 1957; Stern, 1995; Gergen and Gergen, 1988; McAdams and Bowman, 2013; Frank, 2013). These culturally-bound story types are appropriated into contemporary life narratives reflecting certain fears and a psychosocial ethos in life that may often be fatalistic (Gergen and Gergen, 1988; Stern, 1995; McAdams, 2006). For example, McAdams and Bowman (2013:695) refer to Greek mythology, drama and biblical texts in a Western context (e.g. Adam and Eve expelled from garden of Eden), which are replete with stories of good things turning “suddenly and irrevocably bad, typically because of the whims of fate (and the gods) or the hubris of protagonists”. These authors refer to mythic sequences of “falling from grace”, which is a modern

expression in the English language that captures well the meaning of contamination narratives (McAdams, 2006). As such, people may construct narrative identities that had a good, or neutral life to be followed by steep falls (Tomkins, 1987; McAdams and Bowman, 2013). People who see the past as an evolution of good into bad may be less optimistic about the present and the future, often resulting in stagnated or fixed storylines (Tomkins, 1987). Still, such a declining story type may provide individuals with a tool to make sense of and provide some degree of meaning to their lives, albeit infused with a negative rhetoric. In this sense, meaning-making occurs through re-constructing past (unpleasant) turning point moments into tragic and negative life episodes that may overshadow one's present and future self (McAdams, 2006). In a similar vein, Tomkins (1987) writes that the protagonist in a story adopting a nuclear (contamination) script may seek to undo certain damages and re-experience early states of goodness, but such efforts are at best half-successes, thwarting possibilities for positive development and resulting in decreased wellbeing, or depression (McAdams and Bowman, 2013).

According to Stern (1995:176) these tragic identity narratives may also be found in modern stories depicting middle-class anti-heroes who are doomed by their own imperfections and those of society, both always "on the edge of disruption, chaos, and failure". Notable examples are Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* or British kitchen-sink realism (Stern, 1995). Within the realm of consumer narratives, Stern (1995) was also one of the first theorists considering tragic plots (referring to myths in her study), amongst others, and how these are appropriated by individuals to interpret Thanksgiving as a consumption event (e.g. three women complaining about labour-intensive and thankless preparatory housework preceding the event without hope for a

change to the better in the future). Equally, concerning studies on downwardly mobile consumers, their coping strategies have occasionally been portrayed as regressive in terms of grieving a pre-lifestyle displacement “good life” (Ulver-Sneistrup and Ostberg, 2011; Thompson et al., 2018). This longing for a brighter past may lead to mental suffering and turning inwards by distancing oneself from social networks due to a diminished self and engaging in private consumption practices (Roberts, 1991). The adoption of a fatalistic narrative with no prospect for substantial betterment of circumstances in the future has also been considered by Saatcioglu and Ozanne (2013). Their Bourdieusian-inspired analysis of how volatile life trajectories (either downward or upward) may transform the consumer habitus over time, has conceptual affinities with contamination narrative scripts. As such, one consumer typology these authors identify is that of the “Outcasts”. Coming from a past primary socialisation that respects hard work and discipline, these individuals’ gradual social descent over time provoked an indifferent attitude toward themselves, others in the trailer park and society in general. As a consequence, they engage in self-destructive behaviours, which, in turn, reflect their consumption practices (e.g. adopting a hedonistic lifestyle including drug abuse and viewing their homes as a spot for partying; Saatcioglu and Ozanne, 2013).

Although these highlighted contamination narrative plotlines often result in stagnation and potential self-preoccupation (McAdams, 2006), there is equally a culture-bound belief in the progressive nature of the self after disruption. Following this train of thought, the two crucial themes, amongst others, that run through such narratives of redemption is that both bad life scenes transform or are redeemed into good outcomes and prosocial goals are pursued in the hope to benefit society in the future (McAdams,

2011). Regarding the former theme, it has been suggested that when suffering from major setbacks in life challenging one's assumptive world, people frequently find silver linings, often retrospectively, in these major turning points (McAdams and Bowman, 2013; McAdams and Jones, 2017). For example, in McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin and Mansfield (1997) one of the interviewees, Diana, describes the fatal accident of her younger brother when she was nine years old as a low point in her life. However, in ending her account of this negative incident, Diana constructs several redemption sequences (e.g. that her college education was financed by the insurance money coming from her brother's death or when marrying her high-school sweetheart, he came to be treated by her father as the son he had lost years ago). Similarly, a victim of a violent crime, for instance, may have to abandon the past belief that the world is entirely good. However, when re-narrating the story with a focus upon the people who came to her or his aid, such a redemptive spin may result in a new faith in the power of human beings to support, care for, and heal one another. This slight, yet powerful narrative re-construction of a bad, contaminated event into a sequence of redemption, in turn, may set free the decision to assist other crime victims in the future, which resonates with the latter highlighted major theme surrounding redemption stories in terms of forging prosocial goals for the future (McAdams and Jones, 2017). The take-home message, here, is that stories of redemption are stories associated with meaning-making, personal growth and changes in philosophy of life through adversity. They thereby also confer a moral legitimacy to the stories people tell about their identities (McAdams, 2011).

Such a relationship between suffering and benefit, stasis and progression, ignorance and consequent enlightenment, self-actualisation, growing and flourishing in a

dangerous and complicated world (McAdams, 2006) is equally highlighted in other empirical and theoretical humanistic socio-psychological studies on trauma. Noteworthy semantic variations of redemptive selves' conceptual cousins are Post-Traumatic Growth (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004), transformational coping (Aldwin, 2007), flourishing (Ryff and Singer, 1998), resilience (Bonanno, 2004), or thriving in response to challenge (O'Leary and Ickovics, 1995) to name but a few. Similarly, aforementioned sociological research on illness as drivers for self-change (Frank, 2013) bears resemblances to narratives of redemption. Likewise, from a broader sociology perspective, the "therapeutic turn" in Western societies features sequences of redemption as postulated by McAdams (2006). More precise, in therapy culture contemporary individuals position themselves within a cultural narrative in which they are able to work on their identities in order to reach self-actualisation and further their well-being and happiness (Illouz, 2007; Hyman, 2015; Gopaladas, 2016; Marcoux, 2017). Furthermore, critical pedagogical studies originating in Latin America on the oppressed (students) setting themselves free from their oppressors (teachers and autocratic educational systems; Freire, 1970), and, more generally, existential philosophy on finding meaning within what German philosopher Karl Jaspers (1919) has been referred to as "Grenzsituationen" ("boundary situations") concerning experiences of suffering, guilt, personal failure, are suffused with the rhetoric of redemption.

Along this line of reasoning, it may be argued that the conception of the redemptive self is not solely or exclusively linked to prototypical characteristics of contemporary American society as often proclaimed (McAdams, 1985, 2006, 2011; McAdams and Bowman, 2013). From a cultural viewpoint, undoubtedly, prominent historical stories

and myths of upward social mobility (e.g. Horatio Alger's rags-to-riches tales), and liberation (e.g. 19th-century slave narratives about their escape) have provided Americans with socio-historical and contemporary cultural sources informing life stories of redemption (McAdams, 2006). Equally, from more recent times, therapeutic discourses of recovery and self-actualisation (Illouz, 2007) reflected in self-help psychology, 12-step programmes (e.g. practiced by Anonymous Alcoholics), yoga practices, motivational gurus, Hollywood movies, talkshows (e.g. Oprah) or popular literature including politicians' autobiographies (e.g. about the "Comeback Kid" Bill Clinton having overcome childhood poverty and many self-inflicted wounds) are informed by rhetorics of redemption (McAdams, 2006). However, McAdams and Guo (2017) also acknowledge that due to global forces, such as increasing economic interdependency or the Internet, the world has been shrinking at the same time mixing different cultures together. This echoes the line of argumentation often seen in more recent consumer research studies. Here, global consumer culture and liquid modernity have propelled the spread of different cultural resources across the globe creating cross-cultural hybrids of consuming identities in the 21st century (Price, Coulter, Strizhakova and Schultz, 2017; Bhardi and Eckhardt, 2019).

Similarly, those earlier highlighted cultural stocks, which Americans may appropriate to make sense of and evaluate a "good life" in terms of redemptive sequences integrated into their narrative identities, may also be found somewhere in the menu of stories from other cultures (May, 1991), and are considered to be a staple of all the major world's religions (James, 1958). Regarding the latter, for example, the conversion from a bad and sinful state to a good and Godly one, is illustrated in great variety within Judaeo-Christian traditions (e.g. the Israelites' suffering from Egyptian

confinement and 40 years of wandering until God delivers them to the promised land), Islam (e.g. the word Islam means “surrender” as in surrendering to Allah to be purified and redeemed) as well as Hinduism and Buddhism (McAdams and Bowman, 2013). Equally, it may be argued that the core idea of redemption comprising the notion of deprivation followed by enhancement, is ubiquitous in cultural myth and folklore across the globe (May, 1991). For example, Frank (2013), in the context of his quest illness survivor narratives, repeatedly refers to the Greek myth of the Phoenix bird rising from the ashes of its own body as a metaphor to describe the positive self-transformation people undergo in the wake of living with and overcoming traumatic illness (e.g. changed attitudes towards spirituality, empathy for others’ suffering, friendships and a clearer view of what is important in life). In light of these sets of images, metaphors, fairy tales as well as socio-historically and religiously-informed cultural resources and moral viewpoints that people draw upon when trying to make sense of the moves in their life from negativity and suffering to positivity and enhancement, McAdams (2006) has sketched out six different, yet overlapping languages of redemption.

Borrowing from aforementioned religious sources, often the language of “*atonement*” is adopted. Secondly, the rhetoric of “*emancipation*” may be linked back to freeing oneself from captivity and oppression as often highlighted in slave narratives in an American context (McAdams, 2006), yet which can be equally found in in other contemporary survivor stories, such as Frankl’s (1959) bestselling account of his concentration camp incarceration during the Holocaust. Stories of “*upward mobility*” in which the storyteller has to overcome many obstacles and success may come with a price may be rooted in typical American rags-to-riches stories. However, they can

equally be found in other cultural myths, such as that of the German “Trümmerfrauen” (“ruins women”) who helped clearing and reconstructing German major cities after World War II and have long been seen as a synonym for collective German upward mobility in the years after the war (Treber, 2014). Moreover, the language of “*recovery*” within redemptive narrative identities may be rooted in stories of healing (Frank, 2013) and Western therapeutic discourse having developed into a pervasive cultural trope (Gopaldas, 2016). Similarly, stories of “*enlightenment*” and “*development*” in terms of actualising one’s self to its full potential may be found in education, science and other sources (McAdams, 2006).

Within consumer research, creating such positive meanings in the wake of important turning points in life through the construction of new life stories that affirm growth and redemption, may be seen in those studies presented earlier by Schau et al. (2009) and, more explicitly mentioned in Ourahmoune (2016). More recently, Price et al. (2017) have introduced the “Fresh start mindset” concept into the consumer behaviour academic community. According to these researchers’ definition the fresh start mindset is the “belief that people can make a new start, get a new beginning, and chart a new course in life, regardless of their past or present circumstances” (22). A fresh start mindset results in the “personal confidence in one’s ability to bounce back from life’s difficulties and the belief in the possibility of positive future” (26), also helping others in that quest. Such a “clean-slate” philosophy in life may result in consumption behaviours that focus on choosing new and different products and practices to engage in a new life, often reflected in variety-seeking in terms of taking on unfamiliar brands or reading about new products in order to purchase a new self or change personal circumstances. It may be argued, hence, that this research examining how consumers

actively engage to change their lives may resemble redemptive features as highlighted by McAdams (2006) in terms of overcoming adversity. This may lead, then, to starting as a new person or making positive self-transformations that move them towards a more positive future and progress in life. However, from a temporal perspective, Price et al. (2017) are only future-oriented within their conceptualisation, largely neglecting past experiences in regards to shaping and transforming consumers' identities as propagated by narrative theorists highlighted earlier. This is a shortcoming which these authors equally acknowledge briefly at the end of their study where they claim that: "(...) additional work might examine (...) past experiences (...) in the development of the fresh start mindset and making fresh starts in one' life." (41). This is echoed by Schau et al. (2009) who further acknowledge the role of past selves as an inspiration to build upon when a life narrative is significantly revised. These authors, especially, call for more research on consumers' coping with identity threats and loss due traumatic life events. Here, it should be further explored how consumers draw on the past, the present, and the future to (re-) build their identities, and how consumption may reflect change and/or continuity in their lives.

When referring back to these vulnerable consumer populations, such as those who have experienced social downward mobility (Hamilton and Catterall, 2006a; Wendt, 2011; Hamilton, 2012; Barrios et al., 2012; Saatcioglu and Ozanne, 2013), or have to involuntarily live with less financial resources (Schreurs et al., 2012), and suffer from persistent forms of income poverty (Hill, 1991; Hutton, 2016) often consumers' positive adaptations to adversity and forced consumer constraint are highlighted in the literature. Here, it has been demonstrated how consumers may exhibit empowerment and agency, self-care practices, relational coping (e.g. through open discussion of the

strained financial situation with other family members) as well as finding (positive) meaning within the adversarial circumstances, thereby echoing the redemptive linguistic system (McAdams, 2006). Regarding the latter, for example, Hutton's study (2016) examines how low-income female consumers strive to reframe their relationship to the market in a positive and empowering way through resilience, that is the ability to bounce back from life adversities (Bonanno, 2004). Here, one interview participant started to volunteer in the local independent advice centre while being in poverty. As interpreted by this researcher (Hutton, 2016) such an engagement in volunteering and advocacy helped this participant to regain a sense of empowerment through helping others as well as developing financial skills that proved useful in dealing with her own financial deprivation and mounting debt.

Furthermore, as stressed previously, indications on re-formulations of the self in terms of exhibiting personal growth and changed consumption are given (Hamilton and Catterall, 2006a; Wendt, 2011; Schreurs et al., 2012; Saatcioglu and Ozanne, 2013; Caldwell and Henry, 2017). However, these studies cannot convincingly chart "why" such revised self-concepts become manifest and "how" they develop over time (Stephan et al., 2018). As such, it is not well understood if such forms of positive meaning-making and self-alterations in the wake of adversarial circumstances are only situational coping strategies or enduring self-changes (Tennen and Affleck, 2002; Shankar et al., 2009; Ourahmoune, 2016; Stephan et al., 2018). Narrative identity construction using redemption/contamination cultural plots in terms of drawing on past identities to create present and future selves serves as an enabling theory in this research. In this sense, the storied consumer self helps to explore and trace consumers' coping and potential self-change processes following difficult life transitions.

The empirical context of this study's research, which will be presented in the next chapter, in terms of taking into account dynamic types of poverty serves the purpose of exploring this oversight well. Within dynamic or biographic types of poverty, people are able to overcome temporary income constraints and pursue a subsequent upward life trajectory.

Chapter Summary & Gaps in the Literature

This study is positioned within CCTs consumer identity projects stream of research. Research on consumer identity stresses that the marketplace provides mythic and symbolic resources that consumers use to construct personal or collective narratives of identity (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Arnould et al., 2019). Within this process, the review of the literature has shown that consumers continually transform these consuming identities (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) due to role transitions and/or mundane life events (e.g. when ageing, or travelling to a tourist destination; Schau et al., 2009; Ourahmoune, 2016). Apart from these defined and naturally occurring horizontal life transitions, involuntary status transitions (vertical transitions; Ulver and Ostberg, 2014) due to forced life events (Barrios et al., 2012) may lead to protecting, re-storing, or changing one's threatened pre-crisis identity in the service of coping with an unpleasant and traumatic life event, such as downward mobility (Newman, 1998; Wendt, 2011; Ulver-Sneistrup and Ostberg, 2011; Caldwell and Henry, 2017; Thompson et al., 2018).

Looking at the literature on horizontal identity transitions, it has been acknowledged that (narrative) identity work of consumers is long-termed, continuous, and processual following mundane and ordinary life events (Schau et al., 2009; Cherrier and Murray,

2007; Ourahmoune, 2016; Castilhos and Fonseca, 2016). However, when taking a closer look upon vertical transitions and related identity issues, longer-termed processual theories of identity construction are conspicuously absent from consumer research. Emphasis has only been put on snap-shot portrayals of consumers' coping strategies. This theoretical void identified is grounded in an equally important contextual oversight in terms of having considered only one (critical) life event at a time in regards to status transitions (e.g. downward mobility). Hence, it is not well understood how certain adaptive strategies used following a personal crisis event, impact upon long-term identity (re)-construction (Baker et al., 2015; Stephan et al., 2018). Are (emotional) coping strategies associated with having achieved self-growth (Hamilton and Catterall, 2006a; Caldwell and Henry, 2017), or grieving the former good life and adopting self-restoring coping strategies (Thompson et al., 2018), only situational? Or do they form part of a longer-termed and enduring self-transformation process?

One way to approach this latter mentioned theoretical oversight is to consider the long-term effects of traumatic life transitions (e.g. downward mobility) after having overcome such a difficult phase in one's life (e.g. considering a subsequent upward life trajectory). The cumulative impact of multiple transitions over time (such as a crisis event and successfully mastering it) shedding light upon disrupted identity reconstruction may be achieved through narrative sense-making (Shankar et al., 2001; McAdams, 2006). Here, the role of past selves, which is an equally understudied topic within consumer research on threatened identities (Schau et al., 2009), may play a crucial part in understanding longer-termed identity construction. How do post-

traumatised consumers draw upon past identities, and or reject others in their attempt to make narrative sense of a (former) forced, and unpleasant life event?

Especially, the culturally-informed personal storylines of redemption (from bad to positive life scene) and contamination (from good to bad life scene) structuring people's identity narratives may assist in illuminating these long-term identity change processes, and the role of past selves in the aftermath of a difficult live event. To my best knowledge, so far only one study (Ourahmoune, 2016) has considered these person-culture co-constituted plots of redemption and contamination within consumers' narrative identities in the context of a mundane life event (repeat travel to a tourist destination). This restriction presents another theoretical gap that this research intends to redress. Hence, narratives of redemption and contamination may equally be used as an enabling theoretical template (Arnould et al., 2006) to trace disrupted identity narratives following traumatic (consumer) experiences.

Chapter Three: Dynamic Poverty in Germany

In this section, the empirical context of the study will be presented, that is dynamic poverty in a German context. As outlined in the previous chapter, there is a contextual oversight when studying consumers' vertical (status) transformations and concomitant identity issues. As such, only downward movements in social status have been considered thus far in consumer research undermining a complete and longer-termed picture of consumers' self-change processes. The German dynamic poverty context where people slip into poverty (downward social mobility; Betzelt and Bode, 2018), yet manage to come out of it after some time supports this overlooked topic in consumer research by equally viewing a forced life transition (into poverty) not as a "still", yet as a dynamic and temporary life scene forming part of the whole life course movie (Leisering and Buhr, 2012).

Undoubtedly, Germany is one of the most economically successful countries and affluent societies in the European Union. According to the "OECD Better Life Index", Germany ranks amongst the top-tier group of nations in regards to wellbeing determinants such as housing, income, education, environment or health (OECD, 2019). Today's high standard of living could not have been achieved without West Germany's post-World War II "economic miracle" ("*Wirtschaftswunder*") of the 1950s and subsequent decades of growth, which resulted in augmentations of disposable income levels and capital (Groh-Samberg, 2010). The simultaneous expansion of the social welfare system comprising generous income transfers (Esping-Andersen, 1990) further contributed to a social trickle-down effect (Beck, 1992). As a result, ever broader segments of society have been able to partake in both mass prosperity and consumerism (Beck, 1992; Zapf, 1994; Pintelon, Cantillon, Van den

Bosch and Whelan, 2013). Amenities, such as owning a car, TV, mobile phone or going on holiday, can nowadays be afforded by a vast majority of the population and are claimed as an expected right by many people (Butterwege, 2009). This “explosion of prosperity” (Geißler, 1992:38) and its inherent achievements regarding quality of life of society as a whole, however, has been considered to be particularly problematic for those facing difficulties to make ends meet. An exclusion from the ubiquitous material abundance and normal customs of society due to an enforced lack of economic resources may have severe consequences for the wellbeing of those affected by it (Townsend, 1979; Hamilton, 2009a). Following this reasoning, at least with the advent of rising Western German unemployment rates in the 1970s, and again after German reunification in 1990, a reawakened interest in “social inequality”, “stigmatisation”, “social polarisation”, “exclusion”, (relative) “poverty” and “deprivation” in re-unified Germany has been recorded (Leisering and Leibfried, 1999; Butterwege, 2009). Social scientists and media commentators began to caution the emergence of a “two-thirds society” (“*Zweidrittelgesellschaft*”) in which the majority of the population enjoyed the benefits of affluence, while one third were permanently locked into states of poverty (Natter and Riedelsperger, 1988). Mass unemployment, predominantly seen to be suffered by working class, immigrant and single-parent families, in conjunction with a social security system that had been stretched to its limits in the course of the social and political transformation of the 1990s further substantiated perceptions of the formation of a new social underclass” that were not able to enjoy the benefits of their better-off counterparts (Dahrendorf, 1984; Butterwege, 2009). The dominating assumption in both public discourse and social science research by the mid-nineties was that “(...) *most poor people are sunk*

in a vicious circle of hopeless poverty for very long periods” (Leisering and Leibfried, 1999:8).

In opposition to this static/structural perspective on social mobility and poverty stands the “less dramatic” dynamic/biographical school of thought (Duncan, 1984; Bane and Elwood, 1986; Leisering and Leibfried, 1999; DiPrete and McManus, 2000), which has evolved in united Germany over the last 25 years. This approach has illustrated that poverty is, in many cases, not more than an episode in the course of life and can be actively overcome by most of those afflicted by it (Fehr and Vobruba, 2011; Leisering and Buhr, 2012). Individual life trajectories and lifestyle are considered as equally important as stratification determinants, such as social class, occupation, gender, ethnicity or education in predicting poverty entries and exits (Vandecasteele, 2011).

To make further sense of the multitudinous and contested viewpoints on poverty in a wealthy nation, such as Germany, in the following section of this chapter, conceptualisations of the poverty construct will be briefly reviewed. In addition, causes of poverty entries as well as exits are presented by adopting both a macro and micro-social perspective on the latter mentioned phenomenon of transitory income poverty. The chapter will conclude with a brief outline of my understanding of the poverty construct within the scope of this research. Further, specific research questions relating to the literature review, and gaps in the research on transitional consumers are formulated.

Concepts of Poverty

From a contemporary perspective, it has been argued that poverty in developed nations can only be defined relatively in relation to a historically determined, socio-culturally conditioned standard of living and in consideration of the general wealth of a nation's society (Townsend, 1979; Böhnke and Delhey, 1999; Schlichting and Reinbach, 2007). Compared with the absolute approach to poverty, proponents of the “relativist deprivation view” (Sen, 1983:155) focus on a socio-culturally subsistence minimum going beyond starvation and malnutrition (Groh-Samberg, 2010). The most influencing and well-known proponent of the relative approach to poverty is Townsend (1979) who recognises that:

Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the type of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or are at least widely encouraged or approved, in the societies to which they belong. Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities (Townsend, 1979:31)

Summarised as an imbalance in standards of living and exclusion from the normal social fabric of contemporary life due to a lack of resources, Townsend's definition lies at the heart of poverty discourses in the European Union (OECD, International Labour Organisation, European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions – EU-SILC).² Similarly the German government adopts a relative approach in their

² According to a definition by the Commission of the European Communities (henceforth European Union) from 1984 “*The poor shall be taken to mean persons, families and groups of persons where resources (material, cultural and social) are so limited as to exclude them from a minimum acceptable way of life in the Member States in which they live.*” (EEC, 1985)

national report on wealth and poverty in federal Germany (Bundesregierung, 2012:IV). Generally, 60-, 50- or 40 per cent of the median national household income, oftentimes adjusted for household size,³ is chosen as an indicator of the income at which those below are unlikely to be able to fully participate in society. In this context money is assumed to be a “universal medium of inclusion” granting access to various settings of social life (Deutschmann, 2009).

The 2014 “at-risk-of poverty threshold” in Euro/month accounted for €979,75 for a single household and €2057,50 for a four-person household including two adults with two children under the age of 14 (Destatis, 2019a). Currently, approximately 13 million people in Germany are considered being exposed to precarious income conditions (Destatis, 2019b). In addition to these objective relative income poverty measures, a subjective approach to measuring poverty (Mack and Lansley, 1985; Ringen, 1988; Halleröd, 1995; Halleröd, Bradshaw and Holmes, 1997) has surfaced over the last decades. Subjective relative poverty is ultimately grounded in people’s own perception of disadvantage and dissatisfaction, often in relation to a reference group (Runciman, 1966; Muffels and Fouarge, 2004). Here, taking into account that the notion of (non-) wellbeing is intrinsically linked to sentiments of being poor (Kingdon and Knight, 2006) people use a variety of comparisons to subjectively relevant standards, that is their desired state of well-being, the level of well-being they experienced earlier in their lives, and the well-being of relevant peers (Diener 1984). Relative subjective poverty is, hence, a socio-psychological concept, which shapes

³ The Organisation for Economic Development (OECD) modified equivalence scale gives a weight of one to the first adult (aged 14), then 0.5 to any other adults and a weight of 0.3 for each child in order to reflect differences in household size and composition (Groh-Samberg, 2010). The equivalent size of a household that consists of 2 adults and 2 children below the age of 14 is therefore: $1.0 + 0.5 + (2 \cdot 0.3) = 2.1$. The total household income is then divided by its equivalent size.

emotions, cognitions and behaviours of individuals or groups by linking them with interpersonal and intergroup levels of analysis (Sablonniere, Taylor and Perozzo, 2009).

In this context, a study by Gurr and Jungbauer-Gans (2013) in a German context puts further emphasis on employment status and paid work as a key mode of satisfaction and social integration. According to these authors' view in a society that is characterised by a "deeply meritocratic social structure", like Germany, people who lose their employment status or even fear to lose it may feel relatively poor (Gurr and Jungbauer-Gans, 2013:339). Although from an objective point of view poverty may not be indicated, however, social stigma associated characteristics, such as (anticipated) unemployment and phases of social assistance/unemployment benefit receipt (Anhorn, Bettinger and Stehr, 2007) may lead to feelings of relative poverty, fear, and associated identity strains due to perceptions of being treated with rejection, harshness and dislike by relevant others (Gurr and Jungbauer-Gans, 2013).

Relative Poverty Dynamics – Structure vs. Individualisation

As briefly reviewed above, measuring (subjective) relative income poverty has been restricted to a static, cross-sectional (one point-in-time) view (Butterwege, 2009). The question of duration of poverty, however, constitutes an important contribution to contemporary research on relative income poverty (Groh-Samberg, 2010). This is especially so if resource availabilities and allocation as well as associated living standards in a wider sense may change over time (Bane and Elwood, 1986; Heady, Krause and Habich, 1994; Groh-Samberg, 2010; Vandecasteele, 2010, 2011; Leisering and Buhr, 2012).

Studies on dynamics of poverty have originated from a proliferation of assumptions about the long-term nature of poverty and social inequality. Here, debates about a “culture of poverty” and the existence or non-existence of an “underclass” (Dahrendorf, 1984) have revolved around particular fixed groups with perceived long-lasting “poverty careers” (Leisering and Leibfried, 1999). Following this logic, Leisering and Buhr (2012:147) acknowledge that: *“when people talk about poverty, they generally have in mind (...) the homeless, welfare mothers, the unemployed or pensioners, or they think of deprived areas or even a whole underclass in society”*.

According to Layte and Whelan (2002), these views are often grounded in perspectives of the structuring effects of social stratification on social inequality and exclusion. Social stratification determinants such as age, gender, ethnicity, occupational status or social class are regarded as the cardinal structuring principles of society in this research stream. In this sense, the structural approach to poverty entails a connotation of persistency in the form of hierarchical inequality structures, in which poverty is equally distributed amongst specific social classes (Layte and Whelan, 2002).

Several researchers have critiqued this homogenous, structural view of poverty, which is based on a static and “dramatised” way of looking at things (Leisering and Leibfried, 1999). Rather than focusing on “downward spirals of precariousness” or “vicious circles” leading groups into long-term dependency and social exclusion from the mainstream (Paugam 1996), empirical research has tried to show that poverty spells are more short-term and can be actively overcome by most of the people experiencing them. As a consequence, relative income poverty is oftentimes seen to be a phase in one’s life rather than a persistent state (Leisering and Leibfried, 1999). In the same vein, Vandecasteele (2010) drawing on some of the earlier, pioneering dynamic

poverty studies from the United States (Bane and Elwood, 1986), the United Kingdom (Walker, 1994), Germany (Leisering and Leibfried, 1999) and a transnational European context (Di Prete, 2002; Fouarge and Layte, 2005) concludes that poverty 1) has an important temporal dimension occurring in different temporal profiles, i.e. short, medium and long, and in single or repeated spells, 2) is embedded in the life course of a person as a result of “risky life events”, and 3) can affect a larger proportion of the population than previously assumed.

To further exemplify the time-relatedness and embeddedness of poverty in a person’s life trajectory (Leisering and Leibfried, 1999), already Seebohm Rowntree (1902), more than a century ago discovered that working-class people typically were not poor throughout their whole lives but only during certain stages. Rowntree observed in his empirical longitudinal study five alternating life stages of financial deprivation and relative wealth during a labourer’s life in Northern England. As illustrated in Figure 1., workers, thus, experienced periods of economic deprivation in childhood, in early middle life with child rearing responsibilities, and in old age (Rowntree, 1902).

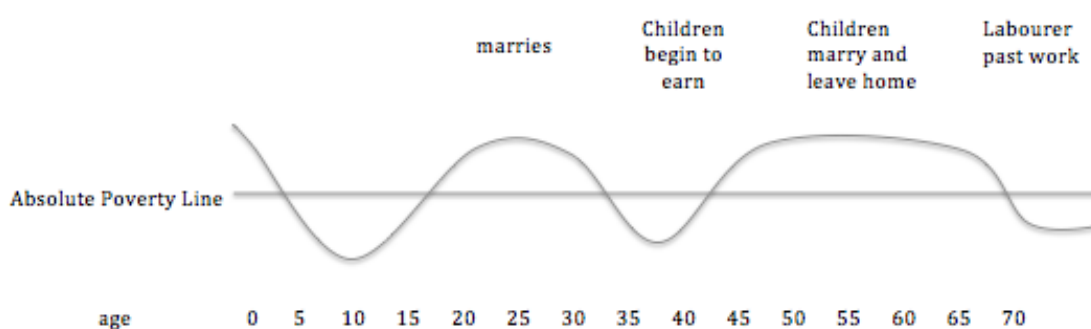


Figure 1. Lifecycle of poverty. Source: Own illustration adapted from Rowntree (1902)

Rowntree (1902) illustrated, that when taking a longitudinal perspective, poverty tends to arise only at certain points/events of the life cycle, thereby confuting misleading static assumptions about the manual working class being viewed as doomed to poverty over their entire lifespan.

With the availability of mature longitudinal panel data, studies on the effects of time on poverty and deprivation have found their way into contemporary poverty research (Duncan, 1984; Bane and Ellwood, 1986). In this regard Seeborn Rowntree's (1902) approach of lifecycle events triggering poverty transitions has been reshaped taking into account contemporary alterations in the social order of Western Europe's societies (Bonoli, 2007). Social change of the last 40 years, as recognised by Layte and Whelan (2002) and more recently Pintelon et al. (2013) is primarily composed of processes of economic restructuring and social policy changes in Western industrialised nations undermining the stability of employment conditions in these societies. Unstable employment careers in terms of an upsurge of flexible employment contracts, job mobility and unemployment experiences (Blossfeld, Mills and Bernardi, 2006) constitute new social risk factors (Leisering and Leibfried, 1999; Pintelon et al., 2013). These new risks often result in reduced economic resources and poverty on an individual level (Bonoli, 2007). Moreover, less stable family lives constitute a further crucial risk. Increased divorce rates and single parenthood (Lewis and Sarre, 2006) have diminished the role of the family as an agent of social integration and socialisation (Layte and Whelan, 2002).

In this sense, De Wilde (2003) points towards the aforementioned transformations in society and recognises that pathways through life have become less predictable and more fluid. This fits well with individualisation theorists, such as Beck and Beck-

Gernsheim (2002), arguing that people increasingly deviate from the standard biography. Moreover, traditional deterministic structural determinants of poverty are losing their impact as life becomes less standardised and more individualised. Concurring with reflexive modernisation theories (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992), similarly Leisering and Leibfried (1999) state that in modern advanced societies increasingly larger sections of the population share in such new risks of society, making them more vulnerable to relative poverty. In line with Berger (1994) both researchers further remark that this “democratisation of risk” (Beck, 1992) has given rise to the “transcending” force of the poverty phenomenon, in which social boundaries are crossed, thereby extending to higher social strata and the middle-class (Leisering and Leibfried, 1999).

Taking the latter mentioned notions of “biographisation”, “temporalisation” and “transcendence” of poverty into account (Leisering and Buhr, 2012), longitudinal empirical studies have shown that poverty is oftentimes only transient in nature. Especially “risky live events” (Vandecsteele, 2010), such as becoming unemployed, entering retirement or young adulthood, periods of sickness and household composition changes in the form of marital dissolution constitute temporary poverty-inducing events, which can be actively overcome by many of those inflicted (Bane and Ellwood, 1986; Jenkins, 1999). Following this reasoning, an empirical study by the International Labor Organisation (Andriopoulou and Tsakloglou, 2011:25), examining entry and exit rates into and out of relative income poverty in Europe, highlights that the probability of exiting spells of poverty in Germany is seen to be relatively high.⁴

⁴ In total 14 European countries for the period 1994-2001 were examined, using the European Community Household Panel (henceforth EU-SILC); The relative poverty threshold was set at 60% of the median household net income in the respective nation

As illustrated in Table III, on the following page, 18.3 per cent of the total population in Germany (D) fell below the relative income poverty threshold only once for at least a year during the period 1994-2001⁵. A different, non-related study by the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW et al., 2007:102) mainly confirms these results. Using data from the German Socioeconomic panel (GSOEP) the researchers show that 19.8% of the total population in Germany had to live with an income below the relative income threshold for at least one year during the period 2003-2006. However, quite often discontinuous/recurrent poverty profiles emerge, taking shapes of fluctuation between stages of poverty and non-poverty. Between 2000 and 2005 almost half of the total relative income poor population (between 16-18% of total population) managed to permanently move above the income poverty line after three years latest, yet the other half escaped only temporarily (DIW et al., 2007:103). The use of longitudinal data shows that movements into and out of poverty are more frequent than had been presumed in static, cross-sectional conceptualisations of poverty, in which the poor are contrasted with the non-poor as if they never change places. Consequently, a far greater proportion of the population experience relative poverty than revealed by one-point-in-time data (Leisering and Buhr, 2012). This shift from “stills” to “life course movies” is further supported by Di Prete (2002) and Fouarge and Layte (2005) summarising that the majority of poverty spells in Europe is short-term with a minority suffering from persistent states of relative poverty.

⁵ The typology of poverty profiles in this study is adapted from Muffels, Fouarge and Dekker (2000). The first profile consists of the “transient poor”, including all people experiencing poverty only once and for only one year during the accounting period. The second profile “mid-term poor” includes those individuals that experience poverty only once but for a period of two years. The “recurrent poor” are defined as those who have been poor more than once but never longer than two consecutive years and finally the “long-term poor” are those who are continuously poor for a period of at least three years (Andriopoulou and Tsakoglou, 2011)

Table III.

Poverty occurrence and persistence (as a percentage of the total population of each country under investigation). Source: Andriopoulou and Tsakloglou (2011:25)

Country	Non-poor	Transient poor	Mid-term poor	Recurrent poor	Long-term (persistent) poor	Total
A	72.4	14.2	3.5	3.5	6.5	100.0
B	67.9	14.8	3.8	4.8	8.7	100.0
D	70.7	14.1	4.2	4.0	7.0	100.0
DK	72.6	15.5	3.5	3.8	4.6	100.0
E	61.4	15.7	4.5	8.1	10.3	100.0
EL	57.7	14.6	5.3	7.6	14.8	100.0
F	67.6	13.5	4.7	4.8	9.5	100.0
FIN	79.2	11.2	3.5	1.9	4.3	100.0
I	61.9	13.6	4.5	6.7	13.3	100.0
IRL	63.4	14.9	4.2	5.2	12.3	100.0
L	77.4	9.8	3.4	2.4	7.0	100.0
NL	76.2	12.3	2.8	3.7	5.0	100.0
P	60.0	14.1	4.5	5.7	15.8	100.0
UK	57.9	17.6	5.4	6.3	12.8	100.0
EU	65.5	14.6	4.5	5.4	9.9	100.0

As outlined above, a conceptualisation of poverty based on fundamental breaks in life trajectories and individual life style may imply that hierarchical stratification structures in terms of social classes have lost their relevance (Pintelon et al., 2013). In this context, Layte and Whelan (2002) and Groh-Samberg (2010) have tried to confute the individualisation (biographisation) approach to poverty (Beck, 1992; Leisering and Leibfried, 1999) and its basic premise that poverty spells are less equally distributed amongst social classes⁶. The researchers point out in their studies that class origins and social stratification determinants, such as age, gender, occupational status, educational level or social class may have substantial and persisting effects of poverty. Nevertheless, an over-determined assumption of the existence of an excluded

⁶ For the definition and analysis of social classes and their mobility oftentimes job characteristics are used to determine a person's social position by grouping people in different hierarchical-structured classes (Goldthorpe, 2010). Alternatively, other resources, such as income on an individual or household level are consulted to determine social groups (Sorensen, 2000).

homogenous group of the permanently underprivileged being at risk of transmitting their fate across generations (Kleinman 1998) is a rare occurrence: “(...) *long before we identify groups doomed to poverty we run out of cases*” (Layte and Whelan, 2002:230).

In light of the seemingly two opposing views, several researchers have tried to unite both frames of reference for analysing poverty prevalence and duration by studying interactions between life course events and social stratification determinants.

Following this reasoning, DiPrete and McManus (2000) as well as Andreß, Borgloh, Bröckel, Giesselmann and Hummelsheim (2006) found that women and children in the US and Germany are more vulnerable to poverty entries than men in the aftermath of a divorce. In a more recent contribution, Vandecasteele (2011) examines empirically whether risky life events have the same poverty-triggering effect for all social stratification groups across thirteen Western European countries. Concurring with the above-mentioned authors, she shows that partnership dissolutions and childbirth affect poverty entry risks of women more strongly. Contrary to this, other studies show that a substantial number of men also experience economic problems after separation due to alimony and child support payments and the costs of acquiring and equipping separate housing (McManus and DiPrete, 2001; Aasve, Betti, Mazzucco and Mencarini, 2007).

A “true life course risk” for all social strata, on the other hand, is an involuntary phase of unemployment, which has a poverty-inducing effect on large segments of society (Vandecasteele, 2011). Consequently, unemployment in Germany is argued to be an individualised life course risk, which does not necessarily hit lower social strata harder, thereby leading to states of permanent exclusion (Vandecasteele, 2011). Regarding the duration of poverty spells an earlier study of the same author

(Vandecasteele, 2010) investigates partnership dissolution and leaving the parental home in Germany, Denmark, Spain and the UK, equally controlling for social stratification determinants (gender, educational level and social class). Overall results indicate that the risk of temporary income deprivation is less structured by stratification determinants than the longer-term poverty risk. The individualisation of short-term poverty spells (Leisering and Leibfried, 1999) is hence regarded as further substantiated (Vandecasteele, 2010).

Findings of the aforementioned studies intent to bridge the gap between hierarchical stratification determinants (social classes/occupational status) and horizontal life course events (Vandecasteele, 2010, 2011). Although not disagreeing with this joint approach, Leisering and Buhr (2012), yet, point out that the previously outlined approaches reflect two different dimensions of analysing living conditions over time. More precise, an investigation of individual lifestyle and (risky) biographical events triggering poverty entries and exits still provide researchers with a higher “micro-social resolution lens”. Hence, the detection of living conditions and subjectively felt poverty is facilitated. Following this logic, deterministic class-based studies focusing on income or occupational status tend to overlook that even small changes in people’s living conditions may have a great impact on individual wellbeing despite the absence of an ascension in social status or a next higher income class. For example, overcoming temporary spells of unemployment and escaping from a stigmatised social assistance system in Germany may be of great importance to many people (Gurr and Jungbauer-Gans, 2013). Rebuilding one’s identity and self-esteem in light of social acceptance, participating again in normal customs of society and re-gaining self-responsibility for shaping one’s own life (Townsend, 1979; Leisering and Buhr, 2012) may play an

essential role in regards to mastering feelings of deprivation and exclusion. By contrast, within the boundaries of a structural class-based perspective, moving from a 40% or 50% median equivalised net income up to a 70% income only marginally heralds in upward social mobility from an objective point of view (Leisering and Buhr, 2012).

Causes of Poverty Transitions and At-Risk Groups

Having outlined the transient nature of relative income poverty as a phenomenon that is oftentimes equally shared amongst social groups, the following last section of this chapter further delves into the causes of poverty transitions. At the same time reference is made to the most predominant at-risk-groups. Considering that individuals' and families' lifecourses are shaped by the welfare state and its social policies (Leisering and Leibfried, 1999), micro-level perspectives of experiences of poverty transitions are presented in light of macro-policies.

Micro-Level Perspectives

In order to provide a general overview, O'Boyle (1998) differentiates between personal and familial reasons with 10 triggering events in the life course contributing to poverty transition processes. Personal reasons are separated from familial reasons, however, oftentimes it is overlooked that the two categories are intertwined and can influence each other negatively.

Table IV.

Factors contributing to the transition into and out of poverty. Source: own illustration adapted from O'Boyle (1998)

Routes Into Poverty	Routes out of Poverty
<i>Personal</i>	
Lower Wages	Higher wages
Unemployment	employment
On-the-job injury or illness	Restoration of physical wellbeing
Rejection	Acceptance
Exploitation	Fairness
Old age, frailty and dependency	Youth, strength and independence
<i>Familial</i>	
Death of breadwinner	Replacement of Breadwinner
Family dissolution	Family (re-) formation
Increase in family size	Decrease in family size
Drop in net worth	Rise in net worth

With regard to Germany, in particular involuntary phases of unemployment contribute to an increase in relative income deprivation (Ehlert, 2013). Notwithstanding that the lower-educated social groups consistently experience the highest poverty entry risk both before and after job loss (Leisering and Leibfried, 1999, Vandecasteele, 2010, 2011), generally speaking all social strata in Germany are at-risk of entering phases of relative income deprivation as a consequence of unemployment (Vandecasteele, 2011). In line with individualisation theories, highlighting the transient nature of

poverty (Beck, 1992), Fehr and Vobruba (2011) and Leisering and Leibfried (1999) before them demonstrate in their empirical studies on social assistance/unemployment benefit claims that the majority of spells of German benefit claimancy are rather short. By using this alternative methodology to examine duration, periodicity and prevalence of poverty, they conclude that more than 50% of “first time claimants” have permanently left a phase of social assistance after at least one year during the accounting period 2005-2007, which is ascribable to finding new employment (Fehr and Vobruba, 2011).

Nevertheless, being employed does not always constitute a safeguard to precarious income conditions and (re-) entries into poverty (Buhr, 2004; Groh-Samberg, 2010). Particularly the proliferation of temporary work contracts and low-wage employment has led to a “revolving door process” of poverty (Fouarge and Layte, 2005) in which the same people experience recurrent spells of income deprivation in different periods (Buhr, 2004). In the same vein, it has been argued that new, atypical career profiles, such as the “working poor” being trapped in a “low-pay, no-pay cycle”, have also found their way into the German labour market (Hellmuth and Urban, 2010). Analyses from the German SOEP affirm this development. Results demonstrate that between the years 2000-2006 the rate of income poor people being in employment has doubled (DIW et al., 2007). By tendency, young adults less than 25 years, lower-educated people as well as female lone-parent households are affected disproportionately high by recurrent spells of income deprivation due to being exposed to low wage jobs and part-time employment (Buhr, 2004; Andreß and Lohmann, 2008).

Interrelated with the “working-poor” phenomenon is the risk of entering recurrent spells of poverty for the group of self-employed people in Germany. Especially small-

sized businesses owners without any further employees (*“Solo-Selbständige”*), often face the risk of volatile income positions over time (Hellmuth and Urban, 2010). Moreover, entering retirement may often constitute an important trigger preceding entries into phases of economic restraint. In particular former low-skilled and low-educated workforces as well as self-employed people are at great risk of entering a temporary phase of financial deprivation in old age (DIW et al., 2007).

Apart from the destandardisation of employment biographies and its associated risks, also household composition volatilities in terms of marital and partnership dissolution may have a substantial negative impact on economic resources and standard of living in Germany (Andreß et al., 2006). Based on the current pattern of divorce in Germany, one third of all marriages registered in a year will end within the next 25 years (Destatis, 2016). Against this background of increased familial instability (DeWilde, 2003) it has been argued that women and children are more susceptible to the negative income effects of partnership disruption than men (Andreß, 2004). This is related to men's stronger labour market attachment and the tendency for children to stay with their mothers after divorce (DeWilde and Uunk, 2008). Following this logic, economic needs are generally higher for female lone-parent households after the marital union dissolves. At the same time employment opportunities are temporarily restricted due to indispensable childcare (Andreß et al., 2006). Hence, several studies show that women and their (dependent) children are most often worse off, while men experience only a moderate loss of income or even improve their economic status after a several years. Women's post-divorce income changes may range between -25% (Uunk, 2004) up to -80% (Sörensen, 1994). However, DiPrete and McManus (2000), observing panel data from the GSOEP for the accounting period 1984-1996, showed that also

German men were negatively affected by a decline of economic resources in terms of a temporary drop in disposable income of -23% after partnership dissolution. An explanation for men's post-divorce economic distress is offered by DeWilde and Uunk (2008) arguing that men have to pay substantial amounts of alimony and child support, and often have to find new accommodation, which raises their costs of living.

Considering routes out of poverty, Andreß et al. (2006), in their comparative study on economic consequences of partnership dissolution in Europe, demonstrate that German women in the years following separation recover better from an experienced income drop than their European counterparts. As depicted in Figure 2., after five years latest, they almost reach the same adjusted household income level as during their dissolved partnerships. It is assumed that repartnering and remarriage serve as important strategies in order to compensate income and status loss after separation (Andreß et al., 2006).

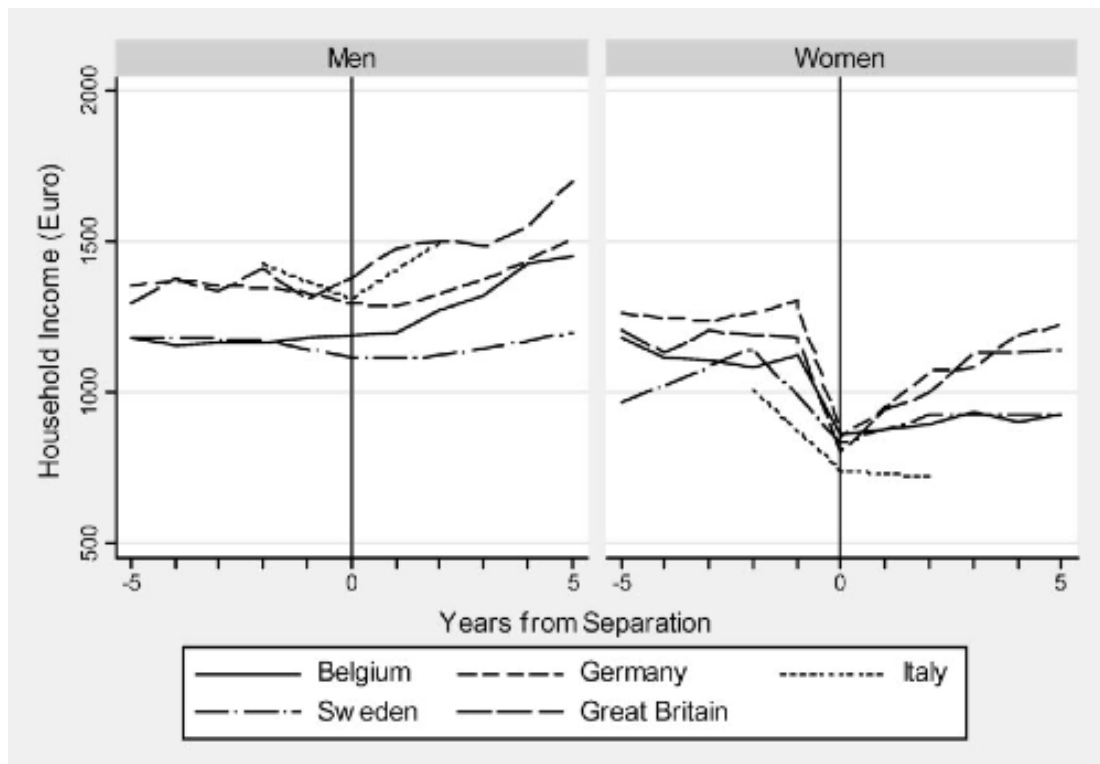


Figure 2. Median adjusted household incomes for men and women in Belgium, Germany, Sweden and the UK from five years before to five years after separation. Source: Andreß et al. (2006:545)

Macro-Level Perspectives

As outlined above, “new social risks” have emerged out of a wave of social changes over the last 40 years in industrialised Western European nations. Amongst these is the destandardisation of employment and growing familial instabilities (Beck, 1992; Andreß et al., 2006; Bonoli, 2007). In line with individualisation theories, these risks are regarded as being embedded in an individual’s life course and affect broad segments of society. As a consequence, from a micro level perspective, ever more individuals have become vulnerable to temporary or recurrent phases of financial constraint and deprivation (Leisering and Leibfried, 1999; Vandecasteele, 2011). Besides individual factors, however, the institutional context is seen to play an

important role in determining economic consequences of risky life events in multiple ways (Leisering and Leibfried, 1999; Andreß et al., 2006). Thus, in a wide-ranging sense, macro-level decisions also have an impact on the distribution of poverty as well as its duration and severity by means of social transfer systems or the the structure of taxation (DiPrete and McManus, 2000).

Considering the aforementioned universal risk of job loss as a life event preceding potential poverty transitions, the German welfare state's shift from a traditional Bismarckian "social protection" (Esping-Andersen, 1990) to a "social investment" model (Bonoli, 2007) has further exacerbated the risk of poverty transitions within an individual's lifetime (Fehr and Vobruba, 2011). Originally designed to preserve social status and the achieved standard of living with the aid of a generous, wage-centred benefit system (Esping-Andersen, 1990), the "new", "active" or "social investment" welfare state (Pintelon et al., 2013) puts more emphasis on individual responsibility and investment in human capital. With its basic principle of "assist and demand" ("Fördern und Fordern"; Jacobi and Kluve, 2006), the main objective of the new activation strategy is to achieve full labour market participation (Fleckenstein, 2008).

Amongst other things, so-called "job centres" were implemented in 2002, functioning as overall agencies to improve the matching between the unemployed and firms with vacancies as well as occupational trainings (Jacobi and Kluve, 2006). Empirical studies on the success of these measures demonstrate increased outflows from unemployment to employment compared to pre-reform periods (Fahr and Sunde, 2009). Fehr and Vobruba (2011) are less optimistic, yet concede that at least the new reforms have not had any negative effects on the already existing high numbers of individuals exiting periods of social assistance claimancy (Vehr and Vobruba, 2011).

Besides positive effects of the highlighted “assisting” element on upward mobility, the re-organisation of the benefit system (“*Hartz IV legislation*”)⁷, which takes account of the “demand” component in Germany’s activation policy, has been highly contested. Critics have argued that Germany further shifts from a conservative welfare state (Esping-Andersen, 1990) towards an Anglo-American liberal model of lump-sum jobless benefits (Ehlert, 2013). Against this background, the previous unemployment benefit (“*Arbeitslosengeld*”), which refers to recipients’ last earned income, was reduced from previously 32 months to 6-12 months for people under the age 50 (BMAS, 2019). The former equally generous “unemployment assistance” (“*Arbeitslosenhilfe*”) amounting up to 53% of final net wage, which could be drawn by jobseekers whose unemployment benefit expired, was superseded by a means-tested lump-sum “unemployment benefit type II” (“*Arbeitslosengeld II*”) in 2005. Unemployment benefit type II entails a universal minimum income per month and is often referred to as “Hartz IV” in common parlance, making reference to the fourth package of the Hartz Activation Reforms introduced in 2005 (Fleckenstein, 2008). As a consequence, those with higher pre-unemployment incomes have become vulnerable to a more radical drop in disposable income and social status in light of the “Hartz IV” agenda (Ehlert, 2013).

⁷ The Hartz reforms are named after the chairman heading the commission that worked out the reform package. It consists of a comprehensive modification of active and passive labour market policies and is considered to be the most-far reaching endeavour in the history of the German welfare state. Four laws (Hartz I-IV) were gradually implemented in 2003, 2004 and 2005. The laws contain a comprehensive set of specific policy measures that came into force at various points in time during the years 2003-2005 and that merge to a three-part strategy: (a) improving employment services and policy measures, (b) activating the unemployed and (c) fostering employment demand by deregulating the labour market. To this end, the reform radically modernised the organisational structure of public employment services, modified many of the already existing measures of Active Labour Market Policy and introduced a set of new ones. The reform fundamentally changed the institutional and legal framework that determines the rights and duties of unemployed in terms of the benefit system (Jacobi and Kluve, 2006).

An additional issue of active labour market and unemployment benefit policy is related to the rigidity of duties to fulfil on behalf of jobseekers (Fehr and Vobruba, 2011). Employable recipients of unemployment benefit type II (Hartz IV) are usually required to accept every job that is offered to them, in order to stimulate a rapid re-integration into the labour market. If jobseekers do not fully co-operate, they are sanctioned, which is most notably reflected in severe benefit cuts (Doerre et al., 2013). In extreme cases of refusal, payments are suspended and food stamps are distributed to reluctant “jobcentre customers” (Jacobi and Kluve, 2006). Hence, ever more people have to accept job offers, that may pay lower wages and/or are based on part-time agreements, further triggering recurrent types of income deprivation (Vehr and Vobruba, 2011). In this sense, persons who are fit for employment, yet do not earn an income covering their needs with their gainful employment, are entitled to payments to secure subsistence in the form of “unemployment benefit II” (Hartz IV), which can be also granted as a supplemental (top-up) benefit in addition to their income (Doerre et al., 2013).

The transition towards an “active” welfare state and the intent of higher labour market participation has led to increasing criticism in regards to the preservation of social rights (Pintelon et al., 2013). With regard to Germany, especially the “Hartz IV” legislation is associated with a high pressure to take action by those who have recently become unemployed or face the risk of losing their job (Fehr and Vobruba, 2011). This circumstance is further propelled by the awareness that one may be susceptible to prejudices and social discrimination in regards to their occupational status (Gurr and Jungbauer-Gans, 2013). From a macro-social perspective, according to Barlösius (2002), the categorisation of unemployed/employed is a popular line of demarcation

that is collectively shared in the German performance-oriented culture. In this context, especially the “Hartz IV” unemployment benefits scheme has become a highly stigmatised cultural entity (Gurr and Jungbauer-Gans, 2013). Being or becoming “Hartz IV”, a “Hartzler” or “Hartz-Family”, that is individuals or families who receive unemployment benefit II or are on the brink of claiming, is a customary term in the German language and is often used as a synonym for personal failure, unemployment, precarious income conditions and social exclusion (Doerre et al., 2013).

Apart from job loss, another social risk triggering poverty transitions is that of the aforementioned partnership dissolution (Andreß, 2004). Especially women with child rearing responsibilities are more at risk of suffering from temporary phases of economic constraint after a marital disruption in Germany (Andreß et al., 2006).

Although the German state has put more emphasis on gender equality and the support of dual earner models in recent years in terms of an upsurge of child care facilities (Betzelt and Bode, 2018) family policies, taxation and the social security system still favour the traditional two-parent family model. Here, a (male) breadwinner model, with the second parental unit, mostly the mother, working part-time and/or taking care of the children, is still prevalent (Andreß et al., 2006). This emphasis on a single-earner model is reflected in a joint taxation system (*“Ehegattensplitting”*) providing strong incentives for the (male) breadwinner’s income and a generous parental leave system of which predominately women make use by retreating from the labour market for several years to care for their children. In the event of a separation, yet, mothers are often disadvantaged due to a lacking attachment to the labour market, no coverage in the pension and social security system and insufficient access to external (early) childcare (Andreß, 2004; Bonoli, 2007; Bothfeld and Rouault, 2014). The bulk of

welfare effort still relies on income replacement programs designed for core (male) workers in Germany (Bonoli, 2007), which may serve as an explanation as to why mothers are often worse-off than their male counterparts after the union dissolves (Andreß et al., 2006). To date there are 8.5 million families with children less than 14 years, out of which 20% are single-parent households. Over 90% of these single-parent households are estimated to be headed by females (Destatis, 2018).

Chapter Summary & Research Questions

Dynamic approaches emphasise relative poverty's heterogeneity in terms of its occurrence in different temporal profiles and an unequal distribution amongst social groups and gender. Without neglecting the existence of persistent poverty (Snel, Reelick and Groenenboom, 2013) temporary and/or recurrent spells of relative poverty are the most predominant manifestations of poverty in industrialised nations (Bane and Ellwood, 1986), such as Germany (Leisering and Buhr, 2012) and are seen to be the result of risky events occurring at different junctures in people's lives (Vandecasteele, 2011). My definition of poverty in the context of this research is, therefore, grounded in temporary or recurrent deteriorations of income in light of new universal social risks, such as involuntary job loss, atypical work forms or familial instabilities (Bonoli, 2007), which are embedded in individual life courses across gender.

However, focusing on temporary or recurrent reductions of disposable income alone may not readily imply that states of poverty from an objective point of view can be encountered. In fact, subjective perceptions of poverty relative to one's own pre-poverty living standard and the lives of relevant others are regarded as being more important within the scope of this research. The relative subjective poverty view

adopted, hence, puts emphasis on subjectively felt discontinuities in living standards and consumption levels due to an enforced lack of economic resources, yet concentrates less on objectively defined income thresholds. Drawing on theories of individualisation of lifestyles, which emphasise the importance of individual agency in response to risky life events the underlying research assumes that phases of financial constraint can be actively mastered by those affected by it (Leisering and Buhr, 2012). However, people's ability to have overcome a spell of poverty is not measured against objectively defined income thresholds in this research. Rather, it follows Leisering and Buhr's (2012) conception of moving out of poverty in Germany by considering those changes to one's living conditions that re-build self-esteem, social acceptance, and regaining self-responsibility for shaping one's own life. Especially, being able to leave behind social benefit payments is such an out-of-poverty measure.

This latter point is important as the literature on consumer poverty research is replete with consumption experiences of static and long-term financially deprived groups of people (Hill, 1991; Hutton, 2016) as well as those that have taken a "rocky downhill journey" in socio-economic status (Hamilton and Catterall, 2006a; Caldwell and Henry, 2017; Thompson et al., 2018). However, subsequent routes of financial strain have not been considered thus far. As highlighted in this chapter dynamic poverty in Germany is a common phenomenon. It, therefore, serves as a particularly useful context for exploring disrupted identity narratives. As such, it may reveal that consumers (re-) construct their identities and lifestyles quite differently after having moved into and out poverty. Through the use of a narrative theoretical lens (Shankar et al., 2001; McAdams, 2006; Schau et al., 2009) consumers' long-termed self-change

processes may be traced, and how they draw on, reject, and integrate different past selves from pre-poverty, and poverty lives into their post-poverty selves.

In light of the earlier highlighted literature on transitional consumers, the core gaps identified, and the empirical context presented in this chapter (dynamic poverty in Germany), the following Research Questions are stated:

- 1) What are consumers' adaptive strategies when they transition into and out of poverty
- 2) Do they experience any identity shifts in both situations?
- 3) In what way, if at all, do consumption practices to manage their lifestyles and relations to consumption objects change?

Chapter Four: Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodology employed in this study. It starts with a discussion on the philosophical positioning informing this research, and a detailed description of the selected research design in terms of a narrative research approach adopted. After that, sampling procedures and data collection methods deployed, such as autobiographies and long interviews will be presented. This section is, then, followed by an overview of the systematic data analysis procedures. Finally, trustworthiness issues are addressed.

Underpinning Philosophical Paradigm

“There is no such thing as philosophy-free science; there is only science whose philosophical baggage is taken on board without examination.” (Dennet, 1995:21)

Determining the underlying worldview (“Weltanschauung”) in a researcher’s field of study may be helpful in shaping an understanding of the whole research process regarding design and methodologies, types of data and how they are read, interpreted and presented in the final report (Hopkinson and Hogg, 2006).

This research seeks to focus on consumers having survived a spell of poverty and their identity development. As such, long-term developments and potential fluidities regarding the construction of disrupted identities and related consumption implications are explored. It addresses a gap in the literature on strained consumer identity due to forced life transitions and its impact upon processes of longer-termed self-change and identity re-construction considering multiple, interwoven transitions over time.

Therefore, the study is positioned within CCTs identity projects stream of research and follows the dominant interpretivist tradition of this academic brand.

The interpretivist epistemology in CCT is based upon the notion of immersion into informants' lifeworlds, seeking "thick descriptions" (Fournier, 1998; Hopkinson and Hogg, 2006) at the micro-social level. Understanding what is going on in a specific setting becomes more important than creating nomothetic statements with causal relationships as in the positivist research paradigm (Ackroyd, 2004). This idiographic description of knowledge across a gamut of social spaces (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) is further emphasised by Belk (2006:158) who argues that "*the interpretivist concern is to understand a situation from the perspective of participants within that situation, and to explore the meanings through which they construct their reality*". Hence, the researcher-informant relationship is viewed as mostly interactive and cooperative (Shankar et al., 2001), which stands in stark contrast to a positivist epistemology that is based on the belief that the researcher acts as a detached and independent observer who should remain distanced from the material being researched (Carson, Gilmore, Perry and Gronhaug, 2001). Following this line of reasoning, from an epistemological viewpoint, the knowledge acquired in interpretivist research is socially constructed, rather than objectively determined (Carson et al., 2001). Consequently, such a social constructionist perspective is based upon the assumption that the only way to access reality is via social constructions in terms of, for instance, language and shared meanings (Shankar et al., 2001).

As such, qualitative data and an array of related data collection and analysis techniques (focusing on language) have been favoured over quantitative methods (focusing on numbers) within the interpretivist owned area of CCT. However, it is a common

misconception that certain methodological tools in terms of quantitative or qualitative research techniques are automatically derivable from a specific philosophical paradigm (Ackroyd, 2004). In this sense, CCT related studies have also successfully embraced methodological pluralism for studying consumption phenomena in the field by combining both quantitative and qualitative methods “whenever quantitative measures and analytic techniques can advance the operative theoretical agenda” (Arnould and Thompson, 2005:870). Some classical and more recent examples of using quantitative data in CCT research include Arnould and Price (1993) and their analysis of satisfaction in extended service studying in an extreme sports context, or Arsel and Bean’s (2013) theory development of taste regimes in a home design blog context (using quantitative textual analysis in combination with a qualitative analysis of content on the website).

Apart from these examples, most commonly, yet, purely qualitative approaches to data collection have been deployed in CCT research. Applied research tools usually consist of (n)ethnographic approaches (Hill, 1991; Kozinets, 2002; Higgins and Hamilton, 2018), in-depth interviewing (Schouten, 1991; Schau et al., 2009; Saatcioglu and Ozanne, 2013); phenomenological inquiry (Thompson and Haytko, 1997; Fournier, 1998; Voice Group, 2010; Ulver-Sneistrup and Ostberg, 2011), and innovative methods, such as Subjective Personal Introspection (Shankar, 2000; Rojas-Gaviria and Bluemelhuber, 2010), autobiographical popular literature (Hirschman, 1990; Turley and O’Donohoe, 2012; O’Donohoe, 2015), poetry (Tonner, 2019), or videography (Rokka and Hietanen, 2018). This is mainly due to the aims driving the CCT research tradition in the form of focusing on experiential, emotional, symbolic and sociocultural dimensions of consumption that are relevant to one’s (social) identity construction

(Arnould and Thompson, 2005). As such, main emphasis is put on understanding and interpretation of social action in a cultural context rather than explaining (“erklären”) and describing, thereby embracing the key term “subjectivity” that is prevalent in the broader interpretivist paradigm of research (Belk, 1995).

Narrative Research Approach

In light of the above listed methodological considerations within interpretivist CCT research, the data generated have often been referred to as consumer narratives (Escalas and Bettman, 2000). Here, the relationship between consumption and identity issues emerges usually through the narratives presented by informants (who may, at times, be the researchers themselves as demonstrated in studies using Subjective Personal Introspection), primarily because these individuals share their personal life stories (Schouten, 1991; Thompson and Haytko, 1997; Fournier, 1998; Shankar, 2000; Ahuvia, 2005; Ourahmoune, 2016).

For example, Fournier (1998) investigates and contributes theoretically to consumers’ relationships with brands. This author explores key life themes of three informants in the US by using in-depth interviewing. These life themes reveal informants’ identities and are reflected in the meanings and personal bonds that are assigned to the brands that these individuals use or avoid (see e.g. one informant’s deep commitment to her Reebok running shoes as a symbol of a revived post-divorce youthful self, or her rejection of other brands inherited from her ex-husband for asserting a new sense of identity and independence; Fournier, 1998). In a similar vein, Cherrier and Murray (2007) looked at voluntary simplifiers and the internal and social processes leading to these consumers’ decisions to dispose of their consumption objects and practices,

resulting in a “being mode of existence” (Fromm, 1976). Informants’ life stories revealed that mundane events from the past, such as being dissatisfied with one’s job, triggered a decision to voluntarily live with less (e.g. building a house in the woods). These sensitisation and separation stages were followed by a socialisation stage into one’s new simplified lifestyle (e.g. through joining a community of wildlife biologists), eventually leading to a present and future state of striving for a downshifting mode that is, yet, infused with identity struggles to resist temptations of returning to one’s previous lifestyle (e.g. due to feeling lonely in the woods).

Building upon these consumer examples, from an interpretivist ontological standpoint, narratives (stories) are positioned as central to human meaning making and identity construction (Sarbin, 2003). The story represents experiences as understood by the storyteller and relate predominately to the ideographic, that is seeking to understand people’s behaviours in their natural settings, and socio-cultural contexts (Thompson and Haytko, 1997; Hopkinson and Hogg, 2006; Cherrier and Murray, 2007). In the same vein, Atkinson (2002) drawing upon Bruner (1986) notes that (life) narratives as a research tool acknowledge that personal truth is achieved from the subjective point of view, since people tell their own stories in their own words. People’s very identities are inextricably linked to the stories they tell themselves and share with one another detailing important influences, circumstances, issues, themes, and lessons learned throughout life (Gergen and Gergen, 1988; Atkinson, 2002; McAdams, 2006). As such, capturing stories from study participants may be a valuable experience for the person telling the story and a successful research endeavour for the one gathering the data (Atkinson, 2002), via collecting and presenting narrative data and telling them as theory (Hopkinson and Hogg, 2006).

From an interpretive epistemological viewpoint, hence, narratives become a way of telling about one's life and a method of knowing what is real where the researcher usually interacts with that, which is being researched (Shankar, 2000; Shankar et al., 2001). Such a relationship between researcher and researched in terms of co-constructing knowledge in the research process will be further drawn upon at a later stage in this chapter in the context of data collection procedures.

As highlighted, through the stories consumers tell about their lives an emic insight can be gained into related consumption patterns and how consumption plays a role in identity construction (Escalas and Bettman, 2000). Therefore, this study adopts a narrative approach to data collection and analysis. The research mainly seeks to investigate and trace potential changes of disrupted consumer identities over time. Hence, identity development is examined through a narrative research lens (Saldaña, 2013). In this sense, the structuring effects of personal narratives are taken into account in terms of tapping into narrative data's temporal and causal dimensions (Shankar et al., 2001; Escalas and Bettman, 2000; Giesler and Thompson, 2016).

As already discussed in the literature review of this study (see Chapter Two), the temporal aspect of identity narratives is associated with the notion of time being configured in episodes (Gergen and Gergen, 1988), life scenes (McAdams, 2006), or (turning point) moments and events (Shankar et al., 2001; Atkinson, 2002; McAdams and Bowman, 2013; Giesler and Thompson, 2016) whereas time in reality is an undifferentiated continuous flow (Escalas and Bettman, 2000). This contrasting episodic conception of time embedded in narrative identity research, hence, assumes that one's view of self in a given moment is reliant upon the linkages made to someone's past (Gergen and Gergen, 1988). An individual's present identity is, thus,

not something mysterious or a sudden event. In fact, it is a sensible result of one's life story (Gergen and Gergen, 1988) where self-relevant events across time are creatively cobbled together to form a meaningful present self, at the same time shaping future anticipated goals (Thompson, 1996; McAdams, 2006; Schau et al., 2009). Put simply, individuals' sense of self is guided by the story about who they are, influenced by what has happened in the past, what they have done, and what one wishes to accomplish in the future (Escalas and Bettman, 2000; Schau et al., 2009).

The concept of causality is interlinked with these coherent self-constructions through (selected) events embedded in one's life history (Gergen and Gergen, 1988; Habermas and Bluck, 2000, McAdams, 2006). More precise, Gergen and Gergen (1988:22) note that "when events in a narrative are related in an interdependent fashion the outcome approximates more closely the well-formed story". This is in line with Habermas and Bluck (2000) stating that a person is able to derive a coherent general theme or principle about their identity based on a narrated sequence of selected events (e.g. when a person may explain the origins of their politically conservative self by appealing to a series of selected events and realisations that transpired during adolescence and adulthood, McAdams, 2006).

Complementing the above outlined temporal and causal dimensions inherent in narrative identity research, a further element forming coherent stories of the self is that of emplotment (Ricoeur, 1985; Mishler, 1995), storyline (Saldaña, 2013), narrative form (Shankar et al., 2001), or personal myth (McAdams, 1993). Polkinghorne (1991:141) describes the process of emplotment within narratives as "a procedure that configures temporal elements into a whole by grasping them together and directing them towards a conclusion or end". In a similar manner, McAdams (1993) states that

a personal myth is the central story behind various episodes in life that are selected to form one's identity through storytelling.

Following this train of thought, theorists from different disciplines have identified basic narrative configurations, or taxonomies, which are based upon culturally-grounded genres, such as comedy, romance, tragedy, irony (Frye, 1957). Drawing upon Frye (1957), Gergen and Gergen (1988) highlighted the evaluative dimension of a narrative over time in terms of stability (positively or negatively evaluated narratives remaining unchanged over time), progression (self-relevant events improve over time), or regression (events decline over time). In a similar vein, McAdams (2006) identified redemption (progressing from bad to good life scenes) and contamination plots (progressing from good to bad life scenes) as person-culture co-constituted structural plotlines (Hammack, 2009). Hence, the plot, ultimately, gives coherence and meaning to one's narrative. Likewise, it provides the context to understand each of the events, descriptions, goals, morals, and social relationships that usually form part of a storied self (Jovchelowsky and Bauer, 2000).

When referring back to the consumer research perspective, Shankar et al. (2001) acknowledge the importance of studying consumers' identity developments and change processes over time through narrative's temporal, causal and emplotment dimensions. More recently, Giesler and Thompson (2016) have reinforced the usefulness of tracing consumers' identity developments over time by taking into account a longitudinal set of events, which can range over years, but are narratively linked together. As such, these authors claim that a narrative perspective would ideally be suited to replace a longitudinal study of consumption behaviour, especially

considering important turning points in consumers' lives (Shankar et al., 2001; Giesler and Thompson, 2016).

This latter point is important in the context of the present research. Due to this study's core aim to trace long-term developments of disrupted identities, taking into account the cumulative impact of multiple transitions over time (transitions into and out of poverty), a longitudinal study would not have been feasible. For example, if consuming identities and related lifestyles are investigated as events are unfolding (e.g. interviewing consumers before a foreseeable forced life transition into poverty, while being in poverty, and after having overcome a poverty spell), constraints on time and sensitivity issues will usually present a barrier to such longitudinal research approaches (Otnes, Ruth, Lowrey and Commuri, 2006). By contrast, the narrative research perspective outlined above permitting informants to go "back in time" (Otnes et al., 2006) may be promising in getting information on both (re) constructions and change processes of identity after both transitions into and out of poverty and their implications on present post-event and envisioned future consuming identities. In order to assist informants in recalling specific events and experiences related to important turning points in life, and to glean some information on whether there have been qualitative changes in consumers' experiences in light of these events, narrative research usually relies on longitudinal surrogate data (Giesler and Thompson, 2016) or narrative artefacts (Tonner, 2019). In this sense, data generation methods, such as reflective in-depth interviews or long interviews, emails, diary records, letters, autobiographical writing, message board postings, or archived netnography data, may be used to trace consumers' perceptions and identity-level consumption at different

points of time (McCracken, 1988; Parmentier and Fisher, 2015; Giesler and Thompson, 2016).

For this research study, both long interviews (McCracken, 1988) and published autobiographical work have been chosen to trace long-termed processes of identity formation and potential change. As stressed by Bamberg (2007), deploying such narrative research methods generates “big stories”, accounting for the temporal, causal and emplotment dimensions of coherent narrative identity formation (McAdams, 2006). Following this line of reasoning, it has been acknowledged in (consumer) narrative and life story research, that long-interviews with their unstructured and loose format encourage informants to tell stories about their life experiences and concomitant identity-relevant developments reflected in consumption (Riessman, 1993; Jovchelowsky and Bauer, 2000; Atkinson, 2002; Shankar et al., 2001; Wattanasuwan, Buber and Meyer, 2009). Equally, concerning autobiographical work, the value of obtaining rich narratives that assemble life events and important turning points into socio-culturally grounded coherent identity plots has been emphasised (McAdams and Jones, 2017). In a consumption context autobiographies equally serve as archives of insight into the personal histories and meanings that underpin patterns of consumption (Hirschman, 1990), in particular during crucial turning points in life, such as in the aftermath of bereavement (Turley and O’Donohoe, 2012; O’Donohoe, 2015), or identity loss due to being imprisoned (Klein et al., 2015).

In the following section, there will be a detailed outline of how the selected data collection methods have been deployed, which is followed by an overview of the systematic data analysis procedures.

Conducting the Study

Pre-Understanding of Temporary Poverty

As highlighted above, this research study is dictated by an interpretivist epistemology where the researcher interacts with that which is being researched (Shankar, 2000) and becomes part of the research instrument (Carson et al., 2001). Hence, becoming actively involved in the research process as a subject, demands that both background and previous experiences of the researcher need to be taken into consideration before entering the field (Carson et al., 2001). This is further supported by Arnould et al. (2006) in a consumer research setting stating that there should always be a match between empirical contexts that are studied and the researchers themselves, although the literature also shows effective counterexamples when entering the field as a complete stranger (e.g. Luedicke, Thompson and Giesler, 2010). This researcher-researched match where knowledge is often co-created during the research process may help to facilitate absorption of experiences from this context that is, in turn, translated into insights contributing to knowledge creation. For example, when Hirschman (1992) studied compulsive consumption (e.g. by interviewing drug addicts) she drew upon her own personal experiences of substance abuse in the past when interacting with informants and analysing data. Likewise, Peñaloza (1994) in her consumer acculturation study on Mexican immigrants in the US had to overcome linguistic and class barriers to establish rapport with her informants (e.g. by initially only observing and learning behaviours from the outside), although she shared some ethnic affiliation with the immigrant consumers studied.

Consequently, having a pre-understanding on the phenomenon studied that is guided by the researcher's own personal and socio-culturally grounded experiences (Shankar et al., 2001) may be conducive to the research process in terms of collecting and interpretation of (narrative) data (McCracken, 1988; Shankar et al., 2001). Especially, in consideration of the sensitive research context that this study has chosen, drawing upon consumers' narratives on temporary poverty experienced throughout their lives, an understanding of the research phenomenon has been argued to be pivotal (Jafari, Dunnett, Hamilton and Downey, 2013). Following this train of thought, as Jafari et al. (2013) contend, interpretive researchers investigating sensitive topics are exposed to emotive situations and, at times, even life-threatening conditions of their informants, which does not only have an emotional impact upon the researched, yet, equally on the researcher. For example, from the perspective of vulnerable consumer populations studied within these sensitive research contexts (e.g. facing poverty, death, illness, migration, illness, etc.), those who encounter researchers who are empathetic towards their disconcerting life situations and life narratives may increase trust among informants (Dwyer and emerald, 2017). Thus, better understanding of their lived experiences is facilitated (Jafari et al., 2013). Alternatively, informants' potential re-traumatisation in narrative research drawing upon past life adversities may be avoided (Sayre, 2006; Flynn, 2014). However, such researcher-informant alignments (Sayre, 2006) within consumer vulnerability research may equally lead to emotional distress on behalf of the researcher due to, for instance, becoming overwhelmed by informants' stories of vulnerability, triggering an exploration of own fears, and insecurities, or potential isolation (e.g. feeling alone in the research process, which may potentially jeopardise the successful outcome of a doctoral research project; Jafari et al., 2013).

Considering such challenges based upon immersion into sensitive research contexts, the adoption of a self-reflexive position (actively reflecting upon own being in the world, and the world around oneself) allows researchers to monitor their own roles and ways of thinking critically at pre-, during, and post-inquiry stages (Shankar et al., 2001; Jafari et al., 2013).

With regard to the underlying study and its initial stages, my pre-understanding was not entirely limited to an outsider-position concerning economic strains and downward mobility. Although not having been subject to a transition into objectively defined relative income poverty (e.g. having been a social assistance claimant), I am a child of divorce and have been directly confronted with a phase of downward mobility at the age of 11. The pre-stages of the research process triggered a deep reflection on past events associated with the divorce of my parents, including the recollection of our move from an upper-middle class suburban locale to a less affluent neighbourhood and small flat with my mother and younger brother.

Through such self-explorations a further sensitivity was developed towards literature on poverty transitions and downwardly mobile consumers. Additionally, attending the ESCR Vulnerable Consumer Seminar series in 2014 was perceived as a useful pre-training for studying sensitive contexts. Within this process of sighting relevant studies, and attending academic seminars to further shape pre-understanding (Shankar et al., 2001), it became apparent that the literature has been replete with identity strains and consumption constraints of those that become downwardly mobile, suffer from persistent states of poverty, or in general linger in difficult life situations. However, I was puzzled about the neglect of a potential temporary nature surrounding personal crises and income restraints in the narrower sense. Having gained cross-sectional

insights into the coping strategies of those facing forced life transitions, I became eager to find out more about how these varied theoretical stories surrounding disrupted consuming identities further evolve after overcoming a crisis situation.

This was also the time when I engaged more closely with literature outside of my field dealing with life stories, and narrative identity work (e.g. from sociology, anthropology, and culturally-informed social psychology). Hence, an appreciation of different narrative features (e.g. how stories may be framed through plots), and a related sensitivity towards the broader social and cultural dimensions that shape people's stories was gained. Through cutting across the different literature streams surrounding CCTs consumer identity projects, consumer vulnerability research, sociological poverty dynamics, as well as narrative identity perspectives I gained a good pre-understanding of how to approach and interact with the field adopting a narrative theoretical research lens. The fieldwork will be outlined in the following sections.

Sampling Procedures

In order to both select suitable autobiographical work as well as recruiting informants for long interviews, I have used purposive sampling. Sampling within the interpretivist paradigm is mostly purposive (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Miles and Huberman, 1994) as it involves the selection of information-rich cases to permit inquiry into and understanding of the phenomenon in depth (Patton, 2001). Guided by both research questions and aims the sample may be pre-specified or emergent (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Consistent with the research aim of understanding long-term developments of disrupted identities within a dynamic relative income poverty

context, I pre-specified a sample in the beginning of the research process. Here, in line with the literature on dynamic poverty embedded in people's biographies, I sought to define a sample that represented formerly income poor people across different age groups in both genders, and various poverty transition triggers (e.g. divorce, unemployment, illness) in order to get multiple perspectives and a rich understanding of the phenomenon.

A further pre-specification criterion included an objective measure of relative transitory income poverty in terms of having experienced social assistance claimancy at some stage in one's life, and managing to escape from it subsequently. Complementing objective pre-specification measures, a subjective socio-psychological perspective on transitory poverty has been adopted in order to account for potential identity disruptions. These subjective measures are grounded in people's own perceptions of falling into and moving out of poverty. As such, decreased wellbeing due to stress and felt discontinuities relative to one's life history (transition into poverty) and subsequent improved wellbeing in light of re-gaining self-esteem and self-responsibility for actively shaping one's own life (transition out of poverty) were considered - irrespective of having re-gained one's objectively defined pre-transition socio-economic status (Leisering and Buhr, 2012).

Against this backdrop, I initially intended to identify a set of published autobiographical work as I felt that these may reflect a vital mix of objective and subjective measures of transient relative income poverty. More precise, I sought to obtain first-hand written accounts that incorporate subjective and lived experiences of surviving poverty, and repairing a shattered self through storytelling (Frank, 2000), yet take place in an objectively measurable setting of transient poverty (living on

benefits temporarily). In line with Klein et al. (2015) the search was facilitated by Google Books and amazon.com as a sampling frame. Selected key search words used were “overcoming adversity”, “surviving poverty”, “overcoming poverty”, “out of poverty”, “social re-ascension”, or “How I survived poverty/Hartz IV” (Hartz IV being the publicly used term for the German benefit system; Gurr and Jungbauer-Gans, 2013). The search resulted in a total of five autobiographies that were analysed for the purpose of this study. These included two bestselling books, authored by German consumers, who tell their life stories and recent experiences of routes into and out of precarious income conditions. Table V. provides an overview of the autobiographical sample selected for this study.

Table V.

Overview of autobiography sample selected for narrative analysis

The table has been removed from the digital version of the thesis by the author due to copyright reasons

The table has been removed from the digital version of the thesis by the author due to copyright reasons

Besides autobiographical work, as for the initial recruitment of informants for the interview stage of this study, I followed Shankar et al.'s (2001) pragmatic solution doing narrative research to purposively sample people that one already has a relationship with in order to obtain rich insights into their personal life stories and turning point moments. From that purposively selected sample it may be possible to further snowball. Although I was able to successfully recruit two informants forming part of my wider social network that matched pre-specified criteria, the snowball sampling technique was not successful in this context. Therefore, I became inspired

by other interpretive consumer research studies to use the public space for posting recruitment signs (e.g. Schouten, 1991; Cherrier and Murray, 2007).

I posted flyers at restaurants and bars in the city of [REDACTED] and listed advertisements in both local and regional newspapers covering the areas of [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. Both recruitment signs asked for individuals who had been subject to social downward mobility (due to job loss, divorce, illness, etc.) and subsequent upward mobility (e.g. having overcome social welfare assistance) in their recent past. In exchange for their co-operation 35 Euros per interview were offered as a compensation. Illustration 1. on the next page illustrates both the flyer and newspaper advertisements that were used. The English translation for the newspaper advertisement is as follows:

*“LOOKING FOR INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS” – FOR A DOCTORAL THESIS
ON SOCIAL MOBILITY IN GERMANY’S CONSUMER SOCIETY, WE ARE
LOOKING FOR INDIVIDUALS, WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED A NOTICEABLE
INCOME DROP IN THE PAST (E.G. DUE TO JOB LOSS, DIVORCE, ETC.) AND
HAVE SUCCESSFULLY MASTERED TO OVERCOME THIS PHASE OR ARE
CURRENTLY ON THEIR WAY OUT (E.G. HAVING OVERCOME HARTZ IV).
35 EUROS WILL BE PAID AS A COMPENSATION FOR EACH INTERVIEW
(60-90 MINS)*



Illustration 1. Recruitment signs posted in newspapers and public spaces (in German)

In addition to recruiting informants from both the private and public sphere, I equally contacted the authors from my autobiographical sample during the analysis stage (via personal email or their publishing houses) with four of them agreeing to participate. On the one hand, this was seen as a further pragmatic solution to recruiting informants where the topic under investigation is very specific and sensitive including issues associated with accessibility and a willingness to take part (Schouten, 1991; Cope, 2011). On the other hand, interviewing these authors had analytical and data trustworthiness reasons (Riessman, 2008), which will be further drawn upon in the following sections.

After brief telephone conversations and email exchanges with individuals who responded to publicly posted signs and with authors from autobiographies, in total sixteen informants could be recruited to participate in interviews. Each of these

individuals, apart from two informants who still found themselves in (subjectively perceived and objective) economically strained situations, have dealt with both temporary (between a few months and a few years) and recurrent phases of substantial drops in income in their past. Table VI. on the next page lists all informants, excluding those two participants who have not entirely fulfilled pre-specified criteria, yet still took part in the interview process. All informants, including the autobiography authors, have been pseudonamed to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

The following section of this chapter will further elaborate on how both autobiographies and long interviews have been deployed in this study.

Table VI.

Overview of informants

Name	Age	Poverty Trigger	Current Occupation/ Pre-Poverty Occupation(s)	Current Family/ Housing Status	Duration of Poverty Spell
Christian	60s	Job loss, divorce	At-home father/ CEO of different companies	██████████ ████ ██████████ ████	4-5 years
Ulla	40s	Divorce	Company Owner/Housewife	██████████ ██████████	4 years
Wiebke	30s	Divorce, indebted	██████ self- employed/ public servant ██████████	██████████ ██████████ ██████████	3 years (re-current)

Name	Age	Poverty Trigger	Current Occupation/ Pre-Poverty Occupation(s)	Current Family/ Housing Status	Duration of Poverty Spell
			██████████ ██████████		
Dorothea	40s	Divorce	Instructor job centre/ ██████████ house wife	██████████ ██████████	4 years
Layla	20s	Illness	Student/Student	██████████	2-3 years
Irene	40s	Job loss(es)	Teacher/ ██████████ Marketing & Sales Manager	██████████	2 years
Johanna	40s	Job loss, divorce	Secretary/ Secretary	██████████ ██████████ ██████████	3 years
Gerda	50s	Divorce, job loss	██████████ nurse/ ██████████, housewife	██████████ ██████████	5 years
Ulrike	60s	Eviction, Loss of Home	Music Teacher/Music Teacher	██████████ ██████████	10 months
Sophie	40s	Job Loss	Journalist/ Journalist	██████████ ██████████	14 months

Name	Age	Poverty Trigger	Current Occupation/ Pre-Poverty Occupation(s)	Current Family/ Housing Status	Duration of Poverty Spell
Robert	60s	Drug Abuse	Social Worker/military man & drug dealer	██████████ ██████████	3 years
Tim	60s	Drug Abuse/ Illness	Pensioner & landlord/ Stock Broker	██████████ ██████████	4-5 years (re-current)
Estefania	30s	Insolvency/ Divorce	Restaurant Owner/ Restaurant Owner	██████████ ██████████	2 years
Lissie	50s	Divorce	██████████ Nurse/Housewife	██████████ ██████████	3 years

Autobiographies

As stressed by Frank (2000) in an illness narrative genre, a self that has become what it never expected to be due to adverse life events requires repair. As such, telling or writing autobiographical stories is a privileged means of such repair. When writing one's autobiography in the wake of turning points in life, often involving traumatic life experiences, authors engage in re-storying their lives to bring back coherency and order to their (narrative) identity. In this sense, autobiographical writing involves helping oneself (Woodstock, 2006) through meaning-making of past events associated with adversity in an attempt to re-build a shattered sense of self (McAdams and Jones, 2017). Notable autobiographical examples, amongst many others, that construct meaning out of adversity and also form a staple of contemporary popular literature are

Victor Frankl's (1959) autobiographical telling of how he survived the Holocaust and life in concentration camps, the grief account written by American author Joan Didion in which she makes sense of the death of her husband (Didion, 2006, cited in Turley and O'Donohoe, 2012), or Elizabeth Smart's (2014) memoirs in which she reveals how she survived abduction and details her transformation from victim to an advocate that works to prevent similar crimes in the future.

Amongst consumer researchers exploring the role of consumption when facing difficulties and trauma in life, the use of such autobiographical work has gained some interest in recent years. This is so as these reflective written accounts provide thick descriptions of people's experiences when making sense of adversities, including the symbolic use value of possessions during grief (Turley and O'Donohoe, 2012; O'Donohoe, 2015) or consumption practices, such as gift-giving in an identity stripping imprisonment context (Klein et al., 2015).

Hence, this study argues for the inclusion of autobiographical work from transitory poor consumers in the systematic research on traumatised consumers. In fact, the autobiographical accounts I have chosen for this study are replete with examples of material loss, lifestyle displacement (e.g. losing one's home and being forced to abandon pre-transition social circles), consumer coping (e.g. hiding their welfare recipient status) and how these authors re-story such unpleasant and disconcerting experiences built into their biography into a meaningful whole retrospectively from the perspective of a poverty survivor.

Due to data confidentiality reasons, no summary of these autobiographies linked to each author's name and publication can be revealed as their accounts have not only served as case studies for this research, but the majority of authors also took part in

the subsequent interview stage. However, in more general terms, all of these authors positioned their written accounts of overcoming poverty as a story of personal development and change. Their stories detailed consequences of becoming downwardly mobile from an individual's or a familial perspective and thematised different routes into and out of poverty concerning shifting social roles and standings over time (e.g. from pre-poverty company owner to post-poverty at-home father vs. pre-poverty middle-class housewife to post-poverty entrepreneur), at the same time making use of differing literary forms (e.g. self-help genre, religious biography, sociological essay). This dynamic view of identity construction is best expressed by one of the author's opening passage, noting that "this is a story about the kind of person I have become".

In this sense, the autobiographical accounts have provided me with an initial window into the long-termed processes of identity construction (Riessman, 2008) and related consumption implications, thereby adhering to the key aim of this study. The use of autobiographies has equally resulted in a modification of the initial research aim of my study considering its consumption scope. More precise, at the very outset, the study sought to investigate the impact of identity disruption on consumer-brand relationships (Fournier, 1998). However, this narrow scope was broadened in the wake of extracting consumption content from the autobiographies in relation to authors' identity stories in terms of focusing more on general lifestyle and consumption practices (Holt, 1998; Thompson et al., 2018), such as hobbies, art, home décor, food, clothing, reading, movies, travelling, budgeting strategies, or just "stuff" (Miller, 2010).

One major shortcoming, however, that I have experienced in the initial stages of reading through the texts was that these "written accounts are inevitably restricted to

the material presented by the author” where I have not been able “to seek elaboration or reflection on particular aspects of an experience but must rely on analysis of the text” (Turley and O’Donohoe, 2012:1338). Indeed, my occasional impression when reading specific parts from these autobiographies was that authors’ sense-making efforts feel forced and are, borrowing the words from McAdams (2006:261), “too upbeat to be true”, which resulted in unanswered questions. Certainly, one reason for partially interpreting these autobiographical accounts as deceiving may be grounded in their moral and persuading functioning. As such, their published work does not only intent to help the authors themselves coming to grips with their poverty spell, yet also others (their readers) facing similar adversities by melding their personal healing narratives into meta-narratives of positive thinking, which, in turn, form the basis of self-help literature (Woodstock, 2006). Hence, writing stories is invariably situated and strategic, always crafted with audience in mind (Riessman, 2008). This potential issue echoes Bamberg’s (2007) concern, who, although acknowledging the value of autobiographies for making sense of one’s self, equally critiques them for being stylised. In order to enrich narrative identity research methodologically, he calls for a combination of “big stories” (such as autobiographies) and “small stories”, with the latter taking place in social interactions and dialogues with the researcher.

Following this advice, this study has sought to use triangulation in terms of aggregating data from different methods (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989), which will be further discussed in the analysis section of this chapter. Wallendorf and Belk (1989) encourage data triangulation in interpretive consumer research due to providing richer and deeper interpretations of behaviours and the phenomena being studied in a broader sense. Hence, in this study I have also stepped into the lifeworlds and normal everyday

existences of autobiography authors by interviewing them on a face-to-face basis, thereby following Bamberg's (2007; see also Bamberg and Demuth, 2016) aforementioned suggestion to co-operatively study narrative identity construction in front of one's eyes through engagement and dialogue with informants besides relying on autobiographical accounts produced in hermetically sealed environments. Furthermore, other informants who have been recruited via newspaper advertisements and publicly posted flyers were interviewed in a face-to-face setting.

In the following section, the interview phase of the research will be further highlighted.

Long (Narrative) Interviews

As an interview technique, McCracken's (1988) long interview has been deployed. Long-interviews have been regarded as a useful tool to facilitate the documentation of informants' stories pertaining to a specific life event or a series of events in narrative consumer research (Shankar et al., 2001; Wattanasuwan et al., 2009). As such, the core premise of long interviews is that they are loosely structured permitting informants to reflect upon a particular issue in an unbiased and free-flowing manner (McCracken, 1988). Additionally, they permit and encourage the researcher to include prompting questions in the interview in order to pursue a thread of discussion in more detail (e.g. by asking informants to compare highlighted life scene x with life scene y, or further draw upon specific incidents discussed), and/or address issues gleaned from previous interviews using a priori questions (McCracken, 1988).

Considering such a co-operative reflection exercise involving both researcher and researched (Shankar et al., 2001), in my interviews with the four autobiography informants I intended to ask specific questions relating to issues identified in their

books. These questions were preceded by a general introduction talk about the research topic (temporary phase of social assistance and associated consumption (practices)) and clarification of ethical issues (the same approach was undertaken with non-autobiography informants). Regarding the latter mentioned informed consent (Flick, 2014), I emphasised 1) data confidentiality, 2) that informants get pseudo-named, 3) the expected length of interviews, including the potential for multiple interviews, as well as 4) the use of audio-recording of interviews with the opportunity to withdraw from the interview at any stage. After that, in order to glean a deeper insight into long-termed identity construction processes and consumption implications, I used a list of prepared, yet broad, probing questions during interviews to create a dialogue with informants. Some examples of questions relating to either key terms emerging from informants' autobiographical testimonies that needed clarification, or concerning the recall of exceptional incidents in which the research topic was implicated (McCracken, 1988) are shown below:

- “In your book, you have briefly mentioned “Aldi instead of Kaiser’s” (*German discount/premium retail brand*) when you joined the breadline. What exactly did you mean here?
- It is interesting what you said in your book about rituals and the importance of your kitchen table. What else can you say about this table?
- You have said in your book that the experience of living on benefits has changed you? How would you describe your lifestyle now compared to the time before Hartz IV (German Benefit System)?
- In your book, you describe your first encounter with the job centre. You said, that you have felt incredibly “rich” in this scene. Could you talk more about this?

Interviews with autobiography authors were highly satisfying for me due to their coherent narrations following a chronological order and adopting a general plotline that configured these temporal elements into a whole (Mishler, 1995). More precise, informants added to and clarified consumption content regarding important scenes and events detailed in their written accounts without deviating from the topic, and connecting the missing links between core episodes from the past outlined in their books and their impact upon the now and future. They opened up to me and enjoyed getting prompted about specific chapters and life scenes described in their books. This was due to the existence of a good deal of trust and rapport between me and my informants (Shankar et al., 2001; Van Mannen, 2011) considering my appreciation for and great interest in their life stories. As such, informants acknowledged that I intensively engaged with their autobiographical accounts. Metaphorically speaking, I was “breathing their life stories”, also reflected in the used condition of physical copies of informants’ autobiographies (filled with post-it notes and annotations) that I brought to each of the interviews. All of these interviews with authors took place between December 2014 and September 2015, running parallel with the other 12 non-autobiographical informants’ interviews.

With regard to informants who have not written an autobiographical account, and, hence, where I had no prior (indirect) connection to them, I reinforced my position as a doctoral student whose aim was to learn more about temporary poverty and lifestyle implications (e.g. daily activities, shopping, hobbies, belongings, sport, home décor, art, vacations, budgeting strategies). Transmitting such an “outsider” status was seen as an advantage (McCracken, 1988; Jafari et al., 2013). Informants found it highly stimulating and were even enthusiastic about the opportunity to have an active voice

(Atkinson, 2002) when sharing their temporarily disrupted life stories and identities with me from an insider's perspective. Against this backdrop one informant stated after the end of an interview being "happy" about the fact that their story "finally finds its way to the outside world".

Interviews (with both autobiography and non-autobiography informants) were mostly conducted in people's homes and, occasionally, in a preferred location in their lived environments, such as cafes, restaurants, or on the terrace of a sports club in order to provide a secure space for them to talk about their life passages and identity, but also to elicit associated consumption phenomena. Following McCracken's (1988) routine to start long interviews with "grand tour questions", I usually began each interview with some of the following questions referring to their past experience of a poverty transition:

- "How did it come to this rupture in your life?"
- "What exactly happened at that time?"
- "Could you please describe the event(s) having led to a phase of reduced disposable income?"
- "Could you please describe your lifestyle after having slipped into a phase of reduced disposable income?"
- "How would you describe your current lifestyle after having overcome a period of financial hardship?"
- "Does your current lifestyle differ from the one you had during a period of low-income and before?"

In using these broad questions to initiate the interview and capturing important aspects of their life histories, I followed others' suggestions to focus on turning point moments

in people's life stories (Denzin, 1989; Shankar et al., 2001; Frank, 2013; McAdams and Bowman, 2013) in order to maximise their capacity of self-reflection and stay within the boundaries of the research topic. From there, the core aim was to develop a conversation, which usually results in an in-depth understanding of subjective meanings of informants' lived experiences (Hopkinson and Hogg, 2006). However, contrary to autobiography author informants, interviews with these informants posed a few challenges and difficulties in the early stages to generate adequate knowledge.

One of these challenges consisted of the requirement to listen with great care to informants' detailed and often complex descriptions of life episodes across time, and how they were linked to each other within a coherent plot. This was not an easy task as some informants frequently jumped topics and did not follow a chronological order of their lives where they should have ideally begun at the time of the poverty transition and then worked their way up to the present time. Hence, they resisted my attempt to partially control meaning in terms of fragmenting their lives into thematic categories (Riessman, 2008). I soon realised informants' stories were more complex shifting back and forth between different episodes of their lives, which also meant that identifying relevant consumption phenomena within these stories as well as developing probing questions at the same time proved to be difficult. The reason for this was that informants, in general, were allowed to go wherever they wanted in their telling of events without being verbally interrupted (McCracken, 1988; Hirschman, 1992; Atkinson, 2002). Further, I decided in my first interview to refrain from using field notes, so that informants did not get irritated in telling their stories by my writing.

I initially found this a draining exercise ("listening-interpreting-remembering-probing"). After the interview had ended, I was full of regret to have missed out on

clarifying important terms used, life sequences described that were relevant to the research topic, or consumption examples mentioned. As a resolution, I decided to use a sheet of paper in the following interviews to jot down notes, prompting questions, and important life sequences mentioned in order to revisit them where appropriate and understand informants' comments more specifically (see Illustration 2.). Furthermore, the field notes were used to capture the general atmosphere of the interview and narrative tone adopted (e.g. optimistic, pessimistic, progressive, regressive) by informants when telling their temporary experience of poverty as a story.

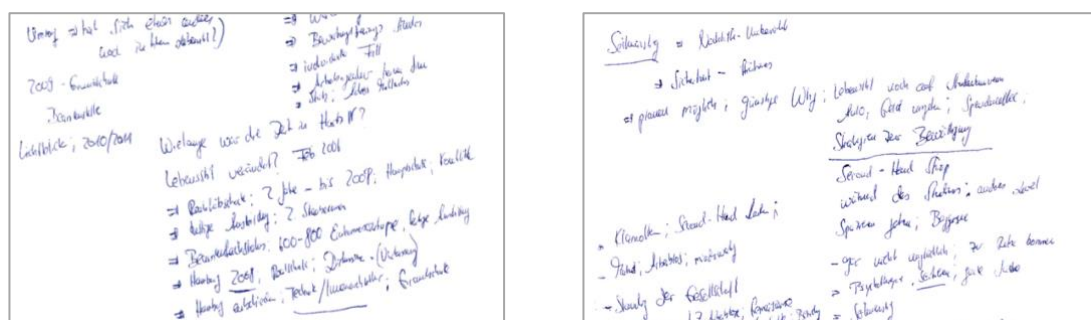


Illustration 2. Exemplary field notes from August 2015

Another useful prompting strategy used throughout interviews was “auto-driving” (McCracken, 1988), encouraging informants to comment on and use artefacts relevant to recalling their experience of temporary poverty and to keep them on track. The material used consisted of old photo albums with pictures of informants taken during poverty spells, or documentation relating to social benefits and job centre interactions. Another informant shared a published women’s magazine article about her divorce and resultant downward life trajectory, which served as an additional source of income during a phase of income restraint (see Illustration 3.). Such external stimuli were used

to foreground and objectify informants' past experiences (McCracken, 1988), thereby creating further discussions between informants and myself.

The illustration has been removed from the digital version of the thesis by the author due to copyright reasons

Illustration 3. Old women's magazine article (in German) used for auto-driving

Considering these many-faceted aspects of interviews conducted in this study, they used to be invariably long, usually lasting between 90 minutes up to three hours. Furthermore, often more than one interview was necessary to fully capture relevant consumption phenomena linked to the different life scenes discussed and, more importantly, to understand how they framed their stories with a plot (Mishler, 1995; McAdams, 2006) in order to make sense of past identity disruption. All interviews ended only when new and relevant information was no longer forthcoming. The following section presents data analysis procedures.

Data Analysis

The 14 long interviews and four autobiographies, including field notes of interviews, containing stories of temporary poor consumers served as the primary data sources for this study. As indicated above, while reading through autobiographies, I already started interpreting the data. This interpretation-on-the-go approach served as a guidance for subsequent interviews with autobiography author informants, and helped to clarify any inconsistencies in their written stories, and to generate further understanding on their evolving selves after disruption. Equally, as interviews with non-autobiography informants accumulated, detecting important events, life scenes, overall storylines and implicated consumption phenomena during interviews helped me and informants to co-operatively reach consensus and “mutually engage on a voyage of discovery” (Shankar et al., 2001:444). Hence, in line with my epistemological approach, interpretation in this study has been an ongoing, collaborative event, not necessarily restricted to the time after an interview has ended (Spiggle, 1994; Shankar et al., 2001).

Nevertheless, since narrative researchers need to construct texts for further analysis (Riessman, 2008), I also transcribed all audio-recorded interviews verbatim into 450 single-spaced A4 pages and saved as Microsoft Word Documents after each interview. As transcribing has been considered to be not only a technical activity, but also a form interpretation and analysis (Riessman, 2008), I transcribed all data myself as I wanted to relive the interview focusing again upon the narrative tone (e.g. optimistic vs. pessimistic), storyline, including turning points, the atmosphere, and general emotions when informants told their tales of living through and overcoming poverty. All transcriptions included pauses, silences, and other vocalisations, such as laughter,

frustration, or anger. After that, for accuracy reasons, each transcript was reviewed against respective audio recordings and compared with field notes. Such an exploratory analysis gave a general sense of the data with initial ideas being jotted down forming the basis for preliminary, or “pre-coding coding practices, and also organising questions for follow-up interviews (Saldaña, 2013).

Building upon this exploratory analysis of data, it has to be stressed that the interviews were carried out in German language with German consumers. As such, at the beginning of the data analysis process I started to translate selected transcripts from German into English, yet soon thereafter decided to refrain from doing so. I realised that parts of the lived experiences of informants expressed through language and meanings attached to their narratives (Riessman, 2008) became “lost in translation” (Flick, 2014:208) at times. Furthermore, informants almost seemed to turn into a different kind of person during translation of their textual stories, creating a felt distance between me and informants. As highlighted by Connelly and Clandinin (2006:480) narrative researchers are “always in an inquiry relationship with participants’ lives”, hence, they cannot subtract themselves from relationship (Shankar et al., 2001). In order redress such a relational issue, no translation of the interview transcripts from German into English took place. However, I selected quotations and ideographic case studies of informants and translated them into English for presentation and reporting of the findings.⁸

In a similar vein, in the initial stages of the data analysis, I started to store, organise and also analyse textual data using a computer assisted qualitative analysis software

⁸ Please see the Appendix for an exemplary interview transcript in German language

(CAQDAS), such as NVIVO, which has become “de rigueur in qualitative research, as it sometimes seems” (Elliot, 2018:2857). However, my impression was that it would further detach myself from informants and their broad identity stories. Therefore, I relied upon manual textual analysis using paper and pencil on hard copies of the transcripts and autobiographies (Saldaña, 2013). Since the number of individual codes accumulated extensively over time, I started to manage them in a code list, or “code book” (Saldaña, 2013:24) in Microsoft Excel with codes being monitored, re-fined and re-organised periodically and clustered into higher-order categories and/or themes at later stages as data analysis progressed. This thematic analysis will be outlined in the following section.

Developing Sub-themes, Themes and Typologies

This study has followed the advice of Saldaña (2013) considering that coding is a pre-requisite for qualitative researchers to make sense of the data. Coding data may give shape to the empirical and categorise it in order to progress towards the more general, higher-level, and abstract (themes) within individual units of and across data (sets), eventually leading to theory generation (Spiggle, 1994; Saldaña, 2013). In the earlier stages of analysis approximately 500 different codes accumulated across this study’s data set comprising interview, autobiographical and field note data. Due to the iterative approach adopted (Spiggle, 1994) with an ongoing analysis shaping the back-and-forth movement (reading) between parts of each autobiography/interview transcript and its entirety as well as noting similarities across autobiography and interview data, this large number of codes was eventually reduced to 200. Furthermore, code reduction and modification was facilitated by tacking back and forth primary data (autobiographies, interviews, field notes) and previous literature on identity disruption,

consumer coping and narrative identity (re-) construction following difficult life transitions. As such, prior theory served as a guidance and inspiration, similar to other interpretive consumer research studies before (e.g. Schouten, 1991; Saatcioglu and Ozanne, 2013), to interpret spoken and written narratives in relation to processes of long-term identity development after disruption. At the same time, I sought to search (inductively) for novel insights from the data (Fournier, 1998; Riessman, 2008).

Such a combination of deduction (theoretical frame) and induction (coding from the data on the basis of informants' lived experiences) is not uncommon when coding for categories and/or themes in narrative research (Riessman, 2008), and trying to detect and explain processes underlying change in consumer identities due to disruptive events (Giesler and Thompson, 2016). On the one hand, this procedure provided me with an interpretive lens through which the complexity in transitory poor consumers' identity re-construction over time could be more meaningfully understood (Giesler and Thompson, 2016). As such, McAdams' (2006) contamination and redemption plotlines have served as an enabling theory to explain change in the longitudinal data set (autobiographies and interviews). On the other hand, I intended to avoid that my analytical lens overrides informants' lived stories and subjective meanings (Fournier, 1998) assigned to overcoming poverty and their implications on consuming identities. Consequently, I constructed a mix of different inductive and deductive codes. Here, interpretive codes (Braun and Clarke, 2012) were deployed, which invoked my theoretical framing to make sense of what informants said (e.g. "*self-change through coping tactic*"). Concerning the former inductive coding approach, descriptive and emic, or in vivo codes relevant to the research questions (Saldaña, 2013) were developed. These codes stayed close to the content of the data and informants'

language and meaning (e.g. “*eating good food created moments of happiness*” (*during poverty*)).

However, apart from solely looking at the content of data (i.e. *what* was said about transitioning into and out of poverty and associated consumption phenomena), I also adopted a structural approach to coding accounting for *how* informants used their language to convey content and incorporate it into a holistic identity plot that relives past events in relation to present concerns and an envisioned future (Thompson, 1996). Hence, the structural approach to analysing data in this research intended to emphasise how informants weaved their stories of overcoming temporary poverty together in a sequential and coherent manner. Although Riessman (1993) has argued that a thematic analysis focusing upon the content of data should not precede a structural analysis, other commentators have equally acknowledged that the distinction between these two types of analysis is often blurred and, therefore, cannot be entirely separated from each other (Escalas and Bettman, 2000; Riessman, 2008; Saldaña, 2013). Similar to thematic analysis, a structural analysis is concerned with content, yet “attention to narrative form adds insights beyond what can be learned from referential meanings alone” (Riessman, 2008:77). Hence, in this study I have sought to enrich content-based codes with a structural analysis of narratives (Escalas and Bettman, 2000) by adopting narrative coding techniques (Saldaña, 2013). Here, I analysed the coded content according to the movement between lives before transitioning into poverty, while living in it and thereafter using McAdams’ (2006) redemption and contamination sequences (from bad to good/good to bad) in order to reflect informants’ long-termed identity (re-) constructions after disruption. As such, for redemption sequences, I used

a selection of McAdams' (2006) six linguistic genres outlined in the literature review (recovery, enlightenment, development, emancipation). As for contamination structural trajectories, language types of tragedy, stagnation (stasis), and regression were considered (Frye, 1957; Gergen and Gergen, 1988; McAdams, 2006; Ourahmoune, 2016). Additionally, structural codes looked at the narrative tone (positive, negative, optimistic, pessimistic; Saldaña, 2013) in regards to content identified. Table VII. provides an exemplary illustration of how both content and structure of informants' narratives were combined through different coding techniques.

Table VII.

Combination of content-based and narrative (structural) coding

Coding Technique	Content (Exemplary) (What is said?)	Linguistic Genre (How is it said?)	Narrative Tone (How is it said?)
<i>Descriptive</i>	learned how to structure life (during poverty)	Development	Optimistic
<i>In Vivo</i>	“experiencing true happiness affords suffering” (post- poverty)	Enlightenment	Positive
<i>Interpretive</i>	coping with downward mobility through resembling pre-poverty life	Stagnation	Negative

The combination of content-based and narrative (structural) codes were clustered into major sequential categories/sub-themes and/or broader themes. These higher-order themes display the linkage among elements of the data “as parts of an unfolding temporal development culminating in the denouement” (Polkinghorne, 1995:5), that is its distillation into two different meta-themes (Saldaña, 2013) or socio-culturally-constituted narrative typologies (Riessman, 2008; Giesler and Thompson, 2016) termed the “Redemptive Consumers” and the “Resilient Survivors”. The core themes identified link back to the research questions and main aim of this study, which relate to the tracing of identity development and change considering multiple, interconnected events over time (transitions into and out of poverty). Figures 3. and 4. on the following pages provide an overview of the thematic development from codes (exemplary) to subthemes and/or themes informing the two cultural typologies. These typologies narratively link together pre-poverty, poverty and post-poverty experiences in a different fashion to generate contrasting post-poverty consuming identities.

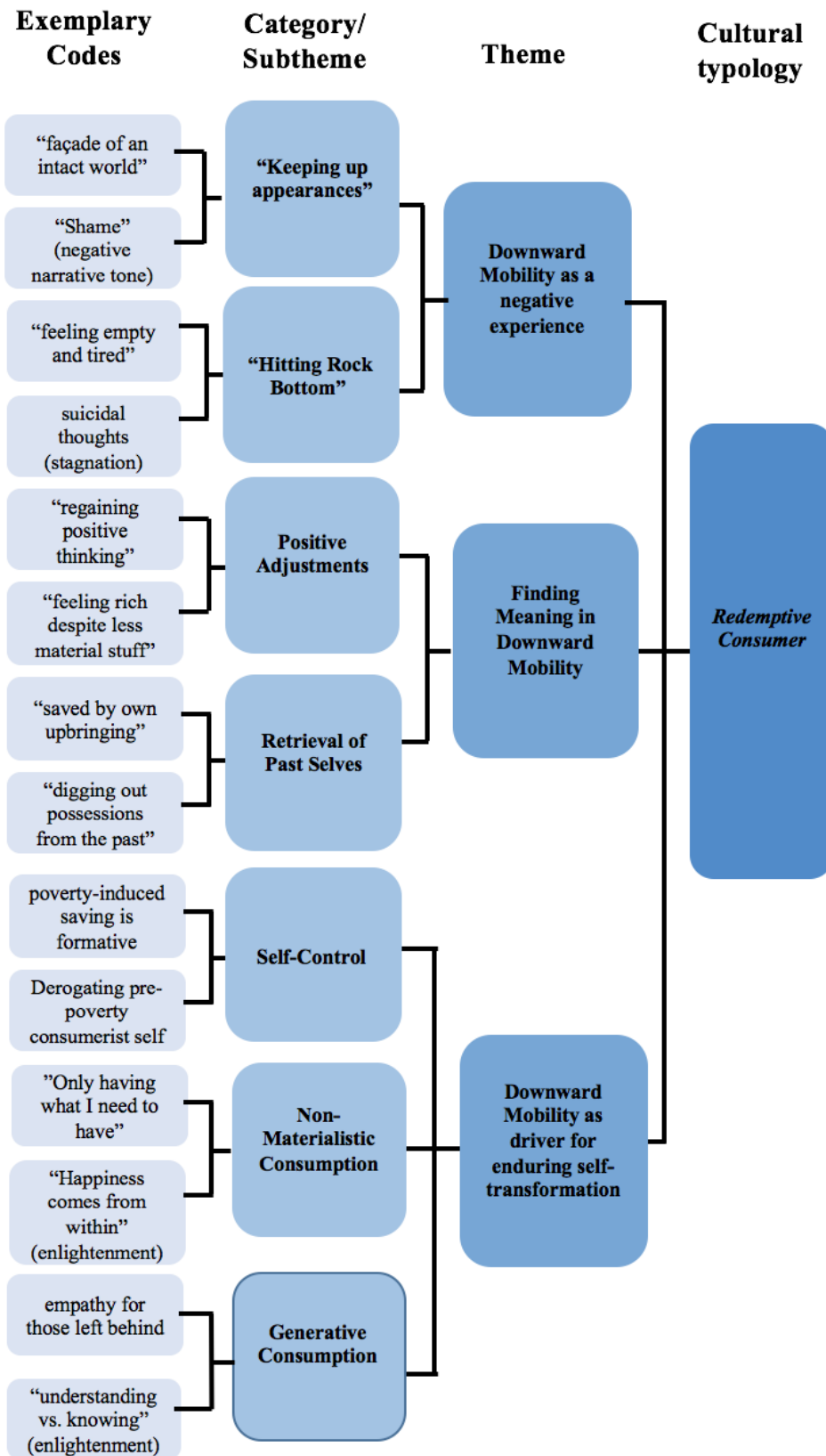


Figure 3. Redemptive consumer typology

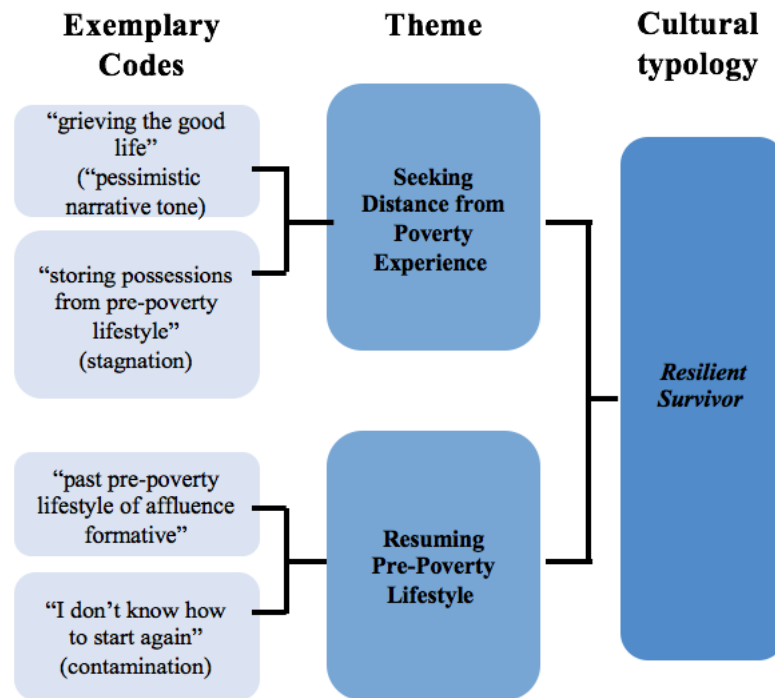


Figure 4. Resilient survivor typology

As a next step in the data analysis procedure, I constructed archetypal case studies, which is a recommended way in thematic narrative analysis to illustrate themes identified and reduce the large amount of data into a coherent story (Riessman, 2008). These cases highlight the unfolding temporal development of making sense of temporary poverty by incorporating the subthemes, themes and associated meanings identified into one coherent story that focuses on consumption phenomena (adhering to both content and structure of informants' narratives). Two of these cases have also been used in the presentation of the findings (see next chapter). They illustrate marked variations in informants' interpretation of finding meaning in the same experience, that is overcoming a temporary poverty spell from a redemptive consumer and resilient

survivor narrative perspective. Since the majority of informants have formed part of the Redemptive Consumer Typology, main emphasis has been put on analytic story development from data regarding these consumers' identity evolutions (see findings section). The following table depicts each informant's affiliation to either of the two contrasting typologies.

Table VIII.

Overview of informants' affiliation to cultural typologies

Informant (Age)	Narrative Typology
<i>Christian (60s)</i>	Redemptive Consumer
<i>Ulla (40s)</i>	Redemptive Consumer
<i>Wiebke (30s)</i>	Redemptive Consumer
<i>Dorothea (40s)</i>	Redemptive Consumer
<i>Lissie (50s)</i>	Redemptive Consumer
<i>Tim (60s)</i>	Redemptive Consumer
<i>Johanna (40s)</i>	Redemptive Consumer
<i>Sophie (40s)</i>	Redemptive Consumer
<i>Robert (60s)</i>	Redemptive Consumer
<i>Estefania (30s)</i>	Redemptive Consumer
<i>Layla (20s)</i>	Redemptive Consumer
<i>Irene (40s)</i>	Redemptive Consumer
<i>Ulrike (60s)</i>	Resilient Survivor
<i>Gerda (50s)</i>	Resilient Survivor

Trustworthiness of the Research

In interpretive qualitative research the value of the terms rigor and validity, that is posing the question why should one believe the field-work done by a single-researcher (Bosk, 1979) has been commonly argued (Hopkinson and Hogg, 2006). Due to its positivistic connotations, interpretive researchers (including those studying consumers) have increasingly shifted towards using the term “trustworthiness” instead of using “validity” as an important “test” of truth for their research (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989; Fournier, 1998; Hopkinson and Hogg, 2006; Thompson, Arnould and Giesler, 2013). With regard to narrative research, Riessman (2008) refers to two levels of trustworthiness, that is evaluating the truthfulness of the story told by a research participant and the trust in the analysis and interpretation, or the story told by the researcher (Hopkinson and Hogg, 2006).

Concerning the former evaluation of informant-implicated truthfulness in this study, several indications have been given throughout this methodology chapter in terms of having deployed triangulation (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989) across data sources from different methods (e.g. autobiographies followed by long interviews), or across interviews and varied stories (e.g. undertaking follow-up interviews with the same informants collecting multiple stories about transitory poorness and consumption phenomena). Here, initially, I sought to verify some degree of correctness in the way how certain sequences reported by informants “really” unfolded in their stories. However, I came to a realisation during this process that it was not so much about checking if every detail was correct. In line with my ontological and epistemological stance, rather evaluating subjective meaning-making processes of poverty survivor narrators regarding the way how they (re-)interpreted past events and re-storied their

lives into a coherent whole (Riessman, 1993; Mishler, 1995) were given priority. This is in line with other narrative identity researchers (e.g. Atkinson, 2002; McAdams, 2006; Riessman, 2008) reinforcing that people's stories about themselves are not entirely accurate re-collections about the past in terms of facts, yet rather interpretations of it to create meaning. Investigators, in turn, interpret these interpretations. Here, they tend to favour evaluations of informants' "coherency systems" in which their life stories, including turning points, are embedded over "factuality" of events (Riessman, 2008:187).

When referring to these researcher interpretations of informants' meaning-making interpretations surrounding temporary poverty and identity development, a common way to evaluate trustworthiness is "member-checking" to gauge the credibility of both researchers' and researched "interpretative claims" (Fournier, 1998:348). Thus, in this study, an initial step to obtain corroboration, or "test" the accuracy of researcher-researched interpretations was to return my interview transcripts to informants via email. The majority of the informants agreed with their (written) stories outlined in individual transcripts. A few of them replied to me that they were not interested in reading the transcripts reinforcing that they "trusted" me. And a minor proportion asked for amendments (e.g. to further clarify certain statements made in their interviews). This latter strategy of sharing transcripts with informants and inviting them for revision also links back to the importance of the collaborative, social constructionist (Shankar et al., 2001) perspective of doing narrative research in this study. As such, a selection of informants who have raised their further interest in getting updated about the progress of the study, were provided with both individual vignettes (in German) summarising their life stories of overcoming poverty as well as

copies of two conference publications (in English). This strategy of further involving informants in the analysis and interpretation process to increase trustworthiness is in line with Lincoln and Guba (1985:314) arguing that data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with those groups from whom the data were originally collected. For ethical reasons alone (Riessman, 2008) I found it important to find out what informants think of my interpretations of their lives. Given the sensitivity of the conversations I had with all informants, I felt a responsibility to give them a chance to comment on my (analytical) representations of their (formerly disrupted) identities in order to avoid misunderstandings, unmasking, and feelings of being exploited or wounded (Estroff, 1995) by my interpretation. As such, the sharing of selected interpretations of informants' narratives resulted in mixed reactions. One of them found the conclusions "too theoretical" preventing them from further reading ("those are just hollow words"). Another informant said it was "inspiring" and the majority responded with corroboration, occasionally coupled with some degree of "epiphany" ("I have not thought about it from that perspective, but this could actually be true"). In line with Schouten (1991) complete agreement, yet, was less important than maintaining dialogue and co-analysis (Riessman, 2008) between me and informants so that the theoretical frame did not override their subjective meanings assigned to lived temporary poverty experience. This collaborative strategy has led to revision and, occasionally, even complete deletion of some categories, or themes and the merging of typologies over time.

Apart from the highlighted researcher-researched steady co-analysis to "test" my theoretical interpretations, also colleagues from the interpretive consumer research community commented on my analytical summaries and interview transcripts.

Although, I coded my data alone, informants' case studies, including subthemes and themes were shared and discussed with my supervisors and equally presented at academic conferences (e.g. Macromarketing, EACR) and doctoral workshops (e.g. Consumption, Markets, and Culture in Bilkent, Turkey) in order to ensure that my interpretations made sense.

Finally, building upon the latter continuous co-analytical functioning between researched, researcher, and academic peers, it was sought to increase trustworthiness also via presenting my analytical story of informants' narratives in an informative, detailed and plausible, yet also critical manner. Hence, I have always supported theoretical claims made with rich accounts from informants, added historical context, attended to language, illuminated the dialogical nature of the narratives, and also considered alternative interpretations (Riessman, 2008) to account for those readers who have not been taking part in the storytelling event of informants. Furthermore, the two different typologies identified (Redemptive Consumers and Resilient Survivors) may converge thematically occasionally, yet also widely split apart, thereby offering contrasting views upon identity (re)-construction after a disruptive event. This is in line with Riessman (2008), who affirms that making sense analytically of both convergence and divergence increases trustworthiness.

Chapter Summary

This chapter's main function was to give a detailed overview of the methodological considerations that have led to inferences made during the course of this study. It was highlighted how the core philosophical underpinnings and assumptions surrounding interpretivism inform the narrative research approach adopted in this study, how

narrative research techniques were deployed to answer research questions, how collected data were analysed, and the way trustworthiness issues have been addressed. Throughout the course of highlighting this process, it was hoped to transmit to the reader that conducting this study has been an ongoing task of critical self-awareness of how the research was done in terms of challenges encountered and tackled, and the impact of critical decisions made along the way.

The following findings chapter will present this analytical story of informants' narratives offering two contrasting perspectives on identity re-construction after overcoming poverty, that is the tales of Redemptive Consumers and Resilient Survivors.

Chapter Five: Findings

This chapter presents the core findings of this study. Specifically, it will highlight the two contrasting narratives identified that make sense of past disrupted identities in a different way, that is the Redemptive Consumer narrative and the Resilient Survivor narrative.

In the following first section of this chapter, an idiographic case study will be presented highlighting the life narrative of one of the study's research informants (**Ulla**) forming part of the redemptive self-narrative. Here, particularly, major turning points in life in terms of coping with adversities the temporary poverty experience brought about and how the (consuming) identity is re-constructed and legitimised after overcoming this phase of relative income poverty is taken into consideration. Considering this case as a point of departure, subsequently, key supporting themes and sub-themes considered within and across informants, and across both interview and autobiographic data (Spiggle, 1994) will be presented and discussed.

The Redemptive Consumers

Ulla is in her late forties, re-married and a mother of four. Currently, she works as a

██
██████████ where she employs other ██████████ professionals. Besides, she offers executive writing seminars and lectures, passing on her knowledge as a bestselling author of several books and articles that mainly deal with her own experiences of having become a successful entrepreneur. Over the last 5 years, she has been awarded with prestigious prizes acknowledging her accomplishments as a female entrepreneur in Germany.

Despite her successful career and a “*totally comfortable*” financial situation where she currently does “*not have to be worried about money*”, Ulla, yet, pursues a lifestyle that is marked by inconspicuousness, self-restriction and a deliberate “*simplify your life*” attitude. In the same vein, she propagates a critical stance towards consumption. For example, she does not own a car and prefers to use “*cheaper*” options such as her bicycle or [REDACTED] public transport system. Recently Ulla’s eldest son, who is a “*Greenpeace activist*”, has introduced her to the commercial short-term rental concept of “*carsharing*”, such as BMW’s “*DriveNow*” who operate in large German cities. Consequently, she has started to “*occasionally*” make use of this mode of transportation due to being fascinated with current trends relating to the sharing economy and collaborative consumption, considering forms of possessions and uses, which do not involve ownership (Belk, 2014). Ulla refers to this phenomenon as a “*new we-culture*” facilitated through Internet technology. Against this background, she speaks enthusiastically about her adolescent children’s encounters made with nonmonetary travel exchanges, such as “*Couchsurfing*”, helping travellers by creating a network of private couches worldwide to sleep on for free while on vacation (Botsman and Rogers, 2010).

Moreover, having been in transition to becoming an empty nester with only her youngest daughter still living in the same household, Ulla recently swapped her rented four-bedroom flat for a smaller, two-bedroom flat. Within this context, the following quote from the interview reinforces her emphasis on not being overly attached to material objects and an appreciation of the liberating effect of disposing of stuff:

(...) same thing when my youngest daughter and I moved to the smaller flat here in [REDACTED] about two months ago. We radically disposed of so many different

things. And only a few things remained. Very refreshing...and we kept only the really great stuff, no clutter at all, everything really high-quality and nice-looking and we took a lot of the old stuff to refugee camps, which made us feel very good. And we have kept just a few things and that's really liberating. I mean you can see it everywhere these days, right? "Simplify your life" or whatever, but those things that you are really attached to...I always question myself critically, am I really attached to it? Am I really feeling worse, if I don't have this or that anymore?

The above quote equally indicates Ulla's empathy for those who are less well-off in society when mentioning donations made to refugees who have recently come to [REDACTED]. This social commitment is further reflected in personal consumption rituals, such as eating a *"fairtrade dark chocolate bar everyday"*, which makes her *"feel good and hopefully the cocoa farmers as well"*. Also, Ulla's children's consumption practices are in tune with her own values focusing upon socially responsible behaviours and a tendency towards object detachment and non-ownership. Despite pursuing a lifestyle that values simple things in life as well as empathising with others who may find themselves in more precarious circumstances, Ulla, however, has not always acted this way.

Going back in time 14 years from now, she and her family lived a middle-class life that stood in stark contrast to their current one. They were staying in *"a villa by the lake"* in one of [REDACTED] upscale neighbourhoods and owned a motorcycle as well as three cars, including a VW Bus that Ulla's then-husband, [REDACTED], bought for her and their joint children. When talking about this period of time, Ulla repeatedly refers to their *"huge household"*, including such middle-class *"insignia"* as a *"library in the living room"*, *"walls decorated with contemporary art"*, *"music school"*, *"ballet"* or *"sports club"* for the children and *"weekly food deliveries with fresh milk and*

organic vegetables". Contrary to her current role as a working mother, Ulla stayed at home at that time and fulfilled her duties as a housewife and mother. However, although objectively leading a privileged and happy middle-class lifestyle, when reflecting upon this episode of her life from today's perspective, Ulla adopts a pejorative narrative undertone, emphasising her unhappiness due to lacking sense of self-actualisation. Retrospectively, Ulla considers her time in the villa as a phase in which she "*wasn't herself*". "[I]t was just one aspect of [her] self" considering her role as a mother who became trapped in a "*golden cage*". Eventually, Ulla followed a different life path as already indicated in the earlier brief depiction of her current lifestyle.

Paradoxically, only through a rocky detour through downward mobility and a four-year long phase of financial hardship as a lone mother, Ulla has become the person she claims to be today. When Ulla was in her mid-thirties, back in [REDACTED], her then husband's businesses went sour. Despite Ulla's efforts to maintain the façade of a functioning middle-class family as long as possible by, for instance, reducing fixed costs, such as changing from private health insurance to the less expensive statutory insurance, applying for payment extensions for her children's private kindergarten, school fees, telephone and energy bills or "*trawling in cupboards for old currencies from past holidays to exchange them at a bad rate*" in order to cover for day-to-day expenses, the family's financial crash was unavoidable. Eventually, they lost both their house and cars due to public auction by court order. Due to lacking cooperation of her then-husband who was reluctant to accept his business failure and social descent at the same time becoming involved in ever more dubious business practices, Ulla felt "*high and dry*". Consequently, she left her then-husband and moved with her four children to a

small council flat in the suburbs of [REDACTED] considering that “*the rent was much cheaper there*”. These four years on a low-income were accompanied by a sheer endless job odyssey with short stints in underpaid and “*dubious*” part-time jobs such as telemarketing or as a private household help for an elderly woman, which, in Ulla, exacerbated feelings of uncertainty, self-doubts and lack of perspective. Within this context, she emphasises the many negative effects of her temporary “*breakdown of a middle-class existence*”. Nevertheless, Ulla views her “*newly acquired critical stance towards consumption*” and the concomitant rejection of her pre-poverty lifestyle as a positive outcome. More precise, she and her children had to adapt to a reduced household income of 182 Euros per week for five persons provided by the social welfare office. In order to cope with their new situation as a low-income family, she tried to maintain an intact family and carefree life for the children despite less money available by becoming more prone to valuing simple things and self-created experiences, such as having meals together with the whole family.

In light of this newfound appreciation for self-produced experiences and simplicity bringing about happiness, Ulla reports on further adaptive strategies while they were struggling financially, such as lending books from the public library for free, furnishing their home with bulk trash, camping in their small and ragged garden of their three-bedroom council flat where the family also started growing their own vegetables. Along with such a forced behavioural change in terms of the family’s consumption practices came a gradual change in perspective regarding Ulla’s own pre-poverty consumer lifestyle in her narrative, which she describes disdainfully as “*unreflective*” concerning her past purchasing behaviour. Retrospectively, Ulla even goes so far as to suggesting that her temporary descent in social status has had a

liberating and cleansing effect in the long run referring to it as a “*catharsis*”. Hence, she has embraced her temporary experience of downward mobility and forced loss with the benefit of hindsight, further buttressing that it has brought about something positive in terms of a “*truly personal development*”. This self-change has become reflected in her earlier mentioned current humble lifestyle that rejects exaggerating the meaning of possessions and instead puts more emphasis on self-restriction and pro-social civic engagement (e.g. making donations to refugees or people who struggle financially). In this sense, after having managed to move out of her four-year long spell of relative income poverty by starting her own business and becoming a successful entrepreneur, Ulla reinforces her “*changed perception of others around her who may find themselves in less privileged living and working conditions.*”:

Ulla’s whole development from an (upper) middle-class housewife to an independent working mother via a temporary phase of relative income poverty shows many resemblances to the themes of the redemptive language depicted by McAdams (2006) in the literature review (e.g. personal growth via adversity, or the social commitment towards those who are less well-off). As a consequence, Ulla’s story indicates the lengths that people may go to construct a redemptive narrative out of difficult, and unforeseen, life events (McAdams, 2006), such as transitioning into poverty and, eventually, overcoming it. She presents an identity story in which she is highly committed to making sense of the adversarial circumstances associated with social downward mobility in hindsight (e.g. losing her villa, moving to a council flat or adapting to a low-income with all its negative consequences for her and the children). This suggests that growth-inducing meanings have been made in the wake of many

difficulties and sufferings experienced while being in poverty, largely through narrative (McAdams and Jones, 2017).

This retrospective meaning-making informs a demonstrable positive transformation concerning her sense of self and concomitant behaviour as a consumer having successfully overcome a critical phase in her life. Within this context, Ulla clearly emphasises and legitimises, for instance, her improved performance of social roles (e.g. donating money due to a heightened awareness for those in need) and a more critical stance towards consumer society and its pitfalls in terms of spending money for things one may not actually need to find happiness and fulfillment in life (Shankar and Fitchett, 2002; Hyman, 2015). Regarding the latter Ulla highlights her newfound commitment to the non-material aspects of life, and her desire to spend time with family and nature, which are features commonly informing conceptions of an enacted voluntary simplicity lifestyle (Zavestoski, 2002; McGouran and Prothero, 2016). Against this background, Ulla expresses a deep disdain for her pre-poverty consuming self that exhibited a largely unreflective and “materialistic” consuming lifestyle.

Hence, as illustrated in Ulla’s case, past, pre-poverty, identity-laden consumption practices may be disposed of, revised or entirely renewed in light of experiences made while living in poverty and the resultant critical reflection upon the own pre-poverty existence in order to make sense of her present and envisioned future self. Simultaneously, it can be argued that this weaving of the narrative across time considering many setbacks and critical life scenes, may give a person’s life a moral justification, legitimacy and value of who s/he was, is and will be - a life narrative function that is claimed to be central to the making of a contemporary identity in terms of seeking to affirm a moral goodness in one’s life (MacIntyre, 1981; Taylor, 1989).

This orientation to the good in one's life, is, for example, expressed in Ulla's full embracement of a non-materialistic discourse regarding her present and envisioned future self, which usually implies that materialism is of little moral value (Shankar and Fitchett, 2002; Hyman, 2015).

Ulla's narrative identity pathway of redemption (McAdams, 2006) in regards to dealing with an unpleasant life experience such as downward mobility and overcoming it, serves as a point of departure for the next subchapters. Hence, in the following it will be initially highlighted how an experience of downward mobility may be primarily perceived as negative in terms of the emotional stress associated with "keeping up appearances" and the reaching of emotional low points in the aftermath of becoming downwardly mobile ("hitting rock bottom"). Subsequently, the progressive shift from negative life scenes to more optimistic ones will be depicted. Here, informants engage in a shift in perspective challenging their before poverty assumptive worlds and normative backgrounds. Such shifting perspectives assist informants in regards to fully embracing their coping, which, in turn, enables them to regulate their stressful emotional situations in an effective way. At the same time, it lays the foundation for an enduring identity re-cultivation that persists even after having overcome a spell of relative income poverty as shown in the final sections of this chapter.

Downward Mobility as a Negative Experience

As seen in the above case study, such a way of confronting a severe crisis in retrospective meaning with the goal to rebuild one's assumptive world in a positive way is a common thread in narratives of redemption (McAdams and Jones, 2017).

Although it may be compelling to experience and understand life difficulties in such redemptive terms, nevertheless, it may be argued that these life stories do not do full justice to the emotional dynamics of a traumatic event (McAdams, 2006), such as slipping into poverty. Following this logic, as suggested by Bauman (2005), poverty is a social and psychological condition that can lead to feelings of distress, agony and self-mortification. Especially, the interaction with the marketplace and being able to consume exhibit a strong ideological hold on consumers in terms of offering resources for both constructing one's identity (Belk, 1988; Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Baker, 2006) and processes of classification and social differentiation taking into account the sign value of goods (Baudrillard, 1998). Therefore, consumers are likely subject to experiencing a reduction of consumption opportunities caused by social downward mobility and decreased economic capital as something negative leading to discontent and psychological stress (Wendt, 2011). This corresponds to Hamilton and Catterall (2006a) suggesting that newly experienced exchange restrictions and negative consequences associated with transitions into poverty may be particularly extreme to those who have become accustomed to a higher level of consumption from their pre-transition lifestyles. Hence, the transitory poor may make comparisons between their pre-transition and post-transition lifestyles. Against this background, feelings of estrangement and identity disruptions in light of potential lifestyle displacements may arise (e.g. when being forced to moving to a less affluent neighbourhood and/or giving up valued possessions, Ulver-Sneistrup and Ostberg, 2011; Saatcioglu and Ozanne, 2013; Thompson et al., 2018). Further, downward mobility and the result of living on a low-income may exacerbate social disadvantages associated with social stigmatisation and reduced self-worth (Hamilton and Catterall, 2006b; Hamilton,

2012), or shame due to not being able to meet societal norms and patterns of consumption as a normal or viable consumer anymore (Chase and Walker, 2015).

In light of these psychosocial difficulties associated with an economic downhill life trajectory, McAdams (2006) stresses that finding redemption in every negative life scene would be too simplistic, deceiving and overly naïve. Not all suffering can and should be redeemed within people's (redemptive) life narratives. By contrast, he writes that: "[a]uthentic life narratives encompass the full panoply of emotional life. The best narrative identities draw upon many images, themes, and plots to provide a rich and differentiated sense of self" (262). In this sense, an unplanned life event, such as slipping into relative income poverty with all its negative consequences and sufferings may sometimes be just endured, at least partially, and adapted to, yet not necessarily fully redeemed in retrospect. This first theme of the redemptive narrative archetype deals with such negative experiences of downward mobility and reinforces the vulnerabilities, flaws and imperfections of informants' narratives in this study in light of their newfound experience of transitioning into relative income poverty. At the same time, this section charts that informants do neither trivialise nor deny the negative experiences that come with social downward mobility as they form an important part of their narrative identities in both autobiographies and interviews.

“Keeping up Appearances”

During the analysis of both autobiographical data and interviews, it became apparent that all of the informants' experiences of downward social mobility and newly experienced budget constraints had some severe negative affects upon retrospective assessments of emotional well-being during that time. As highlighted in previous

studies on consumers' experiences of grappling with downward economic mobility in the aftermath of unforeseen life events, such as job loss, divorce or illness (Hamilton and Catterall, 2006a; Ulver-Sneistrup and Ostberg, 2011; Schreurs et al., 2012; Saatcioglu and Ozanne, 2013; Thompson et al., 2018) informants expressed their desire to maintain a façade of consumption in order to protect their self-image or the image projected to others in terms of (still) leading an intact middle-class existence. Yet, both a felt pressure to hide the economic descent and the associated fear of getting caught by members of their social circles created a great source of distress and feelings of uncertainty about the future amongst a majority of informants forming part of the redemptive self narrative. For example, **Sophie (42)**, a former [REDACTED] who had been a welfare recipient for 14 months back in 2009 due to a slumping economy, which led to a “newspaper crisis” and the insolvency of the publishing house she worked with, discusses in her autobiographical account of being a first-time social assistance claimant:

“13 Euros a day. In the context of my little story, am not entirely sure if it is disappointing to admit that did not have to sleep outside in front of the [REDACTED] in a sleeping bag. Or that I did not start a romantic relationship with a long-term unemployed from [REDACTED] (a former working-class area of [REDACTED] that is now characterised by high rates of poverty and crime), did not have a regular seat at a kiosk selling alcoholic drinks and cheap food and did not become a street juggler wearing a hat (...) Instead, I was busy performing a mimicry. I was terrified, deeply scared, that someone would actually notice the state of fear I was in. So, I decided to pretend that I still lived a normal life, both to myself and others (...). Millions of other people engage in mimicry day in and day out. They buy high-tech technological gadgets for themselves, catamarans, waterbeds, or long-distance travels on credit. There are those who pretend to be stressed all the time in their jobs, get extensions for their hair or buy titles

of nobility. Marriage impostors at registry offices, investment swindlers on the telephone, and wrong doctors at hospitals. I just did the same that many members of a middle-class society usually do.”

Adopting an emotion-oriented coping perspective (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984) to interpret this quote, Sophie seeks to reinterpret her situation of facing a loss of status and the associated fear of getting caught, by drawing upon what Pearlin and Schooler (1978:6) have referred to as making positive social comparisons. Against this background, Sophie stresses that members of a middle-class (consumer) society often engage in different types of (simulated) conspicuous consumption (e.g. in regards to both leisure and busyness; Veblen, 1899; Bellezza, Paharia and Kainan., 2016) to infer a positive social status. Hence, by emphasising such a “we are all in the same boat” mentality (Karanika and Hogg, 2016), she intends to preserve her self-worth and cognitively neutralises the stress-inducing situation of hiding her downward mobility by judging her own situation as less severe or no more severe than faced by significant others in terms of their behaviours.

Besides drawing such positive social comparisons, informants also expressed various other emotional coping strategies to regulate or reduce negative feelings that arise in response to the threat of downward mobility. Here, a variety of related sentiments such as “grin and bear it”, “staying strong (for the children)”, “hoping for the best”, making social downward comparisons (“Others are in far less well-off situations”), or “positive thinking” were revealed throughout both narrative interviews and autobiographies. Especially regarding the latter, in an attempt to shift one’s attention to some positive aspects of downward mobility, informants often exhibited some degree of selectively ignoring negative consequences brought about by downward

mobility or tried to attribute less weight to them (Pearlin and Schooler, 1978) as illustrated by the following quote from **Estefania (38)**:

“The consequences were really serious. I was that close to giving up our flat. Insurances needed to be cancelled. Did I have more at that time? I am not entirely sure. It was really dramatic. But then I always had a relatively large cupboard filled with stuff. And I can cook, this means that I could always make a lot out of relatively modest means. And I always sold this in a good way to my children. “For the next week there will only be rice pudding” – I don’t know. Doesn’t cost anything. I think sometimes they were also happy that they didn’t have to eat vegetables all the time.”

Such an indicative example of putting emphasis on the positive outcomes (cooking cheaper, yet more tasty food alternatives that make children content) while being confronted with life strains associated with downward mobility (e.g. being threatened to give up one’s home) is echoed by **Ulla (47)**, whose life story has been introduced in the opening vignette of this chapter. Here, she reports that she started to regularly cook a “*comfort chicken soup after traditional recipe from her East Prussian grandmother*” for herself and the children in order to cope, for instance, with the imminent threat of attachment of property, or aggressive creditors of her husband’s struggling firm coming by the family’s home to claim their money:

Ulla: “After these events, the children always told me that it was great to get another comfort soup (...). Bingo, I thought! This is another way of viewing things, so when something bad was on the rise, I felt better as I was looking forward to making the soup for all of us”

It may be argued that these emotional coping strategies presented also serve problem-oriented ends at the same time. More precise, unlike emotional coping strategies, problem-oriented or behavioural coping often helps to improve the objective situation

via rational actions (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis and Gruen, 1986). Hence, the above highlighted preparation of relatively cheap food, such as soup, may also be interpreted as a way of saving money (behavioural) besides being a means towards psychologically downplaying and reducing existential angst (emotional) associated with, for instance, the threat of losing one's home. In fact, strategies acting as both problem and emotional ways of coping can be sometimes found in prior research on low-income consumers' coping (Hibbert and Piacentini, 2003; Karanika and Hogg, 2016). Informants, however, also showed purely behavioural attempts to remove or at least diminish the impact of downward mobility as a threatening event to their (lower-) middle-class social standing. For example, **Ulla (47)**, broadly summarises the initial phase of her family's imminent experience surrounding the stressful and chaotic economic displacement from their former materially privileged lifestyle as follows:

"We tried everything to hide the fragile and crazy world we were trashing around like a fish from all others from the outside"

Within this context, she reports how she was actively working against her family's downward mobility and the loss of their house by adopting behavioural coping strategies related to some belt tightening, which is reflected in the following quote from her autobiographical account:

"Although I was so stressed out, I tried to keep a cool head. I initiated all the necessary steps immediately: change of health insurance, applying for reduction of kindergarten and school fees, asking for extension for paying phone, gas, water, and electricity bills. Cancelling all unnecessary subscriptions, even cancelling our paper collection bin. Music School, sports

club, ballet for the youngest, painting course – we needed to unsubscribe from all of that. The weekly delivery of organic vegetables and fresh milk? Gone.”

Likewise, **Sandra (42)**, a former swimming professional and Olympic gold medalist, who was forced to join the breadline for 24 months due to malinvestment on the real estate market remarked in her autobiography that:

“At that time my mailbox started to overflow with dunning letters and collection letters threatening me. I borrowed some money from friends, and my account was overdrawn. My expenses had been reduced to a bare minimum only paying for the most basic fixed costs.”

Such rational and rigidly planned problem-solving efforts (Folkman et al., 1986) to, at least momentarily, resist a further lifestyle displacement due to downward mobility was echoed by the majority of the informants interviewed in this study. Thus, coinciding with previous coping research taking place in contexts of persistent types of consumer poverty (Hamilton, 2012), also those who are in a transition from middle-class existences to a phase of financial deprivation facing the loss of their social status engage in a rigid management of their (family) budget. Informants’ budgeting strategies consisted of making price comparisons, shopping in thrift stores, buying second-hand, and searching for bargains, asking for financial help from others, maximising income by taking on a second job, liquidating assets, or making use of consumer credit. However, not all strategies outlined were used by all informants. By contrast, they acted in ways that they perceived to be most fitting concerning their circumstances, which is in consonance with views surrounding the diversity of low-income consumers and their coping strategies adopted (Hamilton, 2012). In general support of existing research reinforcing such varied active coping resources and strategies used by, especially, women living in persistent states of vulnerability

(Banyard, 1995; Hamilton, 2012; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013; Hutton, 2016), the informants in this study, thus, equally demonstrated great skills of quick behavioural adaptations to adversity in terms of actively trying to resist downward mobility. Yet, contrary to the believe that such an active personal and familial mastery may equally mediate the stress associated with newly experienced economic vulnerabilities leading to enhancements of well-being (Wendt, 2011) or empowerment and enhancement of self-esteem (Hamilton, 2012), informants' narratives revealed that while keeping up appearances, a large proportion expressed negative feelings. Following this train of thought, often an inner resistance towards the above-mentioned budgeting strategies and the sacrifices associated with them was highlighted. Here, for example, concessions made to quality nutrition (Ulla), lacking consumer freedom and choice (Wiebke), or transgressing one's own middle-class homemaker values (Dorothea) were common negative aspects mentioned:

Ulla (47): "When money was really tight, I did not have a problem to purchase less, but I had to get over the fact to buy groceries of lower quality. It was just not possible any other way, anything else would have been too expensive."

Wiebke (39): (...) Well, I kind of felt isolated, all the things that meant to be fun, I couldn't do anymore.

Interviewerr: For example?

Wiebke: Yes, for example, I couldn't go to the gym anymore, just doing sports. Or buying nice clothes for myself in order to feel good. If I bought anything, then it was really cheap stuff. I really started to become a bargain hunter during that time...well, I guess it never looked cheap, but I for myself knew that it was cheap stuff and this makes you feel bad. And if you need a new pair of jeans, you are just not able to buy them for yourself with the same kind of quality. Instead you have to wait for some time and see when you are able to replace it.

Dorothea (48): (...) at that time I was forced to buy cheap food and I had already been sick due all the stress anyways. And then, I bought all this bad stuff full of chemicals, where I only tried to ensure that the food I buy has sufficient nutritional value. Like I was trying to buy stuff that made me feel full for a long-time, something long-lasting. And doing that, I did not take care of my health anymore...well, I did not feel very vital anyways and the kind of food I ate made it even worse. And when I look at old pictures taken at that time, well when I was out with my girls, having some fun, then I still looked quite good, but there are those other pictures of me with dark rings under my eyes, really pale, and one easily recognises that I am not a happy and healthy person.

Interviewer: Were you also aware of this during that time? For example, regarding the food you had to buy, that it was not the best maybe?

Dorothea: Not really I guess – I am aware of this now. Well, to be honest, during that time, I really didn't live according to my own values, I knew it for sure, but I blocked it out. I only thought: "Doesn't matter, doesn't matter – it is just not possible right now!" I mean, just not possible to take really care of my health and eating, although I come from a family that has taken great care of a healthy diet, where everything is made fresh from scratch and they always say: eat a lot of veg and fruit and bla."

Christian (60), a former CEO and partner of a German Small and Medium Sized firm who lost his company and private savings in the early 2000s due to a case of fraud concurs with such highlighted perspectives of not fully coming to grips with adapting to downward mobility. Having earned above-average salaries (over £100,000 per year) throughout most of his professional career, he and his family were now confronted with a drastic descent in socio-economic status, being forced to claim social assistance for the first time in their life. Christian's initial experiences of problem-oriented adaptation are, yet, filled with retrospective anecdotes reinforcing the negative side of counteracting his fall from grace as shown in the following interview excerpt:

***Christian :** “(...) And at that time, I have started doing all this grocery shopping at Penny (**German discounter brand**)...horrifying, you had to see this yourself, the people in there. I mean those who shove away others (laughs) (...) I then said to myself, it just needs to be done...so what! You need this, you need that. You were just forced to buy this pasta for 29 Cent or so (chuckling).”*

***Interviewer:** “Did you buy at Penny (**discounter brand**) before your drop in income as well?”*

***Christian:** “Well, occasionally, maybe sometimes just Aldi, but only if they had something special, I mean like Champagne for 19 Euros or so (laughs). Only then we deliberately purchased there. But not the basics. So, now it was the other way round, now you would only go to Edeka or Galeria Kaufhof (**German upmarket retailers**) for giving oneself a real treat, getting something nice, you know.”*

The excerpt reflects Christian’s initial struggle to both fully disengage from his previous, more affluent lifestyle and fully adapt to his new consumer role of downshifting and saving that was required from him in light of his drastic socio-economic decline. Additionally, by referring to the deviant shopping behaviour of others frequenting discounters Christian’s recollection may be interpreted as a reinforcement of his lack of acceptance of an immediate descent from a former privileged, into a lower, unfamiliar social space (Ulver-Sneistrup and Ostberg, 2011) in hindsight. This non-acceptance of the new socio-cultural space is, hence, symbolically embedded in the notion of being forced to do grocery shopping at the discounter retail brand. The consumption of this brand further involves negative feelings on behalf of the consumer and yet needs to be endured due to external circumstances of newly experienced income restriction.

“Hitting Rock Bottom”

Building upon the previously highlighted negative feelings related to coping with downward mobility and keeping up appearances, informants stressed further aspects of adaptation that negatively impacted their emotional well-being. These consisted mainly of being worried about both one's personal and children's future. Furthermore, social isolation, guilt, feelings of being a failure, or the shame associated with accepting financial help from others were mentioned as key negative consequences of adjusting to a phase of newly experienced income reduction and concomitant social status downgrade. However, informants did not discuss these features in isolation, yet often in combination with other negative aspects linked to their experience of downward mobility. While doing this, they were frequently expressing emotional states of having reached a “low point” or “rock bottom” moment in their narratives, eventually letting them feel stymied and helpless about how to rectify their situation (Newman, 1998). This is best exemplified in the following quotes from two informants' interviews:

***Dorothea (48):** “(...) All of this “not having any money” is not only about not having money. It was an incredible pain that I felt, so terrible that it was almost not possible for me to bear anymore. Well, now that I have been out of this situation, it is hard to understand for you as an outsider, I mean that it was so bad for my self-conscience. Well, I even thought at that time, that it had something to do with me, that I am not worth a penny as a person. And that I am the only person that exists, who can't join their friends for dinner or for a drink. I was always the one who said “No, I can't come with you”. (...) There were so many things I couldn't do and at one stage I was so deep down into the whole thing that I thought “I don't see any light at the end of the tunnel”. I mean, there was no escape I thought. You can always get through a phase of say, 3 months without any money or so: “Grit your teeth and get to it”but it*

felt endless for me, a struggle over several years and I had this feeling that it never ends. It never ends: "I can't do it, not possible" (...)"

Wiebke (39, lone mother who became a working poor due to divorce and custody battle): *"Well, financially it was really bad. Lawyer fees, fees for the court, so many expenses, which made me very often think : "How is it possible to move on? I am never ever able to make it out of this misery." It was just too much I had to pay for. I was badly in debt during that time, roughly calculated 15,000 Euro I would say. It was really insane, really bad. At the beginning of the month when my salary was paid out to me and the rent was deducted I was already in the red. So, I did not know then how to pay for the rest. And at that time my account was overdrawn all the time, like a vicious circle. You are paying such high interest on the overdrawn account, so you might lose track easily. It was really bad. During that time, I also had two jobs, I was a policewoman with much responsibility anyways, and at night I worked as a call centre agent part-time. To be honest with you, I didn't have a real private life during that time. I could not relax whatsoever, or just going to the gym for a workout. None of that for me. And I endured that for a couple of years and at some stage also had a real burnout."*

Such demonstrated negative emotional reactions of lowered self-esteem and resignation are consistent with other informants who expressed sentiments of "tilting against windmills", "being in the wrong film", "feeling small", "traumatised", "burned out" or even "suicidal" in the aftermath of being confronted with the consequences of their experiences with downward mobility and keeping up appearances. As illustrated in the previous quotes from Dorothea and Wiebke, these consequences were not only restricted to an economic displacement. Yet, they also encompassed a social determinant in terms of facing social marginalisation (see Dorothea's comment on not partaking in any social life) and/or a general lifestyle disruption of not being able maintain a consumption level that had been consistent with one's pre-poverty

transition self (see Wiebke's remark on not "having a private life" anymore). In this respect, informants mentioned further feelings of dislike and unfamiliarity regarding several interwoven consequences of downward mobility, such as moving to smaller (council) flats in less affluent neighbourhoods, claiming social assistance, and/or being forced to give up valued or self-extending possessions and consumption practices (Belk, 1988) as reflected in the following quotes from autobiographies and interview excerpt:

Ulla (47, autobiography account): (...) *The bad thing about our new home was not that it was small, shabby and clammy. With this all of us, the children and myself, could live somehow although the contrast to our villa by the lake was really absurd and adventurous. What confused us more were the tenants in this house. They never greeted back and the front door of the main building was slammed several times per day, so that the jam jar on our kitchen table was jumping up and down. It was always us who brought back the dustbins to their original spots. And at night the front door was kept open, so that this couple's overweight cat from the flat above us could enter and leave the building. Also, the cat food was all over the place, in the staircase, in front of our door. The smell was horrible and my daughter invented a word for it: "cat vomit". And one day the cat even pissed in front of our door and the shoes of my children were swimming in a yellowish wet spot. Yes, right. Cat piss. This liquid is bad enough, but being in the shoes of my children meant – trashing them, immediately. I felt so sorry for my children and for myself, because buying four pairs of new shoes was something I couldn't afford at that time. And buying them second-hand was more affordable, but cost a lot of time. When thinking about this scene, I remember often recalling a picture of my children blithely playing in our former garden in the villa (...). Both house and garden were a symbol for a functioning children's world and they often asked when we could go back to the villa during this time (...)*

Christian (60, interview): *“And then you have those 20-year old job advisers from the job centre basically telling you what kind of asshole you are as a former manager and what you need to do. This can be really depressing (...)”*

Interviewer (with Wiebke): *Was there anything else that you had to give up during these bad days (referring to poverty experience)?*

Wiebke (39): *Yes, I always had cats and during this time, it was not possible to keep them. So, we had two cats, yeah right, and one of them was given away to my mother-in-law and the other was taken by my ex-husband. And for me that was a really, really, really, bad separation. But I knew, that I couldn't keep them, firstly because I couldn't afford them...I mean this is hardly imaginable, but I couldn't even afford cat litter or food...and secondly, if something is wrong with the animals, if I have to take them to the vet, I couldn't have paid for that either. And that's why I was also so stressed while still having them, but I had to take the final decision to give them away from which I really suffered. Really, really bad, because cats belong to me, they make me happy.”*

Building upon these insights gained from the above quotes, it was noted that such lifestyle discontinuities triggered by a loss of social status sparked experiences of estrangement and sense of loss. See, for instance, Ulla's experience of reluctantly adapting to the new socio-cultural space of a new home in a less affluent neighbourhood. Here, she stresses the deviant and ignorant behaviour of other members of that new community, diminishing the quality of their family's social life. At the same time, she actively reflects on the sense of loss of a functioning middle-class family identity by grieving a former good life in their villa by the lake. Moreover, indications of identity strains due to facing an array of unfamiliar material constraints (e.g. giving up self-extending possessions, such as Wiebke's cats), and institutional dependencies (e.g. claiming social welfare for the first time as reflected in Christian's short comment) became apparent.

This is consistent with theories on identity strains in the wake of downward mobility. Here, people may go through acute personal crises (Shibutani, 1961; McAdams, 2006; Shepherd and Williams, 2018) characterised by a common feeling of failure, loss, and threat to both one's self-esteem as well as former pre-descender (middle-class) identity (Newman, 1998; Saatcioglu and Ozanne, 2013; Thompson et al., 2018). These may be threatened to the point where, as highlighted earlier, even suicide is considered as the most drastic resolution (Shibutani, 1961; Newman, 1998). In this sense, according to Shepherd and Williams (2016), a perception of having "hit rock bottom" occurs when negativity linked to life transitions is brought to a climax and life situations are, thus, perceived as more negative than positive. In other words, with the formation of associative links among the negative features of one's current life situation, there may be the belief that the future is likely to "contain much of the same" and that "bad days turn into bad years" (Bauer, McAdams and Sakaeda, 2005:1182). As a consequence, in order to cope, downwardly mobile consumers may seek to reactively preserve their threatened pre-crisis (middle-class) identities evincing a reactive and nostalgic ethos (Ulver-Sneistrup and Ostberg, 2011; Karanika and Hogg, 2016; Thompson et al., 2018). This is most obviously indicated in Ulla's comment on longing for a prior state of existence that is believed to be more ideal than their current situation in the face of drastic socio-cultural change associated with a loss of status. Furthermore, in order to be, at least temporarily, relieved from the imminent loss of a former pre-poverty middle-class identity, the informants in this study engaged in some dysfunctional behaviours, such as "comfort eating", "chain smoking", "apathetic behaviours" (e.g. sleeping the whole day or feeling guilty for having overspent in the past), "retail therapy" spending money that they don't have, or excessively "hoarding possessions".

Besides these latter indications of escapist attempts to counteract identity loss (Folkman et al., 1986; Shepherd and Williams, 2018), or aforementioned reactive reflexive modes (Thompson et al., 2018) in which consumers express a sense of being out of place in their post-descender lifestyle and, therefore, long for their displaced middle-class roles (Ulver-Sneistrup and Ostberg, 2011), informants forming part of the redemptive self-narrative theme, however, eventually proposed a divergent path in their response to an identity threat when “hitting rock bottom”. Against this backdrop, the narratives revealed that, in order to recover from such low-points and associated identity incoherencies (Newman, 1998), they started re-defining their current negative situations and adopted a unique, and different perspective to the problem faced. In the following two sub-sections of this chapter it will be highlighted how informants have adopted such varied changed perspectives in the aftermath of downward mobility to constructively cope with its consequences. Subsequently, it will be shown how such a shift in perspective has had an impact upon a long-lasting consumer identity re-cultivation that may persist even after a spell of income instability has been overcome.

Finding meaning in Downward Mobility

As indicated at the end of the previous section, informants intended to construct a narrative of self that is progressive in terms of depicting a transformation from bad, emotionally negative life scenes associated with downward mobility (e.g. the stress and identity strains linked with “keeping up appearances” and “hitting rock bottom”), to a subsequent good, affectively positive life scene. These narrative types of redemption (McAdams, 2006; McAdams and Bowman, 2013) helped the protagonists to make sense and cope with the considerable pain and misfortune that their

experiences of transitioning into a phase of economic instability may have brought about. In other words, due to adopting a change in perspective they often concluded that something good came from the adversity they had faced during their poverty transition in terms of leading to positive adjustments to the consequences of downward mobility and a recovery from them in retrospect.

This narrative pathway from “bad to good” is best exemplified in **Sophie’s (42)** personal “rock bottom” moment of reporting to the job centre for the first time. In having reached this low-point in her downward mobility experience she depicts an inner conflict of being in a limbo between two undesirable social worlds, that is the new life of a social assistance claimant and her pre-poverty world located in the affluent social area of [REDACTED]. At the same time, it triggered a change of perspective to alleviate the identity tension:

“At the job centre I was observing the other people. I am not entirely sure, but it was as if they couldn’t see me. There was no reason to assume that we meet on equal terms. It didn’t feel as if we had much to talk about. Equally the job centre didn’t feel like home. Neither did I belong to my [REDACTED] castle anymore nor here. My job centre colleagues and I, we both had to live on that universal lump-sum payment of 89 Euros per week. Yet, the main difference was that I, if not screwing it all up, could hide and even overcome this status. I would even laugh about it – especially about myself. And this exactly, during that particular moment and since then, has been what really counts: At the very moment when I had reached rock bottom, I perceived myself for the first time as being a really rich person.”

With regard to such a shift in perspective, Sophie’s description of “*feeling rich*” during this ambiguous phase of her life triggered by downward mobility does not refer to a superior financial standing relative to her welfare recipient counterparts in the first

place. Similarly, Sophie did not mean to be “*chauvinist*”. Instead, as further reinforced during the interview, she hints at her own “*vast cultural inventory*” acquired throughout her lifetime in terms of formal education and her lower-middle class upbringing, which has helped her to effectively cope with status and existential angst during the “*dark year on welfare*” and impede on a subsequent upward movement out of economic instability again. Hence, by adopting this new perspective during a moment of crisis, she started to fully embrace and accept her situation of downward mobility in terms of “rolling up sleeves” and adapting her lifestyle to her new financial situation (Schreurs et al., 2012).

Furthermore, it may be argued that her narrative structure starts to unfold from focusing solely upon negative life scenes to more positive ones (McAdams, 2006). Following this reasoning, Sophie stresses that she was appreciative of being able to “*eloquently*” deal with the stringency of imposed restrictions by the job centre and consequent feelings of being deprived of an autonomous self in terms of feeling “small” and “infantile”. Moreover, her new-gained self-awareness in terms of appreciating her cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) acquired throughout lifetime, made her fully embrace and accept her situation of downward mobility. As a consequence, she coped effectively with her lowered social standing and the threat of social exclusion by means of creative consumption tactics. For example, she adopted several saving tactics in terms of restricting herself to inexpensive food such as eating “*bread with salted tomato*”, “*pasta*”, “*boiled potatoes*” or “*rice added with curry spice*”. The money she saved through such a low-cost diet was used to go out with friends or take part in work-related social events where it was expected from peers and colleagues to invite each other for drinks or share a taxi when the night was over. To find adequate

new clothing for such social events, she frequently visited thrift shops to assemble her own “*ironic retro-style look*” for “*just 20 Euros*” – something she would and could not have adequately done without being aware of her “*cultural inventory*” in terms of being educated and informed about “*contemporary fashion trends*” through “*reading blogs*” or “*fashion magazines*”.

Besides having become open to restyling one’s life in the aftermath of downward mobility, Sophie’s rock bottom moment also laid the foundation for a (consumer) identity reformulation as it further opened up a re-examination and re-definition of her taken for granted pre-poverty assumptive world. This is further exemplified in her epiphanic encounter with a premium retail brand (Manufactum) after coming from the job centre:

After coming from the job centre for the first time in my life and being in a desolate mood, I saw in that Manufactum shop window that they’re now offering organic bread and it was like €5,20 for a loaf and I was thinking “Fuck [sic]”! I mean, I don’t want to condemn those people who go there and I am not saying everyone visiting the store is terrible, but I began to really understand how it all works. You begin to understand when you don’t have access to this kind of store anymore...even if I had wanted to buy something from the store that day, I just couldn’t do it...and then you realise that it is not about buying, lets say a felt blanket that you can’t afford, but also about not being able to plunge into a world that is totally different from your current one (...) it was really hard to deal with the superficiality of such a world in which I had lived for so long and that I wanted to sort of stay in.”

The above quote reinforces both the identity strain Sophie was facing and a gradual change in perspective. Although Sophie had never been a loyal Manufactum customer, she always felt “*at home in the Manufactum linguistic system*” considering it a signet

of the “*urban bourgeoisie lifestyle*” that her social ascender self-image associated with. Sophie comes from a modest lower-middle class social background, yet has embarked since her adolescence on a steep upward life trajectory. Here, she has learned the necessary skills and codes to freely move in the higher social spaces of the German “*Bildungsbürgertum*”⁹ on her way to becoming a journalist. Hence, her pre-social assistance claimant lifestyle, taste and cultural preferences partially reflected this social ascendance and corresponding insignia of the “*Bildungsbürgertum*”: there are repeat references in the interview to the importance Sophie ascribed to her six metres wide book library in her living room in that it constituted both the foundation of her profession as a writer and journalist as well as “*status symbol*”. Her former apartment in the noble area of [REDACTED] was not far from the “[REDACTED]”, a vivid hotspot for [REDACTED] art scene, the “[REDACTED] hotel” and “*celebrity hair stylists*”. Furthermore, as vividly described in her autobiography, the flat she had to move out of after transitioning into poverty was elegantly equipped with a “*1950s retro-style couch*”, “*herringbone parquet flooring*”, “*high wing doors and turn of the century brass window handles*”. Further, she received regular invitations to events such as “*classic concerts, wine tastings, art exhibitions or red carpet nights at new publishers’ openings*”. Yet, after having reached a low-point in her experiences of becoming downwardly mobile, as highlighted in the above quote, she was not willing to fully accept the “*superficiality*” and “*absurdity*” of this pre-poverty lifestyle anymore. This is further evidenced by her adoption of a self-critical view upon the ideologies of consumer society in terms of frequently questioning the distinctive, self-

⁹ “*Bildungsbürgertum*” has been referred to as the educated middle classes with a strong focus on high culture, working in high-prestige professions, such as doctors, lawyers, university professors or journalists (Schneider and Lang, 2014)

expressive consumptive behaviours and downward comparisons of the more sophisticated social circles she had been forming a part of before joining the breadline. Consequently, her transitory poor self displays an “*understanding*” for those left behind in society or coming from lower social strata and their consumption and taste regimes. At the same time, she condemns her educated middle-class peers’ unreflective attempts to display a superior social standing through distinctive consumer tastes, (“hipster”) lifestyles and educational attainment:

“[w]hat some of my friends just don’t understand is that hardly anyone living on an income of 13 Euros per day is really interested in pollution-free potatoes, organic sweets or sustainably manufactured shoes” (...) let’s show some respect for those people (...) who maybe don’t read intelligent things and buy stuff that is not in line with our own highly-tuned codes, but works for them. Let them keep their colourful mobile phone cases made of real plastic as they might be as important for these people as for others their real-wood fittings are”

Sophie’s gradual disentangling from the sign domination of consumer society ideologies that creates social boundaries and reflects social stratification (Bourdieu, 1984; Baudrillard, 1998), and in which she was deeply embedded before embarking on a downhill life trajectory, is echoed by **Ulla (47)**. In hindsight, Ulla comments on a related change in perspective adopted when she became a transitory poor consumer. Here, in comparing and contrasting her pre-poverty and transitory poor self in regards to the importance ascribed to material possessions, she highlights the following:

“What does this term actually mean – stuff? In the end, not much. It is astonishing how fast stuff loses its importance when facing a threat to your own existence. It was almost like a cathartic feel, after the breakdown of my marriage and the loss of our house, to end up with almost nothing on the streets”

In a different quote, Ulla further supports this indicated cleansing effect of the poverty experience, which she refers to as a “cathartic feel”, concerning the development of a new, consumption-critical self-image during her poverty spell. In order to emphasise her change of perspective adopted, she further hints at the misalignment between her former pre-poverty transition, unreflective, consumer identity and transitory poor self that has become more attentive to saving:

“Although, at that time, there were not too many positive things you could say about the break-down of our middle-class existence, the new critical attitude towards consumption was definitely a positive one. I realised that I had been such an unreflective person in my old life when going to the supermarket, my wallet filled with money, ignoring any special offers, or noticing extremely cheap package sizes. I was just a mother of four who went to the [REDACTED]¹⁰ wearing high-heels and paying with a golden customer card for a set of cocktail glasses”

Hence, the critical event of becoming downwardly mobile and slipping into poverty triggered a severe interruption to Ulla’s life, at the same time causing her to take pause, think and reflect on her situation. Within this context, she describes her consumer life before the critical event in ways that can be interpreted as non-critical and unreflective by referring to her pre-poverty affluent “[REDACTED]” shopper identity that does not have to worry about money. While emotionally disengaging from this formerly lived upper-middle class reality, she equally reinforces her newfound appreciation and embracement of budgeting strategies (e.g. seeking good value for money) in order to behaviourally cope with the consequences of income reduction. By way of second illustration, **Christian (60)**, further stresses such a reflection on his “before” values

¹⁰ The [REDACTED] is one of the largest department stores in Europe located in [REDACTED] being renowned for selling luxury goods

and belief systems and how the experience of becoming downwardly mobile broke down his former pre-poverty self-definition in regards to the possession of things and consumption practices:

*(...) And then (**after having transitioned into poverty**) you start looking into your closet and you realise how much you actually have (laughs). Those are all aspects, where you think: “I basically have everything that I need to have” ...I mean, there is still great wine from Chile that you can get for less than 2 Euros from the Penny markt (**discounter brand**) (laughs). And that was the time when I started to think more critically about my life and how I my life was before. And that happened together with me becoming involved in Buddhism. And within Buddhism, there is this question of not having any more things than you are supposed to have and all of those aspects. And this is what I have really started to understand quite rapidly at that time. Almost, like a new happiness that I have found: “Ok, you are alive”, “You are totally happy”, “You are relaxed”, “You have distanced yourself from all of those negative moments that were part of this experience”, all of the things that happened before. For example, my circle of friends became smaller and smaller, but then you have this new social circle, people you can also communicate with and where you can exchange your thoughts. I think that was a really important aspect and a true change in my perspective on life, how I started to view things and how I was in the past”*

In corroborating with aforementioned informants’ statements, Christian highlights how a change in perspective in the aftermath of becoming downwardly mobile with all its drastic negative consequences (e.g. diminishing pre-poverty social circles, divorce, or forced disposessions) has led to a gradual re-formulation of his consumer identity. Recall that Christian initially indicated that he had been reluctant to accept his new, economically strained, consumer identity that was forced to frequent discounters and engage in thrift consumption during a stage of “keeping up

appearances”. Having switched to a more positive narrative tone, he, however, changes his perspective and progresses in his narrative to a stage of acceptance and embracement of his economically strained situation reinforcing that he is still able to obtain quality wine from discounters at a cheap price. Furthermore, similar to Sophie and Ulla, Christian equally stresses his adoption of a critical undertone towards consumerism in terms of putting less emphasis on attachment to material goods and consumption, which is informed by a growing consumer self-awareness (“I basically have everything that I need to have”). This increased self-knowledge has been further underpinned by Christian’s involvement in the Buddhist community while being on a downhill life trajectory. Here, he gained access to “spirituality” and the tenets of “Zen-Buddhism”. Especially, Christian’s internalisation of the Buddhist axiom that one should not be overly dependent upon material possessions and materialism to achieve a sense of consumer wellbeing (Mick, 2017) has evoked in him coming to grips with and assign positive meaning to his situation of slipping into a phase of relative income poverty as in “having found a new happiness” within adversarial circumstances.

Theoretically, from a situational coping perspective, it may be argued that Christian’s case echoes other studies of downward mobility and persistent types of income destabilisations. Here, it has been demonstrated how consumers may place increased value upon immaterial assets (e.g. relationships, health, or religious beliefs) and put less emphasis on the importance ascribed to material attachment (Hill, 1991; Hamilton and Catterall, 2006a; Hutton, 2016; Karanika and Hogg, 2016). Further, the aspect of being able to openly discuss issues associated with his downward mobility within the Buddhist community may work as a type of therapy increasing subjective wellbeing (Hamilton et al., 2014). However, similar to the aforementioned cases of Ulla and

Sophie, Christian's attempt to find positive meaning during downward mobility does not end in adopting effective coping mechanisms. It also sets in motion a re-cultivation of his consumer identity in terms of actively challenging his pre-poverty middle-class existence. Within this context, Christian repeatedly engages in further critical appraisals of his past pre-poverty self, emphasising a highly consumptive and materialistic past attitude (*"I wanted to earn more money, be more successful, get more social approval and material pleasures. I was so attached to all the stuff I possessed and didn't possess"*).

Generally speaking, these indicated processes of developing new, critical perspectives in response to a shattered (consumer) identity project brought about by a traumatic event such as downward mobility is in consonance with what others have referred to as people's epiphany moments during an acute crisis (Shibutani, 1961; Denzin 1989; Frank, 1993; Athens, 1995; McAdams, 2006). In an epiphany experience, a person's life existence and previous paradigm is questioned and his/her life is never the same again. Hence, it assists subjects to actively confront and experience a crisis (Denzin, 1989), such as downward mobility. Simultaneously, it lays the foundation for a long-standing "dramatic self-change" (Frank, 1993; Athens, 1995). This partially mirrors other previous conceptualisations of consumer identity transitions where, for instance, turning points in life provoke an "awakening" to previously held beliefs and normative backgrounds of life, including consumer culture and materialism (Cherrier and Murray, 2007; Barrios et al., 2012). Along with the adoption of such new perspectives, "there is (...) rejection, even contempt to all old beliefs" (Shibutani, 1961:527). For example, in Cherrier and Murray's (2007) study on proposing a processual theory of becoming a voluntary simplifier, these authors chart that

consumers who have the economic resources allowing them to participate in consumerist culture without reflecting on it, often become subject to a “wake-up call” triggered by, predominately, natural life passages and mundane events, such as going to college or making a wrong career choice. Such life events may awake consumers to a new reality in which they call into question their previous ways of living a “having mode of existence” characterised by the importance ascribed to money and material things in order to convey social status. In turn, they become more open to a “being mode of existence” (Fromm, 1976) that has been associated with scaling down consumption and dispossession in order to focus upon wellbeing that comes from within instead of the material world (Cherrier and Murray, 2007).

Taking these findings from previous consumer research into consideration, the findings from the current study are novel in that informants also considered a forced life transition, such as slipping into poverty, as a crucial event that interrupted their lives and marked the end of a “before” identity and the beginning of the “after”. At the same time, this awakening to a new reality led to a critical reflection on previous lifestyles and active engagement with changed consumption lifestyles, that is, for instance, accepting the lowering levels of their consumption practices as well disposal of material objects as indicated in the cases of Ulla and Christian. As further exemplified in Christian’s case such efforts of actively adapting one’s lifestyle to the new financial situation in the light of re-shaping his consumer identity was further informed by several social influences (see his involvement in the Buddhist community for seeking support and garnering compassion). Other informants reported differing social influences coaxing and coaching their revised identities, at the same time assisting them in accepting their new situations of economic deprivation. This social

sphere consisted of making use of therapies and coaching offerings (e.g. psychotherapies, Mindfulness-based stress reduction programmes, rehabilitation centres), or approaching inspirational friends and counselling services for institutional advice and support (e.g. persuading informants to make use of social welfare services, visiting foodbanks, or learning effective and creative saving strategies from them).

Positive Adjustments to Downward Mobility

Building upon the previously highlighted changes in perspective and revised self-images, the informants of this study highlighted several positive adaptive strategies to effectively respond to downward mobility. Hence, by progressing from a narrative identity development that initially focuses upon anguishing aspects associated with the unpleasant experience of slipping into relative income poverty and the loss of social status (e.g. while keeping up appearances), a more positive narrative tone prevailed after having become more self-aware in the aftermath of hitting rock bottom (see e.g. Ulla's, Sophie's and Christian's newfound criticality towards materialism and unreflective consumer behaviours linked to their before poverty lifeworlds). Along with this came an acceptance and embracement of coping strategies that enabled them to further transform negative moods and thoughts associated with descending in social status into positive ones. As indicated in the previous section, these stress-releasing consumption practices often formed part of a downshifting (Cherrier and Murray, 2007) or broader simplified lifestyle (Elliott, 1995; McDonald, Oates, Young and Hwang, 2006; McGouran and Prothero, 2016) avoiding the excess of materialism and resisting consumer culture in a broad sense.

As an example, **Ulla (47)** highlights several interwoven coping strategies that resemble values associated with leading a simpler lifestyle, such as keeping close contact with family members (children), producing food at home, or valuing self-created experiences (McDonald et al., 2006; Karanika and Hogg, 2016) as highlighted in the following interview excerpt:

***Interviewer:** “In your autobiography you have said that during the time while you had to live on a low-income being thrown back to “simple things has always created feelings of happiness”. Do you have an example for this?”*

***Ulla:** Exactly! Well, oddly enough, one thing that always created moments of happiness was eating food. Everything that had to do with eating, because you can produce it for a relatively small amount of money. So, you can make a great cake for example. Doesn't cost much. Just 3 Euro. And it has a tremendous effect. This is something that my children also learned during that time. Eating good food has started to play a central role in our lives suddenly, giving yourself a treat by putting something good into your body (...) because other things are so far away. And then this sitting-together and being together with our meals, you have a great cake or pancakes or rice pudding, really cheap with a bit of cinnamon and sugar on top of it. That was one thing, which was entirely new to me as well...that such a thing became so important suddenly. And then such things as, well this wouldn't have worked with older kids, but we also did these walks at night, right? It's all about creating really simple experiences that don't afford much effort, but which do support feelings of belonging together in such an incredible way....like adventures and these sorts of things.”*

At a superficial level of analysis, it may be argued that Ulla and her children due to a severe income restriction were coerced to limit their expenditures on food. Therefore, they engaged in a simpler lifestyle that translated into preparing self-made meals, such as pancakes, or rice pudding to make them content, yet were not underpinned by an

explicit philosophy of simple living. Such a line of reasoning would corroborate with McDonald et al. (2006) proposing that lower income consumers who undertake aspects of a simplified lifestyle for purely financial reasons, should rather be classified as accidental simplifiers due to not sharing the same ethical, environmental, or personal-meaning making motivations that drive the more affluent consumer populations to lead simpler lives (Mitchell, 1983; McDonald et al., 2006, Cherrier and Murray, 2007; McGouran and Prothero, 2016).

Yet, upon taking a closer look at Ulla's experience surrounding a new simplicity in her life, it may equally be argued that her narrative reasoning of consuming home-made food also cultivated other characteristics associated with voluntary simplicity lifestyles. For instance, the emphasis put on being self-sufficient (Elgin and Mitchell, 1977) as in "doing without" great expenditures on food or material things to foster wellbeing and relationship strength with her children is one of those "simplify your life" prerequisites also highlighted in the literature. In a different quote from Ulla's autobiography she further stresses acting in such a self-determined way during a phase of income restriction in relation to her children:

*"You have to provide something special for your children. This is a sentence that I have often heard from other parents around me. With this I mean entertainment, experiences, amusement, holidays, branded clothing, the latest gadgets, etc... No! you don't have to provide such things to your children. Being close emotionally and providing the assurance, that you are always there for them, this is what you need to provide to your children ("this is definitely more difficult than always getting out the material jamboree bag"). For example, going on holiday with five people (**means herself and the four children**) is just not possible, if you have to watch every penny. Even when considering the German youth hostels as an alternative, I would have paid 79*

Euros for all of us per night. This price was shocking to me. So, I announced a rather unusual holiday experience to my children. We did a camping holiday in our little garden (referring to council flat after having moved out of their villa). We didn't own a tent, but we had three large sun brollies collected from the bulk trash and a very large blanket, which we neatly put over the brollies, so that an almost mystical atmosphere was created inside our own-built tent. I added a few rag rugs, a small table, five pillows, a round-shaped tray with juice and cookies. Any North-African Bedouin king would have gone green with envy had they seen it. We even slept in it (...) and even though it wasn't the best for my back, we had a great pleasure with our summer-camping experience, which did not cost us a single penny (...)"

In line with others (Wendt, 2011; Hamilton, 2012; Hutton, 2016), Ulla underlines the importance of maintaining a good level of parenthood in terms of still providing adequately for children despite having financial difficulties. Here, the creation of an emotional atmosphere of safety and comfort for both herself and the children by means of coming up with a creative and simplified holiday alternative that matches the family's reduced income is of pivotal importance in Ulla's narrative. In turn, she refuses being governed by others' expectations within consumer society suggesting that high levels of consumption standards are required to meet the demands of children (e.g. having the latest technologies, going on holiday, or buying branded clothing). This is in further consonance with Elgin and Mitchell (1977) noting that self-determination as a quality informing voluntary simplifiers includes notions, such as looking to one's own values for guidance rather than being driven by wider societal expectations or the media. Further building upon such an agentic, self-determined way of coping through simplified experiences, it becomes apparent that this may stand in contrast to other theorisations on low-income consumers' adaptive strategies. These have sometimes been portrayed as engaging in compensatory consumption in terms of

purchasing expensive status symbols or new things as a means of compensating for their poverty and lowered social standing (Pellerin and Stearns, 2001) or to protect their children from stigmatisation (Hamilton and Catterall, 2006b; Hamilton, 2012). For example, in Hamilton (2012) it is illustrated how poor families work hard to give their children access to the right brands due to social pressures of counteracting social exclusion and to seek “consumer normalcy” (Baker, 2006). By contrast, in light of the transitory poor consumers from this study buttressing the value of a simple way of life, which they, retrospectively, maintain to be a voluntary action informed by self-determination, it may be argued that a reliance on consumer culture ideologies and associated pressures to keep up high consumption levels may be further reduced.

Moreover, already highlighted processes of personal growth and increased self-knowledge in terms of rejecting previously led before-poverty lifestyles, may equally contribute to stepping outside the normative backgrounds of consumer culture in terms of foregoing conspicuous consumption, or reducing an overreliance on material objects. Likewise, personal growth has been considered to be an interlinked value informing voluntary simplicity lifestyles (Elgin and Mitchell, 1977). With this in mind, the basic premise that low-income consumers and their coping should be excluded from traditional voluntary simplifier theorisations due to their perceived incapability to surpass oneself in light of their struggles to maintain (former) standards of living (Elgin and Mitchell, 1977; McDonald et al., 2006; Ulver-Sneistrup and Ostberg, 2011; Saatcioglu and Ozanne, 2013; Thompson et al., 2018) may be further refuted (Rudmin and Kilbourne, 1996). Hence, the redemptive narrative tone adopted by informants to retrospectively make positive meaning of and find benefit in the adversarial circumstances (McAdams and Jones, 2017) faced during a spell of poverty, are often

conceptually related to voluntary simplifier values and motivations, such as self-determination and personal growth. For example, **Christian's (60)** newfound sense of spirituality arising out of his temporary phase of economic deprivation and loss of social status, suggests such growth-inducing meanings. These are translated into a volitional detachment from valued material objects during downward mobility:

*“If you asked me about things I was attached to (**after having become transitory poor**), I could say that there were such things as heirloom - stuff that belonged to the family, like a really great, expensive carpet and what not. But even with these things, I had gone so far that...I mean we still had a lot of these things stored in the basement and when we didn't have any money left, I just went to the [REDACTED] (**warehouse district in the city of [REDACTED] handling and selling carpets**), where you can find those carpet dealers, and I began to sell our carpets there. Also, all of my wife's jewelry was more or less sold at this time (**refers to his second-wife, whom Christian met while being downwardly mobile**). And that wasn't an issue whatsoever suddenly, because it didn't have any meaning anymore at this stage. And this selling of stuff was also influenced by the Buddhism aspect: “you don't need much”, “you need a futon to sleep on” or “just sleep on the floor next to your Buddha statue”. This is, then, almost like a luxury. Just look at some ancient Buddhist stories, there are such nice stories of those who were less well-off using their Buddha statues as fuel to heat their homes. And that's like a confirmation for, aehm, I mean if there is really something spiritual or holy within all that, then it is certainly not found in those material figures. But it is above that, spiritually founded and so on. And when you are aware of that, it is much, much easier to get rid of stuff (...)”*

On the one hand, Christian's spiritual coping with selling valued possessions during a time of economic strain resembles findings from other consumer studies highlighting that spiritual resources are a possible site for producing feelings of empowerment and reducing distress in the face of adversity (Hirschman and Hill, 2000; Hamilton and

Catterall, 2006a; Hutton, 2016). However, the above quote equally connotes a deeper process of inner learning and surpassing his former materially-oriented before-poverty manager self in terms of referring to Buddhist inspirational stories that inform his detachment of material possessions and direct him towards inner/nonmaterial aspects of life. Thus, the more Christian engaged in his spiritual learning by reading Buddhist literature and being involved in the Buddhist community, the more his “*striving for financial and material wealth was diminished*”. He voluntarily disposed of decorative items and furniture in his small “*cell-like*” transitory poor flat that he had to move to after losing his house located in an affluent neighbourhood. And the few furniture items that he decided to keep “*were arranged in harmony*”, so that he could enjoy “*looking at them for hours*”.

Other informants echoed Christian’s strategy of addressing life issues with simplicity and mindfulness (Mick, 2017) via inspirations gained from external sources (e.g. attending an MBSR self-help programme or meditation courses) and consuming stories of how to succeed in difficult situations (e.g. Ulla’s children reading illustrated books depicting how an extended mice family values community and division of labour while facing spatial constraint in their home).

Consequently, such an expansion of inner learning may also constitute a key motivation for adopting voluntarily a (new) way of life characterised by material simplicity during phases of economic strain. In light of these findings, other coping strategies were mentioned in relation to leading a simplified life and associated values of self-determination and growth. These consisted of adopting volitional saving tactics (e.g. visiting the public library to get movies and books for free; buying second-hand furniture on Ebay; switching to private brands), enjoying nature (e.g. going by bike to

a nearby river), trying to consume sustainably (e.g. saving money to buy organic produce), or furnishing homes with bulk trash. Furthermore, informants engaged in related “upcycling” activities, that is bringing used objects back to life and create value out of trash (Cherrier, 2009) (e.g. fixing one’s worn out clothes, or building a raft out of 200 used milk cartons to be used by children at a bathing pond during their summer vacation).

Retrieval of Past Self

In addition to the previously outlined findings surrounding the positive aspects of valuing simplicity during downward mobility, six of the informants from this study (Ulla, Christian, Tim, Robert, Peter, Sophie) referred to making temporal comparisons in regards to their coping. That is, they began to value and revisit consumption practices and possessions that were linked to a positively perceived past self and which helped them in further coping with the negative consequences of downward mobility and associated identity disruption in terms of enabling informants to move forward with their lives. For example, **Christian (60)** mentions in his autobiography that:

“As a contrast to my, sometimes, bald existence of joblessness, I loved reading my Rosamunde Pilcher books. I know almost all of them. Kitsch? In fact, they helped me as they reminded me of family holidays when I was a child going to England or Scotland, which I liked so much and reminded me of an intact family life (...)”

Christian’s experience of downward mobility was marked by severe disruptions to his private life. As he was forced to sacrifice a large proportion of his private savings in an attempt to rescue his failing business, his first wife and him split up and shortly thereafter she filed for divorce. Against this background, he had been forced to leave

their family home and move to a working-class neighbourhood in a different city. As a consequence, “*distances to his children*” who stayed with Christian’s first wife and extended family including his brother and father became longer. Being “*attracted to these books*” triggered reminiscent feelings surrounding an intact family life in his childhood and served as a means for him to cope with a dissolving pre-poverty family life in the wake of becoming downwardly mobile.

Such nostalgic feelings linked to a positively perceived past self, mostly focusing upon early childhood or adolescence, through the consumption of related objects or practices was supported by others. For example, **Ulla (47)** mentions how she retrieved a book by British farmer John Seymour with the title “The self-sufficient gardener”. This book helped her to cope with foregoing the purchase of quality, organic food for her children during downward mobility:

“I dugged out this book, that was read by all of us sharing ecological consciousness during student days in the 1980s and through which we internalised this idea of living independently as a community in our student flats”

Taking this retrieved consumption object as a nostalgic inspiration of leading an autonomous community life through self-production of food, Ulla and her children started to grow their “*own potatoes, cucumbers, carrots and beans*” in the garden of their small council flat. Within this context, Ulla reinforces that:

“(…) Seymours’ instructions on growing potatoes correctly, and the right handling of the soil and tomatoe or bean plants made now real sense. What used to be some romantic ecological dream in the past, transformed into the art of survival for a lone mother with four children”

At first blush, it may be argued that such efforts of revisiting psychologically past periods through possessions precipitating nostalgic feelings for a better-off past may be associated with escapist or reactive attempts to bridge displaced lifestyle ideals brought about by downward mobility (Webster, 2003; Karanika and Hogg, 2016). This may be reflected in Christian's way of coping with a disrupted family life through reading Rosamunde Pilcher literature connoting happier times as a family. In the same vein, Ulla attempts to actively resist the loss of a desired health conscious pre-poverty buyer self ("*in the past I went to Kaiser's (**premium organic food retailer**), now we had to go to Aldi*") through reviving a past environmentally friendly student self, which translated into growing their own vegetables while being on a low-income.

However, upon further prompting informants during interviews in regards to the importance assigned to drawing upon these consumption objects and practices linked to a past self, it became apparent that they were, in fact, used as a type of movement towards growth and development of the self during adversity (Webster, 2003; McAdams, 2006). I noticed this in an early stage of of the research process when conducting interviews with informants who have not managed to fully escape poverty yet. Here, **Peter (53)** reported that he was still struggling financially, yet worked hard for embarking on an uphill life trajectory out of poverty again. Peter used to be a former child care worker, who lost his job due to city counsels' closure of the day care centre he used to work for. At the time of the interview, Peter stressed that he had managed to successfully overcome some severe negative consequences of his downward mobility experience, such as homelessness and being forced "to sleep in his car" for a while before moving to his council flat where the interview took place. However, still being reliant on benefit payments meant that money was also tight

reporting that he only had “25 Euros left for the last 7 days of the month”. During the interview, Peter proudly presented an old leather schoolbag that he used as a child and young teen until the age of 18. When he opened the bag, a past drawing from him became visible on the inside depicting a bomb that was about to explode (similar to Illustration 4. shown below).

The illustration has been removed from the digital version of the thesis by the author due to copyright reasons

Illustration 4. Adaptation of the drawing inside of Peter’s old schoolbag

Peter reported the following when referring to the schoolbag and the drawing inside of it:

Peter: “Now this bag has become really important to me these days. You see this? (showing the interviewer the drawing inside the bag). This is me. The real me, funny right...

Interviewer: Why is this the real you?

Peter: Well, I have always been a ‘revoluzzer’ (“rebel”) I guess, independent in a way not listening to others. Especially in school, I always had my own mind, doing stuff maybe that other classmates don’t do. Critiquing your teachers and the way they teach and things like that. Also using swear words, which caused me a lot of trouble back then. And the bag reminds me of that time, that I am not a conformist. I guess, you somehow forget who you really are. Also, when you are trapped in work life, you do things maybe that are not in line with your own values. During my last job in the care facility, I always had to be careful with what to say when talking to the parents of the

children for example. I mean, I loved working with the children, but it was like a straightjacket that I was put in. You have to follow certain rules on child-rearing forbidding them things that are maybe not in line with your own values. Again, like using swear words for example. I don't have a problem with that when children use these bad words sometimes. But it always created a massive turmoil when these things happen. And then you have to play this role of the good educator to the parents after such incidents.

Interviewer: *And why has the bag become so important then?*

Peter: *"It is like a deep recollection of who you are as a person. I mean the bag just helps me to understand this. And you only begin to realise it when the whole house of cards breaks down (...) (refers to his poverty experience).*

Peter's "deep recollection" of a long-time "forgotten" authentic and desired non-conformist and independent young adolescent self, inspired him, eventually, to shed his former pre-poverty professional identity as a child care worker that he considered mainly as inauthentic. As a consequence, he stopped looking for jobs in the field of child-rearing in order to move out of his strained income situation. Instead, in order to embark on an uphill life trajectory, he has decided on becoming an entrepreneur being in the initial stages of creating "a city guide for children" helping them to "explore the city of [REDACTED] in a fun way". The idea for such a city guide has been further inspired by another past consumption object that he presented to the interviewer as charted in Illustration 5. on the next page. Here, he referred to an old "[REDACTED]" ("[REDACTED] guide"), which he used a teen in the late 1970s to explore the city with friends. He "even received a gold medal" for successfully having "visited all the spots" that formed part of the guide.

The illustration has been removed from the digital version of the thesis by the author due to copyright reasons

Illustration 5. Picture of Peter's old [REDACTED] Explorer from the 1970s

Simultaneously, Peter started to candidate without party affiliation for mayor in the small city he lived in, which may be interpreted to be in alignment with his revival of a “revoluzzer” (rebel) past self.

Such a way of revisiting past, stalled selves through consumption objects or practices in the wake of downward mobility was echoed by other informants. For example, **Tim (67)**, the son of “*very rich parents*”, used some of their capital to become a speculator on the stock exchange and small investor in the late 1970s, coming into money at an early age. Yet, due to his lavish lifestyle, which he sums up, in hindsight, as a life filled with drug abuse, expensive cars, a self-owned holiday cottage by the Baltic Sea, golden Cartier watches, shopping tours to Milan and exploitative behaviours by “*people who claimed to be his friends and lovers*”, he “*blew all of the money*” several times. Every time he fell from grace the consequences had been severe for Tim. Apart

from the loss of almost all of his money he sunk into deep depressions ending up in a few stays at psychosomatic clinics. Several times he managed to regain his lost financial and social standing only to then re-descend in status due to resuming a life marked by overconsumption, extravagancy and prestige. However, during his last and final stint on a low-income he remembered how he retrieved one of his “Bread for the World charity tins”, a charitable body he had already been linked with during his young adolescent years.



Illustration 6. Example of a bread for the world charity tin. Source: Brot fuer die Welt Online (2019)

However, due to being constantly mocked by friends and his rich family for carrying around the charity tin, Tim decided to get rid of it when he was younger and had forgotten about this aspect of his socially responsible self until retrieving it again a few years ago in the wake of his final downward mobility experience. The revival of such a caring aspect forming part of long-time suppressed past self, in turn, encouraged him to further critically reflect on his self-centred and flamboyant pre-poverty consumer self:

“(…). With getting out my old Bread for the World tin (…) I actually realised how much money I spent in the past, without ever thinking about giving anything back to others. But naturally, I have always been someone who likes to give. But I must have thought all of this time, that this was expected from me, wearing a Cartier watch and my wife had this Rolex. “That was expected” – maybe that’s a stupid sentence, because I could have also resisted that. Yes, I thought that this was just a part of the kind of person I used to be. Yes, that’s embarrassing to me. You see how I pause, trying to find the right words for it. Because there is no justification for having these things, neither having a Porsche nor a Rolex. During the time we have spent on talking with each other, probably 100 children, or 50 children, I don’t know, x children have died due to starvation. So, there is no entitlement for having these cars...ok, you support the economy with consuming or create employment or whatever, but the money spent often just goes to those on top of the ladder, those 1% of the population who already have enough of it.”

Similar to Peter, also Tim uses a past consumption object, such as a charity tin, to get rid of a former, inauthentic pre-poverty self. In Tim’s case his discarded before-poverty identity was mainly focused upon outer appearances in terms of conspicuous consumption. By reinforcing that the charity tin helped him to retrieve a past authentic self that values giving instead of taking, it may be further argued that a traumatic event, such as downward mobility, is placed into a narrative of meaning and purpose (McAdams, 2006; Marcoux, 2017) as he strives to avoid falling back into his pre-poverty extravagant lifestyle by rejecting a neoliberal subjectivity of consuming (“there is not justification for having (…) neither (…) a Porsche nor a Rolex”). Such a finding would equally extend current knowledge on consumers’ revival of past selves during life transitions other than retirement (Schau et al., 2009) or going to college (Noble and Walker, 1997). Hence, this research suggests that when a narrative identity is being significantly revised due to a traumatic event, such as slipping into poverty

and the associated threats of losing one's pre-poverty identity, certain past selves (sometimes retrieved or reinforced through linked consumption objects or practices) may be an inspiration upon which to build to move forward with one's life – almost akin to “cleaning the slate” or “making a fresh start” (Price et al., 2017).

In a related theoretical vein, it may be argued that consumers do not necessarily engage in nostalgic feelings solely oriented towards a displaced pre-poverty middle-class existence during downward mobility all the time throughout the process of becoming downwardly mobile as highlighted in reactive reflexive modes of responding to downward mobility (Thompson et al., 2018). By contrast, past selves retrieved from childhood or adolescence often seemed to prevail amongst informants forming part of the redemptive self narrative archetypal theme, thereby favouring a (postmodern) existential reflexivity (Thompson et al., 2018). Here, consumers “*can make and remake their identities over the courses of their lifetime and choose to what degree the new identities are consistent with the old*” (Schau et al., 2009:256). This research shows that such an agentic (re-) cultivation of consumers' identities during times when a sense of ontological security is threatened (Giddens, 1991) by a crisis event such as downward mobility may also be deployed through revisiting past selves and associated consumption objects and practices. Table IX. illustrates further examples from other informants' acts of past-self retrievals and associated consumption enactments in terms of either the revival or picking up new forms of certain consumption practices and objects that are linked to one's past.

Table IX.

Examples of consumers' retrieval of past selves during poverty

Informant	Past Self Retrieval (Example)	Consumption Enactment (during poverty)
Robert	Re-activation of a past adolescent athletic self (swimming and waterball) helping Robert to get through drug withdrawal and move out of poverty by staying strong to not relapse into drug abuse: <i>"If I had not done swimming as a competitive sport when I was young, I would have passed over the Jordan."</i>	Swimming in local lakes, or natural waterways "in any wind or weather"
Christian	In searching for <i>"own childhood, youth, the family, and identity, where one has grown up, parents, grandparents, and friends"</i> Christian engages in a re-collection and retrieval of a past childhood and adolescent self and states that <i>"already as a child I have been a Buddhist"</i> , but <i>"over time I forgot who I really am"</i> .	Digging out an old painting of his hometown inherited from his father, which was drawn in the 1960s by a regional artist and watching it for hours from different angles in his living room. Becoming interested in collecting and curating similar paintings of his hometown from the same artist as a hobby; creating Wikipedia entries about the painter; developing a webpage containing pictures and rich stories about different paintings collected.

Informant	Past Self Retrieval (Example)	Consumption Enactment (during poverty)
<i>Sophie</i>	Re-collection of Sophie’s “ <i>ordinary people</i> ” upbringing in terms of a non-descript lower-middle class socialisation, which triggers self-authenticity and sufficiency	Reflected in her symbolic and self-extending (Belk, 1988) consumption behaviours, such as retrieving a collection of old records where she starts listening again to these records after years (“early Motown sound”, “blues”, “New Wave”, “Punk”)

Downward Mobility as Driver for Enduring Identity

Transformation

As highlighted in the previous findings sections, the personal narratives of informants displayed strong degrees of meaning-making in the wake of an unpleasant and traumatic experience, such as social downward mobility. Here, some evidence has been provided that these changed meanings have come with a gradual acceptance of their situations during a transitory phase of economic strain (e.g. when “rolling up sleeves” to effectively cope with downward mobility), altering identities, and changed global beliefs (see e.g. highlighted efforts of disentangling from more ego-centred, neoliberal subjectivities associated with before-poverty lifeworlds and consumer society in general through one’s coping with downward mobility), resulting in perceptions of growth and positive life changes. To further illustrate such a path towards an enriched life perspective placing one’s poverty spell(s) into a narrative of meaning and purpose after having successfully overcome it, **Tim (67)**, discussed the following during the interview:

*You can't find happiness when only focusing upon appearances. That's what all philosophers say, but you don't have to study them to understand this. I think you have to go through a lot of pain and negative experiences to really understand this. Happiness comes from within. And you have to free yourself from this thinking of owning things and so on. But this is really hard I guess. But, like I said, you have to really, really hit rock bottom. I mean like financially obviously, but also psychologically and physically. If you survive this, then you are indestructible. And that's what I would like to recommend to every human being out there. I mean to get rid of all of this having-shit and just say goodbye. But you know, Julius (**interviewer's forename**), this is only possible when you suffer first. Otherwise, you just don't get it. A person that has never suffered, who is born into a world of clay pigeon shooting or playing golf and tennis, one who only knows Golfino (**premium golfing brand**), Lacoste and all of this...this person is always floating above the clouds, justified or not, sometimes this happens even without any justification through heritage, the person is also totally stupid, maybe also immoral and so on. Yeah, how is such a person supposed to understand it then? That person would always say: "Tim, you're a total lunatic, you belong in the cuckoo's nest!", "I am doing well!", "I have everything", "I have the big cars, great women"...but when they turn 50 or 60 and look into the mirror and are truly honest to themselves, I think that's a catastrophe for them. (...) And then they fear this inner travel to question their own self, and get instead on the next plane to Dubai for holidays and so on and so on. Because they don't have the courage to start this inner travel. And that, I think, is even more painful than all of what I have been through."*

With reference to having become "indestructible" Tim connotes a triumphant positive development of the self as an outcome of trauma and suffering associated with the psychological and physical consequences of his experiences with previous phases of economic destabilisation (see e.g. his previously reported deep depressions after having slipped into poverty). Recall that Tim's immersion in materialism and extravagant consumer behaviour was so deep before his financial fiascos occurred that

he rarely cared about any other things than his outer appearances in his before-poverty life. At the same time, he labeled his former conspicuous lifestyle as the culprit for his repeated slips into destabilised economic circumstances. Yet, his poverty experiences have provided him with an opportunity to “*understand*” that happiness does not come from such formerly valued “*outer riches*”, but rather “*from within*”. Accordingly, he constructs a positive resolution (Pals, 2006) to his past crises surrounding downward mobility and conspicuous consumer behaviours as the catalyst for his multiple falls from grace. In this sense, he creates a redemptive narrative of the self (McAdams, 2006) that moves from suffering to feeling liberated by the opportunity to having re-defined his identity outside of the prescribed background of his before-poverty upper-middle class affluent and unreflective lifestyle as a stockbroker and son of rich parents. This identity re-cultivation comes to surface via his non-materialistic post-poverty self-image that is free of any interference from external or material factors in order to find “happiness”. Further, he explicitly places himself in a discourse around the difference of a hypothetical materialistic and “immoral” other who has “never suffered” in their life and may suppress an “inner travel” to “question” the own materialistic self through consuming more (“travelling to Dubai” instead). In doing so, it may be argued that he gives further substance and validity to personal growth in terms of a moral development, and concomitant identity transformation attained. Such an attempt of constantly (re-) cultivating a redemptive self-narrative that seeks to affirm positive developments towards a moral goodness in life (Taylor, 1989) will be further elaborated on at a later stage in this chapter (*see section on non-materialistic consumption across the consumption cycle*). Here, it will be shown how informants have equally tried to place themselves into discourses of non-materialism being

considered of higher value compared to more materialistic others in society (Hyman, 2015). Their inscription to such a discourse is used as a vehicle to both affirm and express their moral developments inherent in the idea of moving from suffering to positive life outcomes in the aftermath of having survived a poverty spell.

Referring back to Tim, in summary, hence, having become the non-materialistic person he claims to be today, which rather looks inward than outward for attaining happiness, could only be achieved via rocky downhill life trajectories and associated sufferings experienced in the past.

By way of second illustration, **Ulla (47)**, the pre-poverty upper-middle class housewife and current post-poverty self-employed copywriter and empty nester, describes how she has changed her life to the better through downward mobility. Here, she suggests that her temporary descent in social status has had an equally liberating and cleansing effect in the long run:

***Interviewer:** “You have mentioned that you really hit rock bottom. But you have also said in your autobiography that you have developed a lot of strength, optimism and courage during this time. What do you mean by this?”*

***Ulla:** “I suddenly had this inner freedom, some kind of inner independence... in my past life I was in a much more dependent situation, a role that really didn’t correspond with who I really am. Basically, this breaking down of my middle-class existence was a catharsis. It was a chance to get rid of certain aspects of my former self and maybe also to come out of it in a cleaned way. Although it was really tough at that time. Now reflecting upon this time (**referring to poverty experience**) is much easier I guess. During that particular moment, if there had been a wise person sitting at my table and telling me: Ulla, look! It’s a catharsis!” I am pretty sure I would have thrown this person out of my home. When you find yourself in in such a situation it’s just like, you just want to survive somehow.”*

Adding to Tim's account of personal growth, Ulla seems to inject a critique of an overly romanticised view of her poverty experience now that her income level as an entrepreneur owning a copywriting agency has increased again. By hinting at the unpleasant experiences associated with downward mobility, she claims that during times when one's own social existence is threatened, needs for "*surviving*" such a phase may be prioritised over consciously reflecting upon coming out on the other side as a better and happier person. This is in line with McAdams (2006) cautioning that it would be insensitive and naïve to believe that all suffering can be redeemed within people's narrative identities. Such a critique of the redemptive-self links back to the first theme of this findings chapter ("downward mobility as a negative experience"), reinforcing the various vulnerabilities, flaws and imperfections found in informants' narratives of having experienced temporary spells of relative income poverty. In this sense, redemptive narratives of the self are akin to a double-edged sword cutting both ways in that there is no good and authentic story that is free of struggle and tension. Put differently, as further postulated by McAdams (2006:269), "*(k)nowing the limitations and the shortcomings of the stories we live by may help us cope with our failings in constructive ways, and even help us to transcend them*" (McAdams, 2006:269).

Thus, by way of acknowledging and doing justice to experienced hardships of a lone mother on a low-income, Ulla intends to not extol her story of personal growth too much. Consequently, when referring to a "*catharsis*", she tries to give further credit to embracing her temporary experience of downward mobility and forced loss of a past middle-class affluent (homemaker) role with the benefit of hindsight. Here, similar to Tim, Ulla buttresses that her poverty spell has brought about something positive in

terms of a “*truly personal development*” and self-actualisation. When reflecting upon her pre-poverty middle-class existence, and explicitly referring to the “*much more dependent situation*” she found herself in, Ulla considers herself retrospectively as a “*young mother who was reduced to children, cooking and going to the church*” by her “*former husband*” and “*also herself*”. Against this background she claims to have been “*assigned a fixed role*” in which she could not realise an “*authentic*” and “*well-educated, practice-oriented social scientist*” self anymore, which resulted in feelings of her core skills of writing and being creative “*lying idle*” for a long time. During the interview, Ulla substantiates her undesired before-poverty life by calling it a “*golden cage*”, representing a phase of her life throughout she “*wasn’t herself*”. She even goes so far as to painting a bleak picture of a hypothetical, alternative current self, assuming a scenario where she still lived in their villa by the lake as an empty nester resuming her pre-poverty middle-class existence:

“(...) I would have been the right candidate for the typical frustrated housewife...children have left the house, I would have started with drinking alcohol, nice clothing, putting my make-up on, a little bit of representative work, husband already having affairs with thousands of other women...maybe I would have become such a person”.

Both Ulla’s and Tim’s accounts of having achieved growth and identity transformations through re-configuring their bad experiences of slipping into poverty into something positive in hindsight build further upon the aforementioned critique set out in this research of other studies surrounding consumers’ downward mobility. Especially, snap-shot depictions of deploying reactive reflexive modes when coping with unpleasant experiences surrounding lifestyle displacements and the loss of social status (Ulver-Sneistrup and Ostberg, 2011; Saatcioglu and Ozanne, 2013; Thompson

et al., 2018) may be further challenged. This is so as the informants from this study did not demonstrate a hope to regain their misplaced pre-poverty social positions and lifestyle structures as propounded in the reactive reflexive model (Thompson et al., 2018). By contrast, as per existential reflexivity (Thompson et al., 2018), they perceived the poverty experience as a revitalising change retrospectively in terms of feeling liberated by the opportunity to re-define their identities outside of their normative backgrounds of formerly lived pre-poverty middle-class existences (see e.g. Ulla's undesired role of an upper middle-class housewife or Tim's disdain for a materialistic oriented self, coming from an affluent familial origin). Against this backdrop, on a related conceptual level, they intended to make peace with their past sufferings associated with downward mobility by placing them into a narrative of personal growth and an enriched life perspective.

Such a way of finding meaning and positive change in past sufferings associated with downward mobility, goes to the heart of what McAdams (2006) has described as redemptive self-narratives. Equally, this relationship between suffering and benefit, stasis and progression, ignorance (not knowing) and consequent enlightenment, self-actualisation, growing and flourishing in a dangerous and complicated world (McAdams, 2006) has been highlighted in other empirical and theoretical psychological studies on trauma in terms of Posttraumatic Growth (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 1995), transformational coping (Aldwin, 2007), or thriving in response to challenge (O'Leary and Ickovics, 1995). Similarly, within discourses surrounding the "therapeutic turn" in Western societies in which Western people position themselves within a cultural narrative in which they are able to work on their identities and embrace own sufferings in order to reach self-actualisation and further their well-being

and happiness (Cushman, 1995; Illouz, 2007; Hyman, 2015; Gopaldas, 2016; Marcoux, 2017) sequences of redemption, as postulated by McAdams (2006), and illustrated in this study, are featured. Especially, in regards to the latter sociocultural backdrop of inscribing oneself into a therapeutic discourse, enacting a cultural belief that one's well-being and happiness is best served if the person is able to place a traumatic event into a narrative of personal growth (Marcoux, 2017), informants' outlined redemptive quests of psychological healing and moving forward become reflected.

To reinforce this aspect of downward mobility and the struggles associated with it serving as an impetus for psycho-social development, which is strongly shaped by placing oneself into a socio-cultural field of therapeutic discourse, other informants from this study echoed Ulla's and Tim's illustrated accounts of personal growth. While further reflecting upon their downward mobility experience in hindsight, they frequently used such summarising expressions as: "*rising like a Phoenix from the ashes*" (Robert), being "*newborn*" (Dorothea), having achieved a "*deep understanding*" (Sophie), newfound "*authenticity*", or a "*set[ting] free [of their] inner core*" (Christian). They also referred to such expressions as a "*cleansing process*" (Tim/Ulla) considering a spell of poverty as something "*healthy*" (Sophie) in regards to their personal developments and altered consuming selves. This practise of the actualisation of the self via an adverse life event, such as slipping into poverty, is in further line with the notion of redemption and therapy culture in the wider sense in that growth and development are both functions of rediscovering a good and inner true self that may have been buried for some time (McAdams, 2006). However, as cautioned by McAdams and Jones (2017), and others more recently (Infurna and

Jayawickreme, 2019), determining whether or not one has achieved growth and a transformation of one's self in the wake of a life changing event should go beyond just taking one's word for it. Hence, to avoid the threat of "pseudo growth" (Lechner and Antoni, 2004), it should equally involve demonstrable change in a person's (social) behaviour in the service of positive goals and enhanced commitments.

Against this background, in the following two sub-sections, it will be highlighted how informants from this study have incorporated new consumption routines and pro-social behaviours in their post-poverty lifestyles that are in line with their alleged enriched life perspectives. In doing so, a fresh and "envisioning" (MacInnis, 2011:136) psycho-socio-cultural perspective to existing studies on socially mobile consumers may be offered and how they re-construct their consuming identities after having overcome a spell of poverty.

Self-Controlled Consumption

Considering the growing set of studies that have depicted pathways of the downwardly mobile and their adaptive consumption strategies, these sometimes indicate that (some) coping strategies adopted during poverty seem to (partially) persist after having embarked on a subsequent upward life trajectory (Hamilton and Catterall, 2006a; Wendt, 2011, Saatcioglu and Ozanne, 2013). Such a maintenance of changed consumption behaviours induced by a poverty experience has been equally observable in informants' comments from this study. These enduring shifts were reported to take place in various consumption areas such as homemaking (e.g. budgeting, or energy consumption), the purchase of FMCG goods, and consumer durables, furniture, housing, hobbies or going on holidays. For example, **Sophie (42)** said the following

when being questioned about her current money management after having moved out of her one-year long phase of social welfare claimancy:

Interviewer: *You have said that you needed to adopt several saving strategies while being on welfare. How do you handle money questions today? Is there anything that has changed due to your experiences?*

Sophie: *“Yes, absolutely...the way I deal with money today has totally changed. I really had a difficult time, that’s why it’s so ingrained. I am super-correct with money now, I still lend money, but I always ask when they will pay it back to me. A more concrete example is... when we take my wallet, I can show it to you...here it is...I mean I am really doing Ok again financially, but I always go to the cash machine at the beginning of the week in order to get €150 or so. I really hate transferring money from my account or using a credit card. I also rarely use my debit card at the supermarket. I need to see what I have...and when I go to my bank each Monday to get the cash, I always ask for small bank notes, fivers, tens and twenties, and just a single or two fifty-Euro notes, which I put here into a secret pocket in my wallet...the smaller notes go here where I can easily reach them, so that I can always see how much I still have and how much is spent. To be honest with you, my budget is higher than 150 Euros per week, I can spend more than that, but each time I am really happy, even after going out, eating a pizza or going to the movies or so, that I still have 10 Euros left and it is only Friday. Sometimes it’s already gone on Thursday and sometimes it lasts until Sunday. Well, I think this has not really led to saving money, but what I want to say is that I really need this haptic control: how much do I still have? I knew how to manage and control the same money with an app, but I have to see it and also need to personally endure that it is going away”*

Sophie’s reflection on having become both cautious (e.g. when lending money or deliberately refusing to use “plastic money” and electronic payment solutions) and to an extent more conscious concerning her spending behaviour via self-allocating a

weekly budget of no more than 150 Euros bears some resemblances to what Quelch and Jocz (2009) in their study on (post-)recession consumers have referred to as “slam on the brakes” and “pained but patient” consumers. These consumer segments after making it through a severe economic downturn (e.g. after the Great Recession from 2007-2009) seem to develop a heightened sense of economic vulnerability that may persist long beyond its end. Consequently, consumers tend to cut back on spending due to retaining certain consumption habits they have acquired throughout the recession in terms of economising in major consumption areas (e.g. remaining considered in purchases of treats). This observation is in line with others (Wendt, 2011; Karanika and Hogg, 2016) claiming that from a theoretical coping perspective downwardly mobile consumers tend to shift towards becoming more self-controlled (Folkman et al., 1986) in terms of, for instance, regulating impulses (such as resisting temptations when making purchase decisions, Baumeister, 2002) or planning their budgets in more detail (*see also pp. 148-149 and pp. 163-164 in this findings chapter*). Such an increased self-control eventually leads to a heightened degree of self-reflexivity in regards to their purchasing decision-making (e.g. becoming more price sensitive, choosing utilitarian products over hedonic goods, or delaying the purchase of durables), which may linger beyond the end of a poverty spell due to becoming habitually ingrained. The following interview extracts from four informants (Layla, Irene, Tim and Christian) forming part of this study’s redemptive self narrative theme partially confirm such a continuation of self-controlled and reflexive behaviours adopted during a phase of economic strain that informs their post-poverty purchasing routines.

For example, **Layla (23)** reports that she still engages in a type of personal cognitive accounting (Thaler, 1999) after moving out of poverty, which she has “learned” throughout her phase of being transitory poor living in a foster child care facility. Here, she allocates her available financial budget to different mental accounts (e.g. groceries, clothing, hobbies, etc.). Consequently, the awareness of having these mental accounts influence Layla’s spending behaviour in terms of acting self-regulated and conscious of her economic resources available. This is so as different expenses incurred in one category (e.g. clothing) might have a direct influence upon another category (e.g. hobbies) in terms of the actual budget available, thereby helping the consumer to keep within budget and potentially refrain from overspending.

***Interviewer:** How would you say has this time while you were forced to live with less (referring to phase of income reduction) influenced you? Has it influenced you in any way?*

***Layla:** Yes, it definitely influenced me. It (referring to phase of income reduction) has shown me to really think in different categories when allocating money. What you really need your money for. I need the money to eat, I need my money for sanitary products, I need money for clothing, or I need money for hobbies. And this thinking in categories...I believe that a normal person is not able to think in such a structured way, someone who has never experienced such things (referring to phase of income reduction), that she says: “Ok, I need it for clothing, for hygiene.”...and through this I have been influenced sort of, because I know now exactly what I am spending and for what...*

***Interviewer:** You mean you have kept these spending strategies?*

***Layla:** Yes, at least in my head when I purchase something I always know how this might influence other categories of my spending, maybe that some money would miss at some stage in a different category. What I want to say is that I have all the categories in my head still. And I think other people who have not*

gone through this (referring to phase of income reduction) would easily forget about such things, not looking that painstakingly at their spending I believe (...)

Another passage from an Interview with **Irene (45)** echoes this tendency towards making self-reflexive purchasing decisions after having moved out of poverty. Here, she refers to her recent acquisition of a pair of sunglasses emphatically refusing to buy a premium branded version (“these stupid Ray Ban glasses”). Instead, due to her heightened price sensitivity resulting in less impulsive purchase behaviour, which Irene repeatedly refers to as an “inner break/barrier” or “leftover” from her poverty experience, she opts for a much cheaper unbranded version from a German eyewear company (“Fielmann”):

***Irene:** (...) for example I have bought this new pair of sunglasses two weeks ago. And then I had a look in the stores and nowadays everyone wears Ray Ban. I have also tried on one of those and found glasses that I like for 139 Euros. But there are also those copy cat spectacle frames from Fielmann (German eye ware company), and to be honest with you they look exactly like the Ray Ban stuff and they cost just 17.50 Euros. Ok, and then it is also with the Ray Bans..those with the very thin frames that I was looking for, that you only see the name on the glass itself. But I wanted to put in there other spectacle glasses anyway to correct my visual impairment. So, the writing is gone anyways. And then I have thought at the same time: “Whatever! It really doesn’t matter.” ...Sure, I could afford again these stupid Ray Ban glasses, wouldn’t be an issue whatsoever today. But no...I have this inner break inside of me, where I am preferring the Fielmann glasses for 17,50 Euro instead...*

***Interviewer:** And those were the glasses you ended up buying?*

***Irene:** Correct, I bought them. Those are the ones I am wearing right now, yes. Well, I must say that I still have this reservation when it comes to buying those things, I mean bigger things or designer clothing, expensive jeans and whatnot.*

*Yes, sure, I could absolutely buy such a stupid design jeans for 140 Euros. Not a problem. But I don't do it anymore, because it would be a shame to spend that much on such things. I don't know, I think there is still this inner barrier. I think this is just too much when buying it completely new and I would wait until it has been reduced after a while. Maybe for 59 or 69 Euros I would consider buying these jeans. Then I always say: "Ok, you could buy this, but paying over 100 Euros for trousers?" Naaaahh...well, there is still this inner break inside of me, still a leftover from my experiences (**referring to poverty phase**). I mean, on the other hand, this is quite good I think. It does not hurt me in any way that I still think that way.*

Similar to Irene to whom purchasing the generic sunglasses brand, or thinking about delaying the acquisition of new branded designer clothing until prices have been reduced, is insofar acceptable as no loss of quality or aesthetic value subjectively incurs when making these rational decisions about cheaper alternatives, also both **Tim (67)** and **Christian (60)** emphasise the growing importance of (lower) prices and value seeking as key criteria to make purchase decisions after having overcome their poverty spells. To them, the heightened price sensitivity brought about by their past experiences of living with less financial resources is almost akin to a newly acquired "fundamental believe" about saving money. Here, Tim (67) goes so far as to declaring other consumers who are willing to pay more for the same brand as downright "idiotic" due to not engaging in the same conscious and rigid information search about, for example, current sales promotions or their willingness to switch to a cheaper discounter brand as he usually exhibits:

***Tim:** (...) but now (**after having moved out of poverty**) I always look at these...what I have in my mailbox (**refers to promotional brochures from supermarkets**), and I try to find things that are cheaper. And then I also buy these things. Schogetten (**German chocolate brand**) cost now, here I have them*

*with me, they cost now 59 cents at Edeka (**German upmarket supermarket cooperation**). I have bought again four packs of those. Or with Ritter Sport (**different chocolate brand**)...I really don't understand it...the other day I was asking the salesperson: "Are there actually people buying Ritter Sport for 89 cents or 99 cents if they can be bought for 20 cents less?" This is literally idiotic. Well, it's just 20 cents, might be ridiculous that I argue that way. But I am taking the time to search for lower prices and would never buy anything that is available at a cheaper price. Also with Vitell (**French premium brand of bottled water**), I would never buy a bottle of Vitell for 1 Euro or whatever. I would rather die before ending up buying this. Instead, I go to Penny (**German discounter brand**) and buy a litre bottle for 19 cents. You know, I have done all of this in the past, buying these expensive things, I had my Cartier and my wife had her Rolex and whatnot (...)*

Likewise, **Christian's (60)** current post-poverty purchase routines are in consonance with the aforementioned informants' narrative accounts in regards to both increased time and associated cognitive resources used (e.g. continuous engagement with sales promotions, making price comparisons, looking for offers on the internet, or finding opportunities to buy used goods) that go into a rational search for his need satisfaction as a consumer.

***Christian:** I have realised that the people throw away so much stuff, you could if you wanted...I mean every Saturday there is all kinds of furniture standing around in our neighbourhood outside of their homes, so that you could furnish your home bit by bit from outside with these things that are still of reasonable quality. And often you read in the local newspapers...or in the supermarket there is a noticeboard or so... that they want to sell really good stuff for very little money or even give these things away for free. I mean, now we have this pram, right? Almost like new. A really great thing with 10 gears and stuff. Costs new around 250 Euros and we bought it for just 80, I mean without any scratches. And we bought this from a small second-hand bicycle shop in*

our area. This is just unbelievable what things you are able find, stuff that is not that expensive, but equally effective and it absolutely looks the same, but does not cost as much as new things. I mean, you see things now that you did not see in the past (referring to pre-poverty life). Also Arzu (Christian's wife) has started browsing through these leaflets from Aldi or Penny (discount brand) when money was tight. And she still does that..always on the weekend... and I see a lot of things online, for example books. I only buy books second-hand, because you get a few weeks after the book has been published, you get it then second-hand already. Like in an entirely new condition. I don't know, but I am always buying my books online, at least 2-3 times a month.

The above presented informants' interview quotes depicting an increased reflexivity of their purchasing decision-making processes after they have re-ascended financially is in line with others (Wendt, 2011; Schreurs et al., 2012; Saatcioglu and Ozanne, 2013) stating that downwardly mobile consumers may become proud of their more reflective, efficient and disciplined consumption behaviours adopted during poverty. At the same time, these socially mobile consumers (downward and upward) tend to question past unreflective pre-poverty consumption routines, which may provoke an enduring behavioural shift that extends beyond the time after one has embarked on an upward life trajectory from economic deprivation.

Some prior work has acknowledged these permanent changes in behaviours and attitudes of consumers having overcome a poverty spell. For example, studies have referred to them as "change in perspective" (Hamilton and Catterall, 2006a), "changes for the better" (Schreurs et al., 2012:200), or a long-lasting "gain of knowledge" (Wendt, 2010:132) brought about by one's past experiences of being transitory poor. However, these claims made by researchers are usually devoid of theoretical substantiation due to not being the focal point of analysis.

As such, this study is novel with its theoretical lens of narrative self-development being used to explain such changes - especially, when examining more closely the above illustrated informants' quotes using a redemptive reading of meaning-making and enlightenment brought about by a negative life event (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 1995; McAdams, 2006), such as becoming poor. Here, the positive narrative tone adopted by all of these poverty survivors is a further reflection of the negativity generally associated with slipping into poverty that is turned into something positive and fulfilling in the end and, hence, informs their post-poverty consumer behaviours. See, for instance, Irene who indicates that her continued cautiousness regarding the purchase of more expensive goods is a positive remnant of her poverty experience in that it "does not hurt [her] in any way that [she] still think[s] that way" after having managed to get out of poverty. Or Christian and Tim who both enthusiastically reject their unreflective and more conspicuous past pre-poverty consuming identities ("*I have done all of this in the past, buying these expensive things*"). Simultaneously, these informants in a redemptive quest to make meaning and infer personal growth from their spell of poverty further refer to a change in perspective ("*You see things now, that you did not see in the past*"), which they obtained throughout being forced to live with less (*see also pp.156-174 in this findings chapter*). Such an enduring change in perspective has shaped their current post-poverty consumer "belief systems" in that they both (still) keep their eyes open when it comes to purchasing cheaper alternatives of consumer goods within the market (e.g. buying second-hand or keep watching for rebates) that endures despite their personal financial circumstances having improved again.

Non-Materialistic Consumption

Apart from the above highlighted (enduring) changes in purchasing behaviours the informants from this study have demonstrated further redemptive imagery (e.g. by adopting languages of enlightenment or moral development of the self, McAdams, 2006) in their accounts of slipping into poverty and how this has informed their current post-poverty consumption practices. These redemptive linguistic frameworks span the whole post-poverty consumption cycle, thereby going beyond solely focusing on acquisition. Hence, they also include the use of goods and services as well as their disposal (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Here, again **Tim (67)** comments on how his volatile life trajectory having experienced various financial and associated emotional turbulences has had a longstanding effect upon his current post-poverty consumptive behaviours, such as going to gym or eating food. He further adds how these experiences shaping his current consumption rituals affect his wellbeing in a positive way:

***Tim:** “Through my experiences (referring to repeat poverty spells throughout his life), I have gone through a lot of pain. Emotional suffering, which even translates into physical pain of the body sometimes. But I still need that, as I want to feel myself. I do that now through physical exercise, not because I have done something wrong, or thought the wrong way like in the past (refers to past pre-poverty lavish lifestyle that triggered various falls into poverty). I go for a swim every morning between 6am, half past 6, or so and then I go the gym at around 8am to do my pain therapy. This means, I inflict some physical pain upon myself through working out really hard. But this knowledge that I have gained in my life, that this pain that I feel, at the gym or in any situation, will ease after a while...it has always been like that thankfully...this is what I can recommend to any living person out there. Overcoming pain means real happiness to me. Or take a very stale piece of bread for example...you start to*

enjoy it only when you have endured week-long periods of hunger beforehand maybe. Yeah, that's another thing...I often buy things and then put them away for a few days, so that the desire and my own taste for these things can ripe. I never eat anything right away. Because everything is available these days, it is all inflationary. And it doesn't taste any good if you eat it every single day. You don't know how it actually tastes. But if you buy stuff purposefully, maybe only every 3 months...it is with all the stuff you buy...and then you put it away and start looking at it after a while again in order to make these things more desirable. And that's where the real pleasure and taste comes from... ”

Interviewer: “Do you have specific examples?”

Tim: “Yeah, I do that with anything I buy. Any fruit. Chocolates. In the past (*refers to pre-poverty life*) I would have eaten a box of chocolate right away. But I don't do anything anymore right away. And sometimes, I do the same when being hungry...I am trying to get real hungry with rumbling tummies and so on. And then, I try not to guzzle afterwards. Instead, I really try to enjoy it with a different awareness. It's a different kind of enjoyment that is long-lasting. You know, being happy in life is so simple. But you need some sort of loss and suffering beforehand. Well that is my own opinion, but I think there is no other way...”

When Tim talks about the way how his multiple falls from grace have taught him that overcoming pain, loss, and suffering in life brings about happiness, another explicit example of a move on the part of his character from suffering to enhancement, which is so central to the theme of redemption (McAdams, 2006), may be detected. This finding is also in line with studies on psychological health and wellbeing linked to themes of redemption (McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten and Bowman, 2001) or personal growth (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004). These mainly show that people who juxtapose clearly negative past events with positive outcomes tend to score high on emotional wellbeing (e.g. being more satisfied in life, enjoying higher self-esteem or

claiming to lead a meaningful life). In light of such prior research, interestingly, Tim's full subscription to his narrative account of redemption has translated into post-poverty consumer behaviours, which prompt him to replay sequences of overcoming pain and deprivation leading to emotional wellbeing via certain consumption acts. See, for instance, his take on going to the gym referring to it as his "own pain therapy". Here, he inflicts (physical) pain upon himself in order to feel happy afterwards when the pain eases again. Or consider his deliberate practise of self-denial and deferred gratification regarding food consumption in order to produce long-term rewards of "desire", "pleasure", and "real taste". In doing so, he further reinforces his changed self-definition as a consumer towards having become more self-controlled and conscious (*"In the past, I would have eaten a box of chocolate right away"* vs. *[Now] I really try to enjoy it with a different awareness"*), putting emphasis on a deeper experiential benefit gained (*"It is a different kind of enjoyment that is long-lasting"*). Taking a wider socio-cultural perspective concerning mainstream Western consumption, Tim seems to critique the "inflation" of the endless consumer choices these days. Thus, his post-poverty consumption routine surrounding the deliberate delay of need satisfaction may equally be interpreted as a way of distancing himself from consumerism and capitalist society that have been accused of failing to deliver consumers with sustainable states of being as opposed to short term gratifications of having (Shankar and Fitchett, 2002).

Such a way of expressing identity re-formulation and associated change of life philosophy through integration of less consumptive attitudes in the post-poverty life pattern have been reported by other informants as well. Like Tim, these informants also stressed that their less materialistic outlook upon life as a key learning gained

from their poverty experience has become a vital source of long-lasting pleasure, satisfaction and wellbeing in their current post-poverty life worlds. By frequently comparing themselves to materialistic and less reflective others in society, they make further sense of, and (re-)produce their redemptive selves as “enlightened” poverty survivors. **Christian’s (60)** account of comparing his past pre-poverty holidays with current post-poverty travel experiences is equally illustrative of this:

***Christian:** (...) in the past (referring to pre-poverty life) I always booked the best hotel...or we said sometimes: “Ok, let’s book another flight to a different country!”... like really spontaneous when I did this South America tour with my eldest son, we had blown almost 25.000 Euros in 4 weeks. I mean, I would never do something like this anymore today. Like, being really thoughtless and just booking stuff...for example, we arrived in this city, took a taxi and just asked the driver where the next 5 stars hotel is. Preferably with a rooftop swimming-pool, so that we can have the best view over the city (laughs), with a cocktail bar and so on...*

***Interviewer:** So, you wouldn’t do it the same way today?*

***Christian:** Absolutely not! Having money again, I won’t spend my vacation in luxury hotels anymore, and especially not on a cruise. People can fly to Mars if they like, but without me. They can stay as long as they want there. I mean, when we were in Sri Lanka this year, we did not go to the hotel bar or so. We just bought this Arrack (**alcoholic drink**) and took it to the beach...and this is much better, you can see the sunset, and all the locals come out and you start talking to them. And then they tell you stories about the Tsunami a few years ago. And they take you with them to show you their house and a Buddha statue with no feed anymore because the Tsunami destroyed it, but the locals fished it out of the water and re-installed it. I think that’s just fantastic, really getting in touch with these things. I have the feeling that I enjoy this much more, and this has something to do with what I have gone through (**refers to poverty experience**)... and then you are really looking forward to these holidays and it*

is much more sustainable compared to my past life. Memories and the joy you get from this, I think it continues much longer.

In this passage Christian charts his personal redemptive quest by expressing a disdain for his past pre-poverty consuming identity using his lavish tour through South America as an example. This may be summarised as largely unreflective, overly materialistic, and detached from local culture. By contrast, his emphasis on trying to gain more authentic travel experiences these days (e.g. by being more connected to local community and culture) serves as another purposeful linkage to such a narrative of growth and development of the self in terms of leading to more “sustainable” states of “joy” compared to his past inauthentic traveller self before slipping into poverty. According to Hyman (2015) Western consumers tend to increasingly situate themselves within socio-cultural therapeutic discourses of happiness, which, amongst other things, promote the idea of having a non-materialistic identity. The above (redemptive) quote from Christian and others before him reveal that especially those having overcome adverse life circumstances, such as moving into poverty, forcefully subscribe to such a culturally-informed non-materialistic outlook upon life being conducive to their post-poverty wellbeing. It may be argued that they do this to reinforce, justify, sustain and also extend their stories of successful recovery, growth and self-authentication attained from assigning positive meanings to their poverty experiences. This corroborates with McAdams (2006) who states that narratives of redemption are stories of people who see themselves as heroic and uniquely gifted individual protagonists. Hence, they are often the most ardent narrators of their stories of growth, enlightenment and successful recovery in the wake of negative life sequences.

In light of such a self-expressive functioning of redemptive tales becoming vehicles for articulating the uniqueness of having experienced successful recovery and personal development towards becoming non-materialistic, also informants' attempts to further differentiate themselves from others in society may be better understood. See, for instance, Christian's interjection in the above quote where he, in a subtle and sarcastic manner, downgrades those who engage in more mass-market oriented and excessive leisure consumption (*"I won't spend my vacation in luxury hotels anymore, and especially not on a cruise. People can fly to Mars if they like, but without me"*). He, thus, further reveals and substantiates his redemptive narrative process of inner learning in that he now seeks out more authentic travel experiences compared to his past life before becoming downwardly mobile.

The majority of informants from this study equally positioned themselves as distinct or separate from these more materialistic others to further reinforce their pathways of redemption. For example, **Wiebke (39)** gave further weight to this aspect in the below interview extract. Here, similar to other informants, she stressed how her current post-poverty consumption routines are informed by a philosophy of deliberately living a simpler and more conscious lifestyle as a positive result of the simplification forced upon her while being poor. Simultaneously, this learned enactment of a post-poverty simplifier lifestyle (e.g. being less reliant on clutter and eliminating unnecessary possessions and excessive, unreflective consumption activities from one's life brought about by her poverty experience serves as a further way of distancing and distinguishing herself from others who are, as she claims with some degree of contempt, deeply immersed into a consumerist and capitalist market logic:

Interviewer: *You said that your personal crisis (referring to poverty phase) brought about positive things...What do you mean exactly?*

Wiebke: *Yes, well, I would clearly say that I would have never thought about structuring my life with the same intensity like today (after having moved out of poverty) I would have never learned how to save properly. Like I had to think about everything (referring to poverty phase), for example the toothpaste tube that needed to be cut open with scissors, or the charger for the phone that needed to be unplugged due to not wasting energy, or in general all technical appliances that are switched off if you don't need them, it is about the lights, that are switched off if and you would switch them on only if you really have to, I mean it's like everything...even the water from the hot water bottle that goes into your flowers afterwards, so that they can get some fresh water...yeah, like those things where others would maybe say" that's a bit exaggerated, right?" ...but this has become really ingrained. And I do this now (referring to post-poverty life), because I am convinced of it really. I mean, I don't have to do it anymore, but I really want to do continue with it. Because I think we really live in a consumer society, we live in excess, no one really thinks about these things today, what it really means to buy new stuff, like clothing if there is just a hole in it or so, and they just throw away the damaged trousers. I don't do these things anymore. I personally go to the tailor and get it fixed if something is wrong. Or I go to the shoemaker if something is wrong with the shoes or so (...). Having learned these capabilities and having learned to critically reflect on things, this is something that is really positive. I mean when I go through the city I always think: Good god, look at yourselves. How can you clutter up yourselves with all this consumption?" ...and I rather took this direction in life that I want more natural things in my life, not being weight down by too much stuff that I have. I really only want the stuff that I really need in my life (...). "*

Like Wiebke, also **Ulla (47)** has positioned herself in a discourse of non-materialism via a post-poverty enacted voluntary simplified lifestyle (see also the opening vignette at the beginning of this chapter introducing her life story).

This actualisation of a non-materialistic identity brought about by her spell of poverty has had a positive effect upon her general wellbeing and is likewise reinforced by Ulla's expression of the difference to her counterparts. Within this context of consumption simplification, she stresses the newfound triviality of middle-class aesthetics (Bourdieu, 1984) in her life after having moved out of poverty (e.g. not having a home library anymore). This is a view, yet, that Ulla feels is at odds with conventional middle-class social self-concepts. Following this reasoning, she further refers to it as a "cultural shock" to many people if they had to give up their middle-class insignia expressing their social status:

Ulla: Well, I don't have that many books anymore. It just stayed like that, this attitude towards not having to have that much stuff anymore. I don't need a library behind me anymore, it works differently now for me.

Interviewer: How does it work differently for you with the books now?

*Ulla: Ahm, well, I just have a few books now and they stand in a small glass cabinet in my hallway, but I don't have these quality seals communicating my middle-class status anymore, like a huge library behind me, I don't. I also know that some of my friends find that highly irritating, right? Because this is like a cultural shock somehow for many, when you don't have these books anymore behind you. But I see it all differently now. This is really funny! I don't have any of those insignia anymore that I used to have (**refers to pre-poverty life**). Big house, big car, big household...all non-existent. But that's really super, that it's not there anymore. I feel much better without it.*

Upon further analysis of the above illustrated interview extracts it becomes apparent that when comparing their non-materialistic and less conspicuous post-poverty selves to more materialistic and status driven others in society informants generally seem to accord more moral value to these non-materialistic than materialistic selves (Hyman,

2015). According to Beetz (2009) morality is a construction of meaning that is used to differentiate between behaviour which is deemed as good or bad and between subjects that deserve esteem or contempt. Taking this latter definition into consideration, informants have further tried to capture and celebrate their psychological and moral developments towards becoming someone better in life that is good and does good things (e.g. via the recovery of wellbeing, enlightenment and insight gained) inherent in their redemptive quest of moving from suffering to a positive life outcome using several non-consumptive and less materialistic attitudes. In other words, they frequently seem to demonstrate the moral goodness of their redemptive identity quests (Taylor, 1989; McAdams, 2006) by borrowing from such discourses as the voluntary simplicity movement (Cherrier, 2007; McGouran and Prothero, 2016) that equally carries a strong moral cachet (e.g. through being linked to ethical, authentic, sustainable, or ecologically responsible lifestyles, Shama and Wisenblit, 1984; Rudmin and Kilbourne, 1996; Moisander and Pesonen, 2002; Shaw and Newholm, 2002; Cherrier and Murray, 2007). This morality grounded in living with less lets simplifiers often view their own behaviours as going against the mainstream of conspicuous, wasteful and inauthentic consumerism (Rudmin and Kilbourne, 1996; McDonald et al., 2006). Such a distinctive behaviour is quite similar to the way informants expressed their way of having integrated this simplified lifestyle into their post-poverty personal and social environments.

So far in the above sub-sections informants' post-poverty simplified lifestyles have mainly focused on the removal of clutter (Wiebke/Ulla), getting rid of consumption objects expressing one's social status (Ulla), or being used for ostentation (Tim/Christian), and to some extent the refusal of ecological thoughtlessness

(Wiebke). Especially, concerning the latter commitment to the environment or a fairer world - and related care for others in society - informants have further reported that these voluntary simplifier criteria (McDonald et al., 2006; Alexander and Ussher, 2012) equally make up their post-poverty lifestyles. They will be highlighted in the following last sub-section dealing with informants' increased commitment towards pro-social civic engagement as an outcome of their redemptive stories of having overcome a spell of poverty.

Generative Consumption

As highlighted by McAdams (2006) people who tell their stories in redemptive terms, that is benefiting from critical life events in which bad things eventually turn into something positive, they tend to end up wanting to make good things happen for others as well. Following this line of reasoning, he (McAdams, 2006) borrows from psychologist Erik H. Erikson the psycho-social concept of generativity, suggesting a strong commitment of individuals to promote the well-being of future generations and generally trying to improve the world in which they live (Erikson, 1963). As further concluded by Kotre (2000) generativity is the desire to make people's own life count. This may be seen to be the leading thought inspiring the generativity notion to be built into redemptive life stories as they give narrators further credence in regards to meaning-making, personal growth attained (e.g. from ignorance to enlightenment) and associated moral development following a seismic crisis or life event (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 1995), such as becoming downwardly mobile. Individuals may be generative in a wide variety of life pursuits, such as their work life and volunteering activities (e.g. volunteer work, giving time and money, Rossi, 2001), religious and political engagement (Jones and McAdams, 2013), neighbourhood and friendship activities

(Hart, McAdams, Hirsch and Bauer, 2001), or passing on wisdom to children (Pratt, Norris, Arnold and Filver, 1999) as well as grandchildren (Kastarinen, 2017).

With respect to the underlying research, informants have equally expressed their generative efforts after having overcome poverty in many areas of their lives that often corresponded to these activities. For example, in regards to their professional work identities, almost all of the informants had undergone career shifts emphasising their post-poverty pro-social involvements as a positive outcome of their poverty experiences. See, for instance, Robert who worked for the German navy (“Marine der Bundeswehr”), and then became a drug dealer before slipping into poverty. Currently, in his post-poverty life he is a social worker assisting disrupted families living on a low-income in deprived areas of [REDACTED]. Or, consider Irene who was made redundant as a well-paid Marketing and Sales Manager, which triggered her move into relative income poverty. Nowadays, after having moved out of poverty, she is employed as a primary school teacher. Other examples, include the moves from being a policewoman to politician (Wiebke), from dress-maker and housewife (pre-poverty) to an instructor in the job centre (Dorothea), or in a more drastic sense, from pre-poverty CEO and owner of an SME to Buddhist monk and stay-at-home dad (Christian), foregrounding the importance of religious and communal (familial) activities. Even Sophie, who is an informant who did not change their professional identity and continued working in her pre-poverty role as a journalist and author, reported how her poverty experience has triggered a change as to how she approaches work life in terms of being more “socially responsible” after having embarked on an upward life trajectory again:

***Sophie:** (...) I actually, truly believe that some sort of social responsibility arises out of such experiences (**refers to experience of downward mobility**) (...)*

I really try to act responsible as a citizen and a grown-up person having gained these insights. I mean this might sound a bit presumptuous maybe, I don't save the world after all with my texts. But having the knowledge and skills of correctly handling maybe a Facebook or Twitter account in order to be heard by as many people as possible on the Internet...it is now up to me to turn this into something good and to further pass on my knowledge. And not just because I want to celebrate myself or for distinction, like being a sparkling author or actor, but my engagement is borne out of a certain social responsibility, I mean working together with others (...)"

Sophie expresses her personal development in her redemptive narrative of turning the poverty experience into something positive through the use of a certain generativity script that largely entails the notion of “giving back to society”. With regard to her professional career, she does this mainly through writing about the topic of poverty and being left behind in society (e.g. considering her most recent book at the time when the interview took place about the working-classes in Detroit). In order to make further aware of general poverty issues and those in need she is a regular guest in political talkshows on German television where she has discussed issues surrounding structural poverty in the German context.

Referring back to the consumption focus of this study, informants' efforts to equally express and enact their commitments to “give something back” to society as highlighted by Sophie was reflected in several consumption practices. These may be matched against the aforementioned generative activities highlighted in the literature. For example, the poverty survivors in this study stressed that they make regular donations (e.g. financially, giving away clothing or furniture) to those in need and less well off in society. The following quotes and extracts from interviews with both **Ulla (47)** and **Wiebke (39)** are indicative of these pro-social engagements brought

about by their poverty experience:

Ulla: “(..) well, in the past [referring to pre-poverty lifestyle], I have never even thought about if, for example, when we had parent’s evening and then I remember we had been asked to pay 10 Euros extra per child for this schooltrip and then there were parents complaining: “Nah, this is a bit too much for us at the moment” where I thought: “Oh my god, why are they making such a fuss about it”. Today my thinking in this regard has been changed completely. So, nowadays I would say and do something that had never crossed my mind before, that I would chip in 20 Euros instead of 10. And this heightened awareness, for instance by spending an extra amount of money for someone else to help was not there (...) It wasn’t clear to me that 10 Euros may help and make a real difference.”

In this quote Ulla refers to her pre-poverty life as being ignorant in terms of not knowing that spending relatively small amounts of money, such as the requested additional 10 Euros for the children’s schooltrip, might be an extreme burden for people who find themselves in more strained economic situations than herself at that time. However, her poverty experience and associated difficulties to make ends meet as a lone mother of four children, has entirely “changed her thinking” in this regard. Having learned “the hard way” throughout her spell of poverty that also small (financial) gestures may be of tremendous help for the financially deprived, she would now, after having moved out of poverty, always consider donating an extra amount of money to assist those who are not able to afford it. Referring back to her self-experiential account of living in poverty, in her autobiography she further reinforces this latter aspect of the importance ascribed to what Cutrona and Russell (1990) and Duhacheck (2005) have described as receiving tangible aids or instrumental help from others respectively to effectively cope with a stressful life event, such as poverty. For

instance, while being in poverty Ulla also reported to have received financial aid from family members, or was donated groceries from a sister of an order within Ulla's local community:

*“So during this very difficult time (**refers to poverty phase**) I had surely been embedded in and rescued by the helpfulness of other people who I did not know (or those who were close to me) without fully realising this maybe. Today (**refers to life after poverty**) I try everything in my power to pass on this support that I had received – especially to those who are really in need. In this way, maybe the giving and taking on this earth may be a bit more balanced again (...)”*

This learning and social empathy gained through self-experienced adversities associated with living in poverty and the social support received from others (Hamilton, 2009b) has shaped both a sensitivity as to what the financially deprived might actually require and a post-poverty desire to return the help received by helping others in need. In the following passage, Wiebke equally uses her current voluntary community involvement (e.g. organising donation campaigns for women having become involved in prostitution) as a medium to denote a real concern for the needs of those who are less well-off in society. She further intends to pro-actively leave a positive and sustained mark on their lives by simultaneously liaising with a charity organisation (“**██████**”) that works towards getting young women off streetwalker districts of **██████** and encouraging them to pursue alternative careers away from prostitution. Within this context, she, similar to Ulla, stresses that the social support she has received while being poor serves as a further inspiration and encouragement to act in such a socially responsible manner now that her life is marked by renewed financial stability:

Wiebke: “(...) I regularly try to get rid of stuff that I don’t really need and then I always donate them...”

Interviewer: “You donate your stuff?”

Wiebke: “Yes, to the [REDACTED] for example. That’s a welfare provider for women who have become involved in prostitution. And this place is sort of a hangout place for those who stand in the [REDACTED] (street in [REDACTED] known for its red-light district) in order to get medical treatment for example, or they get food there. Like these things, and they also work with those women so that they can escape from prostituting themselves at some stage, which is really important to me, because I personally find prostitution really bad. It is a shame that women have to sell their bodies and generally I don’t want to support prostitution, but this institution actively supports these women, so that they can develop new ideas about what else they could do with their lives in our country. And they chart alternative ways to make a living. And that’s where I donate my stuff to, because it totally matches those women’s needs. I mean, they need women’s clothing, like I am wearing it. And I also do a big donation campaign once a year where I ask all the women in my district to donate clothing they don’t wear anymore, which they are really grateful for (**refers to women visiting the [REDACTED] institution**). Well, this has really grown within me, to think about people who don’t have anything, and to give them something back. I know I might not be able to entirely change their current situations, but I exactly know how much it means when someone comes along and says: “Hey, look! Here – I have those pair of shoes that I don’t need anymore” ...like, for me today or you this is not imaginable maybe that such donations could mean the world to someone in need, because you and I have everything that we need. But at that time (**refers to poverty experience**) I didn’t have anything at all. And it really meant a lot to me when someone came along and said: “Hey, I have cleared out, don’t want all of this” ...and I was happy and thought: “How can you get rid of this actually?...this is such a nice pyjama” ...like, this has really changed my perspective upon poverty, and people who live under more severe circumstances than we usually do. And I think people who have never been in

such a situation (refers to own phase of poverty), they actually don't know what this all means, being in need and so on (...)"

The fact that the above accounts from Ulla and Wiebke demonstrate a post-poverty generativity (Erikson, 1963) that may also be interpreted as a powerful way of reciprocating the past social support received while being in poverty may further underscore the importance of social support as a coping strategy for the income poor (Hamilton, 2005, 2009b; Hutton, 2016) in terms of its wider societal implications. More precise, considering the longitudinal (narrative) theoretical lens of social status transitioners' consumption (downward and subsequent upward mobility) adopted in this research, such a finding of extended care for others enacted through informants' communal and socially responsible post-poverty consumption practices reveals that relational coping may not only be situational helping those who are currently in poverty. On the contrary, it may have more far-reaching consequences at the macro-level of consumption, albeit driven from the grassroots, in regards to changing structures of society towards promoting the idea of social responsibility and community spirit by those passing on the help received throughout times of economic hardship to other vulnerable consumer populations and so forth. This finding would, then, further refute existing theoretical claims that mainstream consumerist society may not be ready for taking up less sustainable, individualised and ego-centred consumption practices (Kilbourne, McDonagh and Prothero, 1997; Shankar and Fitchett, 2002; McGouran and Prothero, 2016) that have been accused of eroding community spirit and focusing upon interpersonal social bonds (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Hamilton, 2009b).

This latter argument corresponds with McAdams (2006:7) claiming that generative

people in their quest to infer meaning from their past life crises and find purpose in life through redemptive self-narratives often try to make over the world: *“In the most general sense, redemption is a deliverance from suffering to a better world”*.

Building upon McAdams’ (2006) line of argumentation, thus, other informants’ redemptive narrative accounts from this study echoed such community engagements within their generative post-poverty lifeworlds promoting the wellbeing of others in society. For example, they reported to have become involved in supporting religious organisations (e.g. by acting as host families for international youth meetings held in their city), regularly donate money, decorative items, and furniture to refugee hostels, have been offering social support in their neighbourhood communities, or have said to actively approach homeless people in the streets or public transport.

Additionally, they expressed a desire to spend their money after having overcome poverty in more ecologically, conscientious ways to both express and signify generative values of social justice, and improving the world for future generations (Erikson, 1963). These values are in line with the aforementioned findings relating to informants’ inscriptions to Voluntary Simplicity discourses while being in poverty and thereafter. Previous empirical research has shown that such an environmental concern or the emphasis on workers’ rights within the global economy of producing consumer goods, are equally considered essential motivations among participants in the Voluntary Simplicity movement (Alexander and Ussher, 2012). Informants have, consequently, reported to enact their generative efforts of showing empathy for others in society that are, in turn, interwoven with voluntary simplifier discourses, by directing their expenditures toward local, organic or fair trade products, avoiding “unethical” global brands, such as Primark or taking strict steps to keep down

household energy consumption. Regarding the latter, the following passage from **Wiebke's (39)** interview is indicative of this when talking about her current post-poverty saving routines:

***Interviewer:** It is interesting when you mention that certain things you have done during your crisis (**referring to poverty experience**) have been continued until this day where you feel more stable again (**referring to more stable financial situation**). Like the hot water bottle example where the water still goes into your plants...*

***Wiebke:** Yes, absolutely, but for me this is not an emergency situation anymore. It is rather about caring for the environment, so that I say, I am doing it out of free will. Because I have seen myself and learned, that it doesn't really hurt. And when looking further down the line, I can actually make a real difference, if you add this all up what you are actually saving energywise. I mean especially from a societal or global perspective. These thoughts are new to me, but I am extremely grateful actually for having them (...)*

Although not being fully explicit, Wiebke's comment may be further interpreted as another way of expressing post-poverty generativity embedded in her morally flavoured redemptive narrative of assigning meaning to her poverty experience. Here, she indicates both her care for others and an attempt to improve, or at least not worsen, the life of future generations through her cost-saving energy consumption routines adopted during poverty. As stated by her these have been largely continued, yet turned into pro-civic consumption actions that aim to reduce her own environmental impact (from "emergency situation" to "caring for the environment"). Similarly, **Dorothea (48)** commented during the interview on her heightened awareness of certain consumption acts having a detrimental effect upon other people in society. Here, she further reinforces how her poverty experience has further shaped her enacted

generativity towards having become socially responsible (“you are a totally changed person”), which is translated into buying predominately organic produce:

***Interviewer:** This is an interesting insight you have given me. Especially in regards to eating nowadays. I mean purchasing organic and healthy food...*

***Dorothea:** Yes, but I have to say it is not so much about the health aspect to be honest with you. It is more about, I really don't want the environment to be harmed anymore. This is the actual reason for buying these things. Not my own health (...). This is all because of this mindfulness and reflection upon things and other people that I have gained through my experience (**refers to poverty phase**). You can't get rid in your head of these animals that are tortured. Or knowing that these pesticides really harm those people who grow the fruit or vegetables. It is rather because of this...that I don't want to harm them, so I am buying organic (...). I mean you sort of lose anything one day (**refers to poverty experience**), and then, all of a sudden, you are a totally changed person three years after (**refers to post-poverty life**).*

Dorothea's comment not only serves as another example of charting the importance for this study's poverty survivors to improve the wellbeing of others (through fair and organic consumption) as per the generativity concept outlined earlier in this subsection. Although being relatively short, the quote also summarises key features of the redemptive narrative pathway informants have taken, and which have been painstakingly outlined throughout this findings chapter, to find meaning in the adversity (poverty experience) itself. In doing so, they have assigned a (moral) purpose and coherence to their storied self. By referring to an increased state of mindfulness attained through Dorothea's poverty experience, which, in turn, makes her aware of human beings potentially being negatively affected by unsustainable consumption practices, she reinforces that her poverty experience has brought about something positive that lingers beyond the end of her poverty spell. This positivity largely entails

the notion of surpassing one's past pre-poverty self, thereby assigning the poverty experience some kind of transcendental or enlightenment process ("you lose anything one day, and [...] all of a sudden you are a totally changed person three years after"). Consequently, Dorothea, like all other informants introduced in this findings chapter, thinks about her past poverty self in redemptive terms, that is transforming the bad into something good eventually.

In the following section of this findings chapter, a contrasting view to this largely positive and progressive life story script of redemption in the context of overcoming poverty will be provided. Here, it will be demonstrated that a small proportion of the sample interviewed for this study ("The Resilient Survivors") has constructed their life stories progressing from good (pre-poverty life) to bad (poverty experience) and how such a less progressive narrative pathway overshadows their post-poverty identity reconstructions and consumptive attitudes. These, as a consequence, stand in stark contrast to less consumptive selves of redemptive consumers' narratives outlined earlier in this findings section.

The Resilient Survivors

Similar to the above outlined informants having adopted a redemptive narrative tone to make sense of their poverty experience, the Resilient Survivors have been subject to volatile life trajectories. They had experienced a sharp decline in their incomes leading to downward mobility, yet managed to re-climb the socio-economic ladder after some time.

Given that this sample only had two people (Gerda and Ulrike), no clear patterns emerged regarding the processual development of their identity stories used to making

sense of the adversarial circumstances experienced while being transitory poor. However, they shared a common narrative script of trying to put behind their traumatic experiences associated with past economic hardship by firmly moving forward with their pre-poverty lifestyles after they have managed to come out of poverty. Hence, these informants, unlike the redemptive selves outlined earlier, have not tried to assign new and positive meanings to their poverty experiences that may inform an enduring identity and concomitant lifestyle shift lingering beyond the time after becoming upwardly mobile again.

On the contrary, they demonstrated in their retrospective accounts of both going through and coming out of poverty a strong sense of perseverance and attempts of repressive coping, that is avoiding unpleasant thoughts, emotions or memories linked to loss and trauma (Weinberger, 1990). This nonidentification with their poverty experiences was expressed through maintaining important aspects of their pre-poverty consumption lifestyles despite less economic resources at their disposal while being in transient poverty. Further, they tried to resume these pre-poverty lifestyles after re-ascending in social status without being disrupted by negative memories linked to their poverty experiences. Such an emotional disassociation from a negative life event is usually a cardinal feature informing the psychological and health construct of “resilience” (Bonanno, 2004). The core meaning of resilience is to bounce back from adversity and stress during critical life events (Baker, 2009; McAdams and Jones, 2017).

As the resilience concept carries a multitude of different meanings, it has also been used in conjunction with positive psychology and therapeutic cultural discourses surrounding positive emotions in the wake of critical episodes in life (Bonanno, 2004),

favourable adjustments to adversity (Orthner, Jones-Sanpei and Williamson, 2004), or even the redemptive self, “celebrating the power of human resilience” in regards to personal growth and self-enhancement in the aftermath of traumatic experiences (Bonanno, 2004; McAdams, 2006:269). However, the Resilient Survivors from this study rather followed Silver and Updegraff’s (2013) description of the resilience concept. According to these theorists’ view resilient people’s traumatic events do not shatter previously held beliefs and assumptions about one’s past pre-crisis life (contrary to the redemptive self-narrative). They rather show efforts to put the trauma behind them and move forward with their (old) lives. However, McAdams and Jones (2017) in drawing upon these researchers carefully emphasise that this latter type of moving forward with one’s past life in the aftermath of trauma and loss does not safeguard a survivor from pain and suffering. Following this train of thought, the traumatic assault associated with slipping into poverty was equally reflected in the Resilient Survivors’ accounts of sharing a common comprehensive negative and bleak narrative tone when retrospectively elaborating on their times of economic hardship. In this sense, these informants constructed the poverty experience as a contamination sequence in their narratives of surviving poverty reinforcing the belief that the former good life (pre-poverty) has been disrupted and negatively sullied by their experiences associated with slipping into poverty (Tomkins, 1987; McAdams, 2006). Consequently, the poverty experience seemed to recycle through their narratives time and again, so that they often became a signature of their plots of having overcome poverty and partially overshadowed post-poverty consuming identity re-constructions and lifestyles.

In the following last two subsections of this findings chapter it will be shown how the

Resilient Survivors in their retrospective accounts of surviving poverty have sought to distance themselves both emotionally and behaviourally from their experience while being in poverty. Secondly, it will be demonstrated how they attempted to resume their pre-poverty lifestyles and consuming identities despite imposing a contamination frame (informed by the poverty experience) on their, generally speaking, successful stories of financial and social re-ascension.

Seeking Distance from Poverty Experience

One of the informants forming part of the “Resilient Survivor” narrative is **Ulrike (61)**. Ulrike’s story of becoming downwardly mobile is insofar dramatic as she lost her job as a piano teacher in a private music school and became a welfare recipient shortly thereafter. She failed to pay the rent for her single-person terraced house in the suburbs of [REDACTED] over several months, which, ultimately, led to Ulrike becoming evicted from her home. Consequently, she had to abandon her house and most of the possessions that were left inside of it. After the eviction, she moved to a friend’s place for a few days only keeping a handful of basic necessities, such as her “wallet”, “some clothing”, “a toothbrush”, and her “smartphone”. As her friends refused to let her stay any longer in their home, and she did not have any further places to go considering that most of her extended family live abroad or were not willing to help, Ulrike was forced to find shelter in different homeless accommodations and women’s refuges (“Frauenhaeuser”) across the city of [REDACTED]. During a one-year long period of living in (women’s) shelters she had been able to safe-keep some of her valued belongings in an interim storage facility by a local garage (e.g. her piano, jewellery, a washing machine, heirloom). However, while being without self-sufficient dwelling she also lost many of her former belongings that were still inside of her former house due to

foreclosure on her property with many of these possessions being either auctioned or destroyed (e.g. a “bookshelf” with “books about musicians”, “musical scores”, and “over 300 CDs in it”).

Six months before the interview with Ulrike took place, she had managed to escape from her temporary spiral down the housing chain by finding a new permanent council flat for herself. Simultaneously, she has started working again part-time in her role as private music teacher for a different school near her new flat topping up her benefit payments which she is still dependent upon after having re-embarked on an uphill life trajectory away from living under the roofs of homeless shelters.

When reflecting upon her pathway of losing her home and the period of time when she had to stay in various shelter institutions, she adopts a negative and pejorative narrative tone largely distancing herself from this unpleasant episode in her life. Here, Ulrike frequently devalues her experiences of downward mobility by referring to poor living standards in shelter homes and the disconcerting and passive behaviours of other shelter residents. She further expresses feelings of social exclusion, inferiority and stigmatisation due lacking permanent housing as highlighted in the following interview quote:

Ulrike: (...) I never sat down there (refers to shelter residence) like others (refers to other shelter residents) have done, maybe in front of the doors to their rooms waiting for others to talk to them. I actually never talked to any other people there. I just went in and out. And I felt so embarrassed when other people outside were staring at me leaving the shelter residence: “Where does she come from?” I mean they exactly knew what kind of place this was I was leaving there. And I always noticed it and I had just tried to ignore that when they were looking at me and then drove away with my bike (...) And then when I moved to a different shelter in [REDACTED] (local district in the city of [REDACTED])

I received this new room...and that was shared with a Russian woman. Ethnic German immigrant from Russia. Baahhhh! Noooo! And the way it smelled in there on our floor. And in our room, there was just rubbish. The whole room piled with plastic...everywhere. Under the bed, only plastic bags. Every corner of the room overstuffed with plastic bags filled with even more stuff. And then there were also boxes everywhere with old pots and jars from her. And when I entered the room, I just put down my stuff, and walked away again and came back at night when everyone was sleeping and thank god, she wasn't even there quite often. And this mattress I had to sleep on, really small and made out of foam. And underneath it only hair. Disgusting. And I have felt that really badly in my back after three or four weeks. And I think this woman didn't see all of the dirt in our room because she was shortsighted (laughs). She had several glasses laying around all the time, but never wore any of those (...) And on the same floor there was also an elderly woman from Afghanistan right across my room. And right next to her room there were Africans. A woman with a child, three years old, and another African with two children. And that was really loud I have to tell you. The African children were screaming all the time, all morning long when they were waking up. And when I entered our shared kitchen it was full of dirt, eeww. They even washed their clothes in there. In the kitchen, every morning and evening (...) And they were using too much detergent sometimes so that the sewer got blocked and the whole kitchen was underwater. And one day I also complained to the janitor, but nothing really changed. And I continued to just go back to this place to get some sleep - doors shut and then left again really early. In and out.

Hill and Stamey (1990) in their study on homeless people in a Northern American context have argued that the permanent homeless often try to emotionally distance themselves from both more dependent and uneducated peers as well as shelter institutions in general to maintain some degree of self-esteem and avoid social stigma. This finding is largely consistent with Ulrike's retrospective narrative account of her temporary experience concerning the lack of stable housing. Here, she tries to

disassociate herself from other “primitive” shelter residents’ deviant behaviours surrounding a lack of cleanliness, orderliness, or respect for others’ private spaces. However, contrary to previous research (Hill and Stamey, 1990; Barrios et al., 2012), Ulrike does not engage in any community or solidary activities with other like-minded homeless people to, for example, share material possessions or generate additional sources of income (e.g. recycling) with the aim to bolster her identity. By contrast, charting the shelter residence as an all-too-fleeting place to just find some sleep (“I just went in and out”) is used by her as a synonym to highlight the importance assigned to escaping from the adverse conditions associated with not having a permanent residence. These escapist efforts became further reflected in maintaining many of the consumptive characteristics associated with her more stable and affluent pre-poverty lifestyle in terms of identity construction. The following passage from the interview is illustrative of such efforts to resume important aspects of her pre-poverty consuming identity despite living under the adverse conditions of having lost her home and many of her possessions:

*Ulrike: “(...) I just continued with my life (**referring to pre-poverty life**) as if nothing had happened. I went swimming in [REDACTED] (**upscale area in the [REDACTED]**) and I also attended cultural events, went to the opera. I also subscribed to a cultural project (...) I don’t know if you are familiar with art and theatres, but there was this project, an oratory for two months in which I participated and was singing in their choir. Yes, that’s how I continued my life...”*

*Interviewer: These are all things that you have done before (**referring to pre-poverty life**)?*

Ulrike: Yes, those things, things that I have always done. Practically, I was always on the move, 8-10 hours per day. I always went to my places that I

usually visit, like the library, cultural institutions, and then I also went to some concerts, some of them were also for free and so forth (...). And when there wasn't anything to do I went to the park and was laying down there, but I was always doing something. Sometimes 10 hours a day. I just couldn't take these shelters, being there and so on. That's incredible. People scream and the way it smells. Eeww.

Ulrike's adaptive strategies to escape from the reality of life in the shelters partially corroborates with Barrios et al. (2012) who claim that people having recently become homeless tend to perform daily routines and rituals, such as going to a local park, helping them to distance from their drastic lifestyle displacements in terms of changing from one's home to the streets. However, these researchers (Barrios et al., 2012) also highlight that homeless individuals tend to re-invent their self-concepts the longer they live without a permanent home. Here, they may use their experiences gained on the streets, the consumption practices they are forced to perform (Hill and Stamey, 1990) as well as the reduced attachment to (their former) possessions (Hill, 1991) as vehicles to develop a new, more positively perceived self-concept (e.g. from pre-homelessness "couch potato" to becoming a "strong-minded person"). Such a re-cultivation of (consuming) identities in terms of actively challenging before homelessness (poverty) existences and trying to assign meaning to the experience of being homeless (poor) is akin to the redemptive narrative (McAdams, 2006) outlined earlier in this findings chapter. However, no redemptive language in terms of benefit-finding, personal growth, or meaning-making was deployed by the Resilient Survivors from this study in regards to their narrative pathway of becoming downwardly mobile. On the contrary, in showing a great deal of resiliency and a repressive coping style (Bonnano, 2004) Ulrike draws upon her pre-poverty lifestyle trying to continue her old life,

thereby staving off the traumatic assault associated with having become downwardly mobile. Such attempts to preserve a familiar (pre-poverty) identity in light of an identity-threatening event, such as social downward mobility has been scantily reported in the consumer literature on individuals having recently experienced a life transition from higher to lower socio-cultural status (Ulver-Sneistrup and Ostberg, 2011; Ulver and Ostberg, 2014; Thompson et al., 2018). Against this backdrop, Ulrike's refusal to let experiences associated with her downward life trajectory become part of her transitory poor self may further add to this literature.

Following this train of thought, in her narrative of living in various shelters, she made further reference to keeping important possessions from her pre-poverty life, such as a coffee mug and a self-created calendar with pictures of past holidays, family, and her former neighbourhood, which she retrieved from her abandoned home. During the interview Ulrike was showing pictures to the interviewer she took on her smartphone to document the poor conditions of the shelters she had stayed in. Along with showing these pictures, she commented on the aforementioned importance ascribed to her kept possessions placed in the shelter residence as illustrated in the below conversation:

***Ulrike:** Here, you can see all of this this garbage, they just leave their dirt all over the ground (**refers to other shelter residents**). And here, this is the kitchen. Not possible to cook anything because it is all cluttered. And this is the room I stayed in with my desk in it. And here you can see my calendar (**standing on her desk**). This calendar means home to me...like I had my home here with me (...)*

***Interviewer:** So, you took this calendar with you from your old place? Any other things you took with you?*

Ulrike: Yes, I took it with me. Yes, my coffee mug. Here it is (showing the coffee mug on standing on her desk).

Interviewer: Why was it so important for you keeping this mug (refers to shelter experience)?

Ulrike: Mmmhh, that's my life I always say. I have always attended theatre nights and went to several operas, or other theatres. And that is one of the mugs that I kept from one of those nights. That's the mug.

Interviewer: What would you have done without the mug?

Ulrike: Well, I don't know, maybe I would have bought a new one, but this was my place there, my own space with my own stuff, and the others they had their stuff...mostly garbage wrapped in plastic bags (...)

Ulrike used her valued possessions to re-affirm her pre-poverty identity of being a “culturally interested person” (see “theatre mug”) and to further demonstrate a strong attachment to her former stable life situation referring to her self-made calendar as “home”. Thus, contrary to the redemptive consumer selves outlined earlier in this chapter she did not show efforts to detach herself from (formerly) valued possessions in the process of meaning-making, questioning one’s pre-poverty lifeworld and construct an enduring new self out of her poverty experience. Rather, for Ulrike, these kept possessions served as a symbolic marker of distinction (Bourdieu, 1984) in terms of further reactively distancing herself from the negative experience of downward mobility (Thompson et al., 2018) and life in the shelter in the narrower sense.

In line with Ulrike, equally **Gerda (52)**, the second informants forming part of the Resilient Survivor narrative, stressed that she mainly attempted to maintain several possessions and consumption practices emblematic of her pre-poverty middle-class consumer self. This informants’ slip into poverty was triggered by her divorce to her

former husband (an entrepreneur). As a consequence of the marital separation a downward socio-economic spiral was set in motion coming to a stop in a one-bedroom council flat that Gerda had lived in for about two years before re-ascending in social status through re-marriage to a new “well off” partner. Before her divorce and resultant move into economic hardship Gerda’s life was financially “carefree”. Besides her housewife duties she used to work in one of her former husband’s health stores. The following interview quote refers to her experience of downward mobility and the importance ascribed to a continuation of purchasing and eating organically produced food despite reduced disposal income:

*Gerda: “I would have spent my last penny on organic products. Also my savings. I still had a bit left (**refers to poverty phase**). I would have never imagined to go to Aldi. Nah, No! That would have been a real bummer. It would have reduced quality of life drastically. These artificially flavoured yogurts, you can’t eat this anymore when you have done it differently all those years (**refers to pre-poverty phase**). That is something I could have never given up”*

When Gerda stresses the importance assigned to maintaining the purchase of organic food and avoiding discounters at any cost (even considering to tap into her savings to satisfy her need of buying organic), she makes an economically counterproductive decision to spend her limited financial resources on more expensive goods. Such an unwillingness to alter her life standards to endured conditions of financial necessity while being transitory poor, however, is a further expression of distancing herself from the experience of downward mobility in her narrative. Accordingly, she implicitly makes reference to her more privileged pre-poverty personal circumstances, which were marked by affluence and a perceived high quality of life. In this sense, the

purchase and consumption of organic food is used a symbolic marker of such a former “good life”.

At this stage, it has to be noted that Gerda’s life story is unique compared to all of the other informants from this study in that she was the only person growing up in the socialist East of formerly divided Germany. This aspect adds another layer of complexity to understanding her resilient efforts of distancing herself from the poverty experience as reflected in the continuation of consumptive characteristics linked to her pre-poverty lifestyle. After re-unification in the early 1990s, she embarked on a steep uphill life trajectory with her former spouse opening up a pharmacy with an integrated health store selling organic produce. As a consequence, she experienced material amenities that been unknown heretofore (e.g. going on skiing trips to Switzerland, or moving from a socialist apartment block to a more spacious detached house with “new luxury kitchen” and “antique furniture” in it). In this context, she reported in the interview how the consumption of organic food was equally symbolic of her social ascendance into a Western German marketplace that offered an abundance of consumer choice and freedom to her:

***Interviewer:** Have you always done this in your life? Buying Organic?*

***Gerda:** I have started doing this in 1990 when it became available to me...after they teared down the wall. That’s when I started to cook more with these organic ingredients. That was the time when it started right away. I was looking on the markets and all of those new stores, having a look at what was available there, also organic and vegetarian stuff. Because nutrition in the East was much less diverse. Always meat...meat, meat, meat. Really low veggie choices. Maybe just 25% of what was available in the West at that time and today. You can’t compare it whatsoever with Eastern standards. Yes, that was really important to me to keep this (**refers to poverty phase**). All of those years eating*

organic food, also taking stuff home from the store I had. That was really formative (...)

Taking Gerda's upbringing in an autocratic socialist regime with a restricted marketplace and less consumer choices into account, she depicts a narrative pathway of transitioning into poverty that corroborates with what Ulver-Sneistrup and Ostberg (2011) have referred to as moving from unfamiliar to familiar social spaces. This means that Gerda has experienced ascendance in status at an earlier stage of her life into an unfamiliar social space relative to her past life (see her move from former socialist to a capitalist sociocultural space). Yet later, after her divorce, she re-descended into the familiar, lower social sphere (relative income poverty marked by material constraint) where she tends to strongly regret the loss of her former higher social standing characterised by consumer freedom of choice and material abundance. More precise, Gerda had fully internalised a consuming identity associated with the higher spaces she ascended in her past, and which she was not willing to give up. This, in turn, rendered the navigation in the lower social sphere she re-descended into (being forced to limit her consumption standards again) largely undesirable. Such an interpretation may provide a further understanding as to why several consumption habits and possessions kept during Gerda's spell of poverty served as a symbolic marker of her unwillingness to associate with aspects of constrain and necessity characteristic of her transitory poor self (e.g. cluttering up her small council flat with oversized furniture, or skiing equipment bought in her pre-poverty life).

In summary, both informants forming part of the Resilient Survivor narrative did not assign any positive meanings to their poverty experience. This aspect was further supported by **Ulrike (61)**:

Interviewer: *Were there any moments of happiness during your crisis (refers to experience of downward mobility and homelessness)? Anything that was positive maybe?*

Ulrike: *What? Happiness? Are you kidding me? Well, I always said that I used to have a very good life and that I was satisfied with it – in my old house, I was very satisfied with everything. This is something I had also told my daughter a few years ago when she visited me over summer. I can do whatever I want, and am free. And I am satisfied. But then moving out and losing all of this. Naah, no. You can't be satisfied with that. Because you need to rebuild your whole life, like it used to be before that (...)*

Ulrike's remark of devaluing her poverty experience by charting a narrative a pathway of contamination (McAdams et al., 2001) throughout which she progresses from a former good life scene in her house to a bad life situation (loss of her home), thus, largely differs from the redemptive selves' plots outlined earlier. Within redemptive story-telling informants adopted new and positive perspectives in the wake of a negative life scene, such as moving down the social scale (e.g. by disengaging from their former pre-poverty middle-class realities). This helped them to accept and fully embrace their unpleasant experiences of being forced to live with less economic resources and its consequences (e.g. by appreciating the new simplicity forced upon them). On the contrary, the whole setting for the Resilient Survivors' stories on downward mobility seemed neglectful and hostile. This is echoed by Gerda, remembering a crucial moment from her phase of downward mobility when she had to move to a council flat. This negative life scene impacted the way how she perceived her social descent as a whole relative to her former more privileged life. Like Ulrike, she was progressing from a former good life scene to a bad one:

“I can tell you about a scene, which has haunted me all those years (refers to phase in poverty). When I moved on [REDACTED] to this small flat (refers to council flat) there was this guy helping me who also already helped us a lot with the old house and my move to my former big flat in an old building (refers to first post-divorce flat that Gerda moved to when still receiving alimony payments). And this guy brought me from [REDACTED]x (city where Gerda’s former home and subsequent flat was before alimony payments ended) to [REDACTED]. And that was a building from the 1950s, really simple and much smaller, maybe 46 square metres in total (...). And this guy noticed the difference, too. And can you imagine what the guy told me when he carried all of my stuff to the flat? He said: “Well, Mrs [REDACTED] (surname of Gerda), I guess that’s a massive downgrade from your old home!” And I was really devastated hearing such a thing from this person. And I thought when he left after a while and was sitting there by myself in this tiny flat: “Ok, let him talk. I don’t care. But then he’s also right. I don’t have a job. And yes, it was a real difference to my old life. And this is really formative, having these really high standards all those years. All this money, big house and not caring about anything. I think it is not possible to get rid of this thinking...like not at all. No. I mean when you had it all once and then plunging into a whole new world (refers to poverty experience) (...)”

Similar to Ulrike, also Gerda emphasises the importance ascribed to her pre-poverty life and that “plunging into a whole new world” of economic and material deprivation did not provide her with an opportunity to generate positive meaning. If any meaning was given to a spell of poverty by Resilient Survivors like Ulrike and Gerda, then it was negative as further evidenced by Gerda’s statement above where she, eventually, agreed and identified with others’ derogative comments on her social descent. This negativity translated into maintaining many consumptive habits emblematic of their former pre-poverty “good life”. In doing so, they distanced themselves both emotionally and behaviourally from their move into an economically strained

situation. As a consequence, after having re-embarked on an uphill life trajectory, both informants attempted to fully rebuild their pre-poverty identities by resuming their lifestyles before slipping into poverty as also indicated in both Gerda's and Ulrike's final comments above ("it is *not possible to get rid of this thinking when you had it all once*" – Gerda; "you need to rebuild your whole life, like it used to be before" - Ulrike). However, their efforts of identity re-construction were partially aggravated by their indicated narratives of contamination (move from positive pre-poverty life to negative transitory poor life scene), which lingered beyond the end of their poverty spells as highlighted in the final section below.

Resuming Pre-Poverty lifestyle

After having overcome their temporary phase of financial strain and status descent, the Resilient Survivors commonly reported that the retrieval of their former social standing (e.g. having returned to stable housing – Ulrike; moving to a more spacious home in an upscale neighbourhood in xxxxx – Gerda) and their general ability to consume normally again away from material constraint increased their overall wellbeing. In this sense, they revived several pre-poverty transition consumption routines and possessions. Consequently, these informants felt relieved to forego budgeting strategies that they were forced to adopt during their poverty spell as reflected in the following quote from **Gerda (52)**:

***Gerda:** "(...) Well, how does this actually affect you (**refers to poverty experience as a whole**)? I have usually collected all receipts for all purchases to keep within my weekly budget of 100 Euros.*

***Interviewer:** Did you collect your receipts in the past (**refers to pre-poverty phase**)?*

Gerda: I was lightyears away from doing that. I had 2000 Euros income per month...without paying rent or anything. And I could buy whatever I wanted. Like that...

Interviewer: Have you kept any of those budgeting strategies (adopted during poverty)?

Gerda: To be honest with you, no (laughs). Not so much anymore. That's so fantastic. I am financially much more relaxed I suppose. I think that's great. For example, right after Christmas I was yelling at my husband (refers to new husband): "Hey, let's go to [REDACTED] (upscale district of [REDACTED]) and have some Thai food. That place we go there is really great, vegetarian and all fresh. Really good food there. We often have to book several weeks in advance because it has become really popular these days. So, I don't have to make any compromises anymore. Before that I might have said: "Ok, money is tight..I just go the restaurant only once a month." Or the other day we (Gerda and new husband) bought this Thermomix (premium kitchen appliance)... 1,200 Euros...Gosh! Isn't that great!? Now I can also cook proper vegetarian food at home for my husband and myself (...)

Gerda celebrates her re-gained financial freedom and social re-ascendance through being both spontaneous and not too concerned anymore about spending money on more expensive consumption practices and possessions using such examples as going to the restaurant or purchasing a premium kitchen appliance for her home. Consequently, she feels positive about having retrieved a degree of carefreeness regarding her spending, which had been a key feature of her pre-poverty lifestyle as a middle-class homemaker, yet was temporarily disrupted by her financially strained situation throughout which Gerda was forced to economise in her spending. Although she does not explicitly refer to the linkage between the purchase of a Thermomix and her re-gained social standing as a middle-class homemaker, it may be interpreted as a

crucial purchase in regards to further resuming this pre-poverty lifestyle. Having a Thermomix, especially in a German context, has been argued to be a status symbol for the contemporary middle-classes (Mueller, Pfeil, Dengel and Donath, 2018) as it is used as a signet to display domesticity, technological prosperity, and a healthy lifestyle to significant others (Zacharakis, 2014) that go beyond its functional benefits. This finding, then, would contrast with the redemptive stories of other informants from this study. These rather positioned themselves in discourses of non-materialism distancing themselves from the (ir former) idea that engaging in material culture supports efforts to create (their) social identities. Hence, they seemed to appreciate post-poverty lifestyles associated with a high degree of consciousness regarding budgeting, or discarding conspicuous consumption, which they derived as a key learning from their poverty experiences. Simultaneously, these voluntary simplified lifestyles brought about by their poverty experiences were used as a therapeutic medium for achieving wellbeing.

By contrast, for the Resilient Survivors like Gerda, their story of overcoming poverty is rather reflective of the dominance of a neo-liberal subjectivity in that their re-gained consumer freedom is used as a core therapeutic function to attain a happy life (Gabriel, 2015). Therefore, these informants further reject the simplicity forced upon them while being poor (e.g. trying to get rid of budgeting strategies adopted). In more general terms, they moreover counteract their transitory poor conception of being a failed consumer by trying to re-assign the status of a full-fledged consumer (Bauman, 2005) to them after having escaped poverty (*“when I go into stores these days, you feel like you’re a real human being again, well, like a potential customer again, and not like someone who just gawps and doesn’t buy”* – Ulrike, 61).

Nevertheless, although largely feeling positive about the continuation of pre-low-income lifestyles, a few negative experiences associated with their poverty experiences partially hindered Resilient Survivors in their efforts to fully re-construct their consuming identities post-poverty. See for instance Gerda's statement below when further elaborating on her uphill life trajectory. In this quote, she contradicts her own previous statement regarding newfound consumer freedom, carefree spending and concomitant wellbeing. This is so as Gerda likewise problematises her post-poverty strained relationship with money considering it as a negative debris of her temporary life on low income and enforced thriftiness:

Gerda: (...) the other day I said to my husband (refers to new husband post-poverty): "Actually, we have money again, right? But I have to still learn to fully feel it again." Because I felt this thriftiness (adopted during poverty) was maybe a bit exaggerated sometimes. But before you're able to get back this feeling where you're like: "Hey, look, you're really doing well again." ...that takes some time I guess. I remember that I was so tense, so stressed. You can either go to dancing class for 6 Euros or you can go to an Indian restaurant for 6 Euros (refers to poverty experience). And then I realised that I need to relax a little bit with my finances (refers to post-poverty phase). So I went to the bookstore and started studying a book from a woman who wrote something about money. For one hour I was reading this book and making notes, without even buying it for 20 Euros...that says it all I guess that I have not even bought it. That your attitude towards life has been affected by this in such a way...that it really had to come to this thinking. I think that's a real shame.

Similar to Gerda whose thrifty coping strategies adopted during poverty have brought about an unpleasant feeling towards getting used to spending money in a carefree manner again after moving out of poverty, also **Ulrike (61)** reported that she took issue with re-using certain formerly valued possessions, such as her piano. Although she

successfully safeguarded this possession from being auctioned and placed it in a spot of her new flat similar to her old home, she has refused to play it since moving into the new home due to the trauma associated with having lost many of her musical scores during her spell of poverty:

*Ulrike: "I have managed to get some of my CDs back, and a lot of the musical scores (**that were destroyed during foreclosure**), too from second-hand shops and also the library. But how is it possible to throw all of this away, right? This is still really traumatic for me when I just think about it. And because of that I have not started to strike the keys of my piano again in all those months. It's just standing there now and also needs to be tuned I guess."*

While, unsurprisingly, the behaviour of resuming pre-poverty lifestyles after having re-embarked on an uphill life trajectory has been briefly indicated in the literature on socially mobile consumers' identity projects (Wendt, 2011; Saatcioglu and Ozanne, 2013), its wider effect on how an unpleasant and traumatic experience of becoming downwardly mobile might also complicate successful post-poverty identity reconstruction has not received any attention thus far. Consequently, the above finding from this study suggesting that certain negatively perceived experiences associated with becoming downwardly mobile and coping with a life on a low income (e.g. the stress associated with forced thriftiness) may linger beyond the time after having overcome poverty and contaminate (McAdams, 2006) post-poverty consumer identity work further underscores the uniqueness of this study. By adopting a narrative approach to making sense of an adverse life event, such as becoming poor, it provides a novel insight into how consumers not only form happy and meaningful stories in the aftermath of overcoming a spell of poverty (as mainly evidenced in the redemptive self narratives). By contrast, this study also stresses a potential dark side in regards to

poverty's long-term negative traumatic consequences on consumer wellbeing and self-formation despite having resiliently mastered to escape from a poverty spell.

Chapter Summary

As shown in this findings chapter, consumers who have managed to overcome a poverty spell diverge in their ways of coming to grips with this unpleasant experience in their lives. This difference is largely grounded in the contrasting narrative scripts (Tomkins, 1987) adopted by the poverty survivors from this study as well as the opposing cultural discourses they have inscribed to. Those consumers progressing in their narratives from a good life scene (pre-poverty existence) to a bad one (temporary poverty experience), as reflected in the stories told by Resilient Survivors, are largely entrenched in consumer culture's marketplace ideology. Here, they have subscribed to a neoliberal subjectivity of viewing the marketplace as a core therapeutic function to attain a happy life. This is so, as it delivers consumer freedom through choice and an associated normality to define and understand oneself through material possessions (Belk, 1988; Baker, 2006; Gabriel, 2015). As a consequence, they reject past transitory poor selves that used to be marked by financial and material constraint and, hence, restrict consumers' market choices. In turn, past pre-transition middle-class selves are restored in their retrospective accounts of having survived poverty.

By contrast, post-poverty narratives of the Redemptive Selves are, as uncovered, accompanied by a greater critical reflexivity towards such "having modes of existence" (Fromm, 1976). Redemptive consumers' experiences of economic uncertainty have brought about reflection on happiness as something that does not come from "external" material goods due to an embracement of their past sufferings

associated with an enforced simplicity (e.g. regarding budgeting, or the forced loss of possessions and pre-poverty housing). In this sense, their narrative accounts are reflective of therapeutic socio-cultural discourses surrounding the promotion of self-knowledge, self-actualisation, growth and moral development through finding positive meaning in adverse life circumstances (Cushman, 1995; McAdams, 2006; Illouz, 2007; Hyman, 2015; Gopaldas, 2016; Marcoux, 2017). The inscription to such a therapeutic discourse is used as a vehicle to keep up with their stories of having changed to the better as an outcome of a seismic crisis or traumatic life event (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 1995), such as a tip into relative income poverty.

Several theoretical implications on consumers' identity construction after traumatic life events emerging from these findings will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

This chapter concludes the thesis. It starts with explaining the contributions of the findings to consumer research and the broader humanistic socio-psychological literature on identity development and change. Next, practical implications for both Marketing practitioners and policy-makers are highlighted. The subsequent section discusses some methodological limitations of the research from which potential areas for future research are derived. Finally, there is a critical reflection on the research journey's impact upon my own researcher identity, which is followed by an overall conclusion.

Theoretical Implications

In the following section, theoretical implications that have emerged from the findings will be further discussed. The study's originality stems from offering a focus on the temporary nature of relative income poverty and its implications on consumers' identity (re)-construction. So far, only consumers' first-time encounters of marketplace restrictions and concomitant identity strains due to forced life transitions triggering a downward life trajectory have been brought to the fore (Elliott, 1995; Hamilton and Catterall, 2006a; Wendt, 2011; Ulver-Sneistrup and Ostberg, 2011; Barrios et al., 2012; Saatcioglu and Ozanne, 2013; Chen and Nelson, 2017; Thompson et al., 2018). However, studies on subsequent upward social mobility where consumers move out of a spell of poverty and re-construct their identities are conspicuously absent from consumer research. In consideration of liquid modernity's loose social structures forcing Euro-American middle-classes to become increasingly socially mobile (Bauman, 2001; Bhardi and Eckhardt, 2019), this oversight is

particularly important for consumer research. Hence, the current lopsided account of the social mobility equation solely stressing consumers' experiences associated with downward mobility, undermines a more dynamic understanding of identity (re-)construction in the light of forced and traumatic consumer life transitions. By also considering intragenerational upward mobility (Sorokin, 1959) and exploring the cumulative impact of such multiple transitions over time (downward and upward) in the context of German transient relative income poverty this research makes three broad contributions to consumer research: (1) it reveals that consumers having undergone major disruptions in their assumptive worlds, make use of different past selves by, for example, rejecting or revisiting them, in order to construct their present and future identities, (2) it shifts the perspective on traumatised consumers from restorative to transformative identity construction, and (3) it demonstrates that (transient) low-income consumers form an important part of voluntary simplicity theorisations.

The following subsections discuss these broad theoretical contributions in more detail, beginning with the importance of retrieving/rejecting past selves in regards to identity (re-)reconstruction during and in the aftermath of a poverty spell.

Role of Past Selves in the Re-Construction of Consumer Identity after

Disruption

This research builds on CCT's claim that identity projects are integral to understanding consumer behaviours (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). In particular, it acknowledges the increasing importance of theorising processes of identity change over time due to major shifts in consumers' assumptive worlds following life transitions (McCracken,

2008; Giesler and Thompson, 2016). In this sense, Schau et al. (2009:273) suggest that mature consumers post-retirement create: “*identity tapestries*” by moving between “*the past, the present, and the future in a nonlinear, iterative way*”. This means that identity projects do not occupy one temporal sphere, yet rather take inspirational threads from the past to inform present and future selves in the wake of critical life events. However, these authors acknowledge that for triggering events other than retirement, such as when coping with identity loss due to unforeseen and forced life transitions, explications of how consumers draw on the past, the present, and the future to rebuild their identities are largely amiss (Schau et al., 2009).

Findings from the current study redress this theoretical gap. It has been demonstrated that those consumers coping with identity threat and loss following a major life crisis, also draw on the past to re-construct their identities. Here, for some consumers, pre-transition identities are heavily drawn on in order to move forward in life, whereas the crisis experience is largely denied access into post-transition selves (see Resilient Survivors’ contamination narratives). For others, past selves are both retrieved (e.g. from adolescence, or childhood) and left behind permanently (e.g. their pre transition selves) and consequent identities emerging during a crisis situation seem more dominant and enduring (see Redemptive Self narratives).

Especially, the latter indicated therapeutic redemptive narrative pathway of self-growth and moral development (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004; McAdams, 2006) contributes to an understanding as to how past crises-shaken selves inspire current and future post-crises lives using consumption. Following this train of thought, for redemptive poverty survivors, the role of their past transitory poor selves is so compelling that adaptive consumption routines adopted during poverty linger beyond

the end of the poverty spell, yet are imbued with altered meanings. More precise, consumers both value and celebrate their post-poverty consumption consciousness (e.g. budgeting, buying second-hand), simplicity (e.g. removal of clutter, conspicuous lack of pre-poverty middle-class insignia), and generativity (e.g. improving the life of future generations through poverty-induced saving strategies) accounting for the life-enriching perspective of transitory poorness and the simplicity forced upon them. Hence, with its narrative perspective crossing time orientations, this research contrasts with previous studies exploring how consumers bounce back from adversity in their lives and how they change their consumption behaviours. It shows that consumers do not only re-invent their identities after critical life events by building new identities from scratch, and adopting a future temporal focus as reflected in a fresh start mindset (Price et al., 2017). They neither strive to abandon the past in order to become a new self after a life transition (Schouten, 1991) as suggested in rites of passage (Van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1974) enabled research on consumer self-transformations. By contrast, redemptive (post-poverty) consumers are forward-looking, that is they consume less and are generative. Yet, they are influenced by past experiences in terms of finding benefit in transitory poor selves and rejecting pre-poverty non-reflexive lifestyles. Equally, current circumstances influence them where they distance themselves from dominant neoliberal marketplace ideologies that are misaligned with the social-cultural field of therapy they have subscribed to.

In light of the above discussion, this study generally follows CCT's goal of addressing the sociocultural dimensions of identity-laden consumption, and where consumers shape coherent self-narratives that connect the past, present, and future (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Ahuvia, 2005; Gabriel and Lang, 2006; Schau et al., 2009; Larsen

and Patterson, 2018). It therefore further extends scanty existing theoretical work on exploring socially mobile consumers' (both downward and upward) motivations to maintain large parts of their transitory poor consumption routines after financial circumstances have improved again (Quelch and Jocz, 2009; Wendt, 2010; Wendt, 2011; Schreurs et al., 2012). These studies either lack theoretical substantiation considering that upward mobility has not been the main focus (Schreurs et al., 2012), or they briefly (Quelch and Jocz, 2009; Wendt, 2010; Wendt, 2011) draw upon psychological theories surrounding cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) and adaptation levels (Hellsen, 1964). These latter psychological theories are used to suggest why some consumers may start assigning positive meaning to negative consequences associated with transitioning into relative income poverty (cognitive dissonance) and/or how poverty-induced coping strategies become habitually ingrained and persist beyond social re-ascension (adaptation-level) (Wendt, 2010, 2011). The current study, by contrast, with its psycho-socio-cultural narrative approach to understanding longer-termed identity construction over time provides a more full-fledged understanding as to what drives consumers to maintain large parts of their transitory poor consumption routines. In this sense, the findings are novel in that they go beyond focusing on psychologically implanted transitory poor habits of forced simplicity in consumers' post-poverty lives.

From Restorative to Transformative Consumer Identity Re-Construction

As discussed in the previous section, identity work for (formerly) poor consumers adopting a redemptive narrative of the self (McAdams, 2006) is reflexive and continuous in the sense that past selves are subject to revision (e.g. rejecting pre-poverty middle-class selves, and drawing upon transitory poor selves), which triggers

both an enduring identity and associated lifestyle change. This theoretical insight informs and is likewise interwoven with the second broad contribution to consumer research. That is the shift from viewing traumatised consumers' identity reconstruction as reactively reflexive (maintaining pre-crisis event lifestyles, Thompson et al., 2018), or restorative (recovering what was lost during a traumatic life event, Caldwell and Henry, 2017) to transformative (expanding beyond what was before the traumatic event due to enduringly surmounting pre-crisis selves).

As revealed in the findings, informants forming part of the Redemptive Self narrative have depicted in their narrative accounts signs of reactively preserving their threatened pre-crisis middle-class identities (Thompson et al., 2018) during stages associated with “keeping up appearances” and “hitting rock bottom”. However, their narratives, eventually, shifted from evincing a reactive and nostalgic ethos to portraying their poverty experience as a revitalising change retrospectively. As a consequence, informants placed their traumatic experiences of social status descent and economic hardship into a redemptive narrative of personal growth and life enriching perspective (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004; McAdams, 2006; Marcoux, 2017). These growth narratives were not only used to cope with the unpleasant experience of loss while being poor in terms of re-establishing a sense of normalcy and continuity as highlighted in previous studies (Hamilton and Catterall, 2006a; Karanika and Hogg, 2016; Hutton, 2016; Caldwell and Henry, 2017). They were equally deployed to demonstrate how such an identity re-formulation endures long beyond the end of their traumatic experiences. Accordingly, the following working definition of the ‘Redemptive Consumer’ is offered:

“Redemptive consumers do not only situationally, yet sustainably remake their disrupted identity following difficult and traumatic life events by actively building a revised self into present post-trauma lives, which considerably diverge from pre-trauma lifestyles, giving them long-term directions for the future”

Consumer redemption arguably extends current theorisations surrounding identity reconstruction following traumatic life events. This is so, as previous studies tend to focus on snap-shot portrayals of consumers trying to get back their “former good lives” in the aftermath of a crisis event, such as job loss, social status descent, or divorce (Roberts, 1991; Ulver-Sneistrup and Ostberg, 2011; Black, 2011; Thompson et al., 2018). Moreover, it has been shown in prior research how traumatised consumers restore their pre-crisis lives after overcoming disconcerting life events, such as illness (Pavia and Mason, 2004; Mason and Pavia, 2015), or natural disasters taking the form of wildfires and earthquakes (Sayre, 1994; Delorme, Zinkhan and Hagen, 2004), which usually entails a revival of many of their pre-event consumer behaviours. By contrast, this research offers a different perspective on identity re-construction after a traumatic life event. Redemptive consumers enduringly surmount their pre-crisis selves. This leads to suspensions of reactive identity goals to both maintain and re-inscribe themselves in displaced pre-event social positions. Further, their less consumptive and non-materialistic post-trauma consumer behaviours show little resemblances to past pre-event lifestyles. Baker et al. (2015) acknowledge that when individuals seek personal transformation, a temporary phase of vulnerability might provoke lasting change. However, for these theorists the question of how and when the experience of vulnerability creates uplifting changes for consumers remains largely unanswered. By introducing consumer redemption as a theoretical concept, this study fills such a

theoretical void. The redemptive narrative process of permanent self-change charted in this research may provide a useful theoretical lens to understand other kinds of traumatic events leading to vulnerability and their impact upon identity re-construction (e.g. when returning to one's home country after having lived in a foreign country as a refugee for some time).

Seen in this theoretical light of the sustainable transformative power of a traumatic experience, the current study makes another explicit addition to theories of habituated tastes (Bourdieu, 1984) and their changes throughout life (Ustuner and Holt, 2007; 2010; Saatcioglu and Ozanne, 2013; McAlexander et al., 2014). These previous studies on consumer habitus transformations have focused on either elite (Ustuner and Holt, 2010) or dominated consumers (e.g. peasant migrant women living in an urban Turkish squatter trying to consume according to a Western lifestyle; Ustuner and Holt, 2007), working-class individuals moving to a marginalised location (Saatcioglu and Ozanne, 2013), or religious consumers trying to detach from increasingly marketised and detraditionalised religious institutions that have been former pillars for their identities and related lifestyles (McAlexander et al., 2014). The current study complements these studies by including the middle-classes and showing how they incorporate their past experiences of status descent into post-poverty identity re-construction and concomitant changes of habituated tastes. These middle-class habitus dynamics, which this study illustrates, have an impact on refashioned markers for social distinction through consumption.

As highlighted above, redemptive consumers have created enduring uplifting changes through their traumatic experience associated with economic constraint. While being transitory poor, they have adapted to and embraced taste standards that are traditionally

misaligned with their more middle-class higher pre-poverty sociocultural standing (e.g. appreciating discounters' offerings and self-produced low-cost meals and experiences vs. purchasing in upscale retail outlets or taking expensive holiday trips) to make sense of their poverty experience. The fulfilment found during this phase is expressed through a consumption-critical attitude that is incongruent with their pre-poverty non-reflexive taste standards (e.g. lacking self-reflection when purchasing at premium retailers). This story of personal growth through adversity is, eventually, reflected in enacted non-materialistic post-poverty selves that trivialise traditional middle-class aesthetics (e.g. foregoing ownership of former comprehensive book libraries). By contrast, more simple, mindful and authentic lifestyles (e.g. only having a few books at a time before re-selling or giving them away) are favoured. In situating themselves in such non-materialistic discourses post-poverty and adopting less conspicuous, yet more conscientious consumption practices, these informants express perceived tasteful selves of growth and moral development. Thus, their stories of successfully mastering and personally growing from their poverty experience serve as cultural capital repositories. These are converted into symbolic displays of distinction from more non-reflexive and morally inferior materialistic others within consumer-oriented society. This new symbolic capital attained via stories of growth and benefit associated with a rocky downhill life trajectory is further substantiated with generative consumption efforts to improve lives of future generations and those that are in need (e.g. by donating money, or purchasing ethical and sustainable brands).

Such a view of sustainably changing tastes and altering types of social distinction contrasts with theories surrounding the refusal to identify with a lower social status via discordant performances of taste (e.g. tapping into savings to maintain consumption

tastes emblematic of one's lost social standing; Thompson et al., 2018) as illustrated in the Resilient Survivor narratives of this study. It also contrasts with studies detailing conflict-ridden identity re-constructions due to leaving a consumption community, or primary field of socialisation (McAlexander et al., 2014). The findings rather add to perspectives on successfully transforming the habitus following life transitions, which is reflected in changes of tastes and social differentiation through altered forms of consumption (Saatcioglu and Ozanne, 2013). Contrary to Saatcioglu and Ozanne's (2013) study on working-class consumers shifting towards consumerist middle-class ideals to signify their upward life trajectories, the changed consumption practices from this study, however, are built upon a simplified lifestyle and non-materialistic stance, which will be discussed further in the following section.

From Accidental to Voluntary Simplification

As highlighted above, finding positive meaning in critical life events leads to the construction of an enduring lifestyle change reflected in altered taste standards in terms of consuming less. This insight gained from the findings has some further implications for the literature on Voluntary Simplification (Zavestoski, 2002; McDonald et al., 2006; McGouran and Prothero, 2016). Here, it has been shown that those who try to adopt voluntary simplification of their consumption for the first time in their life and avoid purchasing items and experiences that are irrelevant to the "chief purpose of life" (Elgin, 1993:23) often tend to go "back to normal" after some time has passed (McGouran and Prothero, 2016:204). It has been argued that one reverts to pre-simplification living standards due to being heavily influenced by society's expectations on outer appearances (e.g. looking the right way). Following this train of thought, the associated pressures of ingrained pre-simplification values, beliefs, and

daily routines relevant to the self-concept may cause anxiety, dissatisfaction and loss of self-control when voluntarily resisting to meet those lifestyle patterns via mainstream market offerings (e.g. giving up going to a premium hairdresser and cutting one's own hair instead, McGouran and Prothero, 2016). Consequently, trying to voluntarily live one's life in a reduced, simpler and more sustainable way may be a difficult endeavour for regular people (McGouran and Prothero, 2016) due to the wider dominant social paradigm drawing people towards consumerist lifestyles (Kilbourne et al., 1997; Kilbourne and Carlson, 2008).

Paradoxically, the findings from this research reveal that those who had been forced to live simply during their poverty spells and have traditionally been excluded from Voluntary Simplification conceptualisations due to being accused of just outwardly sharing Voluntary Simplifier criteria for financial reasons (Oates and McDonald, 2002; McDonald et al., 2006; Alexander and Ussher, 2012) are, in fact, those who have successfully adjusted many areas of their lives to the ethos of living simply. As shown in the findings and further discussed in previous sections informants have, in retrospect, constructed redemptive narratives of meaning-making and benefit-finding in response to adversarial circumstances. In doing so, they have charted how a process of stepping out of the normative background of consumer culture and associated pressures to keep up high consumption levels while being in poverty was set in motion. Consequently, their consumption during poverty was also informed by traditional voluntary simplifier values and motivations (McDonald et al., 2006), such as self-determination (e.g. family camping experience in own garden) and personal growth (e.g. newfound spirituality diminishing a striving for financial and material wealth from pre-poverty life).

More importantly, they have maintained their simplified lifestyles adopted during poverty also after having managed to move out of poverty again. As highlighted earlier, this is so as consumers' moral and personal development constructed in their redemptive narratives of surviving poverty is largely expressed and enacted through situating themselves in non-materialistic cultural discourses of wellbeing (Hyman, 2015). The common thread here is that personal meaning and happiness cannot be found in excessive consumption or material objects, which is in itself the key ingredient of the voluntary simplifier recipe (Etzioni, 1998). That is why a majority of informants forming part of the redemptive self-narrative, have adopted a post-poverty lifestyle, which is characterised by intentional non-consumption that refuses to draw upon the dominant social paradigm of consumerism. As highlighted in the previous sections, they do this in order to further re-affirm and signify their pathways of personal growth, enlightenment, associated identity re-formulation (e.g. from pre-poverty conspicuousness to post-poverty consciousness) and moral certitude. Moreover, the findings show that consumers try to further uphold and extend their stories of positive change following adversity by expressing and signifying generative values of social justice, and improving the world for future generations (Erikson, 1963; McAdams, 2006). They further enact these pro-social behaviours through inscribing themselves to discourses surrounding the emphasis on workers' rights within global capitalist economies and a broad environmental concern (e.g. through directing their expenditures towards local, organic, or fair-trade products). These pro-civic qualities have equally been considered essential motivations among participants forming part of Voluntary Simplicity movements (Alexander and Ussher, 2012).

In light of the above discussion, this study, firstly, contradicts current theorisations of low-income consumers' coping being excluded from traditional voluntary simplifier theorisations (Rudmin and Kilbourne, 1996) due to their perceived incapability to surpass oneself in light of the struggles to maintain (former) standards of living (Elgin and Mitchell, 1977; McDonald et al., 2006; Ulver-Sneistrup and Ostberg, 2011; Saatcioglu and Ozanne, 2013; Thompson et al., 2018). Secondly, it adds to theories surrounding consumers' self-change processes resulting in permanent lifestyle changes towards leading simpler lifestyles (Cherrier and Murray, 2007). Hence, apart from considering mundane life events (e.g. making a wrong career choice) as triggers for leading simpler lives, this study demonstrates that equally involuntary dispossession narratives brought about by forced and traumatic life transitions trigger a process of self-change towards a being mode of existence (Fromm, 1976). Such a process of self-change, which is initiated through experienced adversities, improves self-actualisation and true self, which become reflected in leading less consumptive post-crisis lifestyles that largely resonate with Voluntary Simplification principles.

Building upon this latter contribution, the study also extends the humanistic socio-psychological literature on redemptive self-narratives (McAdams, 1993; McAdams, 2006; McAdams and Jones, 2017) and concomitant constructs, such as Post-Traumatic Growth (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004), transformational coping (Aldwin, 2007), or flourishing (Ryff and Singer, 1998) in the wake of trauma to name but a few. These theoretical terms and its semantic variations have been used to capture the transformational role that adverse life events can play in fostering growth in terms of not simply returning to baseline after a crisis event, yet charting an experience of improvement from pre-event lives that for some people is deeply profound (Tedeschi

and Calhoun, 2004; McAdams, 2006). Despite the fact that the phenomenon of finding meaning and personal growth in the aftermath of various traumatic experiences (e.g. illness, heart attacks, HIV infection, sexual assault and sexual abuse, being taken hostage, bereavement, genocide; Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004; Frank, 2013; McAdams and Jones, 2017) has been extensively shown in the literature, little is in fact known about the actual nature of positive changes following these adversities or behavioural consequences (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004; Jayawickreme and Blackie, 2014; McAdams and Jones, 2017; Infurna and Jayawickreme, 2019). For example, attempts to measure different domains of growth and generativity, thereby allowing for quantification of growth experiences, may lead to oversimplifications of matters (McAdams, 2006).

This interpretative qualitative research study advances such an understanding regarding more nuanced manifestations of gaining something positive out of loss and sustainably improving one's wellbeing after traumatic experiences. This is so as the study explicitly considers the inevitable impact of consumption practices on disrupted identity narratives. To my knowledge, using a consumption context to trace personal growth after trauma and further capturing the significant revision one's life story has not been considered in the socio-psychological thus far. Following this train of thought, in this study it has been revealed that the possibility of taking new paths in life brought about by a traumatic experience, such as slipping into poverty, is reflected in an enduring change of one's lifestyle towards more simplicity and less materialistic, less conspicuous consumptive attitudes (as reflected in the narratives of Redemptive Selves).

Against this backdrop, findings from the study equally offer a counter perspective on critiques of growth narratives. These have often been to be associated with adaptive coping strategies following a traumatic life event and not leading to actual change of a person's identity and concomitant behaviours (Tennen and Affleck, 2002; McAdams and Jones, 2017). Within this context, Tennen and Affleck (2002) assert that the process of searching (retrospectively) for benefits and actively reminding oneself of these benefits is effectively a coping strategy to come to terms with past critical life events. Hence, there are conceptual similarities between some of the emotional and behavioural coping strategies proposed by Folkman et al. (1986) and the outcomes that are said to manifest in personal growth (Jayawickreme and Blackie, 2014). In fact, taking the example of certain creative adaptive consumption strategies adopted by transitory poor consumers from this study (e.g. watering plants with hot water bottle to save energy costs, or furnishing homes with bulk trash) may be interpreted as coping strategies that reinforce the empowerment and agency practised during times of emotional difficulty. Such a perspective would be in line with previous research on subsistence consumers and how they engage in innovative and empowering adaptive consumption behaviours with great frequency and intensity (Hill, 2001; Hamilton and Catterall, 2006a; Hamilton, 2009b; Wendt, 2011). Further, from an emotional coping perspective, it may be argued that some of these strategies have been used to derogate past non-reflexive pre-poverty selves to be able to be able make sense of the traumatic experience associated with slipping into poverty. However, apart from coping, this study has shown that examples of creative consumption strategies are used in retrospect to showcase paths of enlightenment, moral development and inner learning, leading to more conscious and socially responsible post-poverty consumption

behaviours (e.g. continuing to water plants with hot water bottle with the goal to save the planet). As a consequence, this study does not only refute claims that perceptions of growth are just a coping strategy to better understand what one has experienced in the past (Tennen and Affleck, 2002). By contrast, it adds to an understanding of how personal growth is manifested in post-crisis simplified and conscientious consumption. Adopting this lifestyle, thus, may be seen as the elixir or magical treasure (Campbell, 1993) that has been brought back from a transformative life journey (through poverty) of enlightenment and moral development. Following this line of reasoning, the current research study also contributes to the literature on the importance of creative consumption adaptive strategies during and in the aftermath of difficult life events. Thus, it has shown that creativity used in consumption does not make a halt in empowering vulnerable consumer populations (Hamilton et al., 2014). Creative consumption tactics deployed also have the potential to foster personal growth in that they are translated into post-poverty voluntary simplifier lifestyles (including ecological conscientiousness).

Finally, building upon the latter contribution, this study further extends knowledge on adversity-exposed individuals' tendencies for compassion and empathy as a signature of personal growth and how it becomes materialised after overcoming a crisis event (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004; McAdams, 2006; Staub and Vollhardt, 2008). As revealed in the findings, informants have adopted post-poverty consumption practices of generativity (e.g. giving money to financially struggling others in society). These practices are used as altruistic disposition acts in support of one's stories surrounding self-change and concomitant moral development. The use of such a consumptive generativity script (e.g. making donations as an expression of feeling compassionate

for others suffering from economic deprivation) highlights both potential drivers leading to compassionate and empathetic behaviours following traumatic experiences as well as its consequences, which have not been well understood thus far (Infurna and Jayawickreme, 2019). The few qualitative interview studies that exist (Woodward and Joseph, 2003; Calhoun and Tedeschi, 2014) have only considered general emotional expressions of empathy towards others sharing the same difficult fate (e.g. “I’ve become more compassionate towards anybody in pain and anybody in any kind of grief”). Also, the reciprocation of past social support received (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004; Staub and Vollhardt, 2008) while being poor serves as a key motivator to engage in generative consumption practices. This insight further extends knowledge regarding the importance of social support as a coping strategy for the income poor (Hamilton, 2005, 2009b; Hutton, 2016) and traumatised consumers in more general. Hence, the extended care for others enacted through communal and socially responsible post-crisis consumption practices showcases that relational coping may not only be situational helping those who struggle with adverse life circumstances (Caldwell and Henry, 2017). It may equally foster a pro-civic chain-reaction of passing on help received throughout times of hardship to other vulnerable consumer populations and so forth. Taking a macro-social level perspective, changes towards less individualised and ego-centred consumption practices (Kilbourne et al., 1997; Shankar and Fitchett, 2002; McGouran and Prothero, 2016) could be further boosted.

Practical Implications for Strategic Marketing and Social Policy

Makers

Despite CCT research having an academic origin (Arnould and Thompson, 2005), “*its approach is valuable and applicable in the managerial sphere, as brand managers realise that cultural meanings (...), and consumer identity projects are integral to the market success of brands*” (Arnould et al., 2019: 135). As such, a key practical implication that flows from this study is that it underscores the importance and relevance of overarching cultural narrative scripts, or myths used for both consumers’ identity construction and contemporary branding activities. It is certainly not groundbreaking when stating that portrayals of life adversities as heroic adventures of perseverance, or transformative narrative journeys (Campbell, 1993; McAdams, 2006; Frank, 2013), as charted in identity stories of redemptive consumers in this study, are important pillars of commercial brand storytelling. See for instance a recent communications campaign by Samsung (2018) in Germany. In this commercial the struggling and injured football star Mario Goetze is shown in a state of depression and loneliness while watching on his Television the German national team playing the World Cup without him. In another scene of the same commercial, the audience sees a hard-working Goetze on the pitch fighting for a comeback in the forthcoming 2020 European Championships. The advertisement ends showing the fallen hero’s prospective return back to the team stronger and more celebrated than ever. Similarly, Dr Martens’ (2019) current “tough as you” global campaign uses different spots with creatives telling their personal stories of overcoming adversity in life and how they became who they are today. The shoe brand also engages with consumers by inviting them to tell their own stories of “kicking back” (using the Hashtag #ToughAsYou on

Social Media). How have they dealt with difficult life experiences? Were these experiences transformative? And in what ways can personal stories of successfully managing challenges in life, be turned into social weapons for change?

Undoubtedly, redemptive identity stories of bad things turning into something good highlighted in this study find great resonance within commercial marketplaces. However, this poses the question as to why non-profit organisations (e.g. Oxfam, PETA, Plan International, Greenpeace) are not adopting similar kinds of storytelling more effectively. In their attempts to promote such ideas as alleviating poverty, or changing behaviours towards leading more ethical and simpler lifestyles, often shock tactics are used to create a maximum degree of attention amongst the public (Cherrier and Murray, 2007). However, these tactics may run risk of causing feelings of us and them (Chouliaraki, 2012). It may separate benefactors from feeling connected to those who might be in need of charity assistance. Instead, personal stories of positive change from previous adversities may be a more effective tool for promoting social causes due to people generally being able to identify strongly with this cultural master narrative (Hammack, 2009). Here, increased focus could be put upon respectful portrayals of (former) beneficiaries. They may be depicted in a state of emotional and physical stability where stories of positive personal change arising out of adversity are used to transform others' lives facing similar circumstances (e.g. a formerly poor child from an underdeveloped country has become a school teacher, who is currently working with refugee children). Such stories of positive change, yet, would not have been possible without acknowledging past endurance (e.g. working way out of poverty through education), and the support received from charitable bodies (e.g. Oxfam), local partners (e.g. educational institutions), and their benefactors (charity consumers).

This importance assigned to consumer redemption (growing through adversity) and generativity (helping future generations) as both powerful personal and cultural narratives, also raises a number of policy issues. For example, in order to assist people who have become downwardly mobile, job centres and other social welfare providers may consider integrating therapeutic measures into their offerings, such as Mindful-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programmes. Within these, or similar workshops, success stories of personal failure, and overcoming life difficulties, may be disseminated to the newly unemployed, and other vulnerable consumer populations. Here, it could be shown how redemptive consumers have embraced their situations of forced simplicity, and sustainably changed their perspectives on upholding high levels of consumption towards leading more mindful and authentic post-crisis lives. For example, first-time financially struggling and emotionally strained consumers may get inspired by others' creative consumption acts brought about by their poverty experience. Thus, they may become empowered in their own ways of coping with economic constraint and develop more optimism and hope for their future. Encouraging a sensitivity towards certain consumption tactics highlighted in this research, such as delayed gratification, upcycling, or creative budgeting strategies could direct affected individuals' attention to more non-material goals in life. This would, in turn, provide a basis for increased well-being, self-determination and may trigger enduring personal development through their adversarial circumstances.

These suggested implementations at the institutional level enabling self-empowerment of poor consumers, may also alter perspectives on top-down threatening postures of activation policies in German and Anglo-Saxon societies. In fact, policy-makers have shown strong tendencies towards re-infantilising those who face aversive economic

situations and downward mobility. In this sense, widely standardised institutional pressures are exerted upon those claiming social assistance (e.g. full disclosure of financial circumstances, partnership status, travel activities, etc.), largely emphasising the duty to collaborate (Betzelt and Bode, 2018). Instead, social assistance policies may try to account more for people's needs for self-determination when dealing with unpleasant experiences of economic hardship. Hence, suggested initiatives of encouraging creativity and mindful consumption, would take into account poor consumers' striving for taking an active role in coping with consumption constraints, as stressed in this study.

Suggested policy changes at the institutional level towards more solidarisation with the income poor may also have some wider macro-social and political implications. Especially, in performance-oriented cultures, such as Germany and the UK, people often fear a potential status loss and downward mobility in light of benefit systems that are considered to be highly stigmatised (Betzelt and Bode, 2018). Social assistance claimancy usually goes hand in hand with notions of personal failure, unemployment, underclass stereotypical representations, and social exclusion (Doerre et al., 2013; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013). These middle-class anxieties have been suggested to result in more far-reaching societal symptoms such as xenophobic tendencies and sympathising with far-right movements across Europe (Betzelt and Bode, 2018). However, such prevailing discourses of fear may get changed when individual narratives of gaining something positive out of loss, as stressed in this research, are more shared and incorporated into social narratives. Mainstream political parties, social leaders, and the media could gain more inspirations from such grassroots global movements as the FUCKUP Night community (2019). This event series provides a

platform for the public sharing of professional and personal failures, and what kind of positive lessons people have learned from them. Apart from giving hope to people, these events may render negative consequences associated with failure, such as downward mobility, living on a reduced income, or claiming social welfare, as socially acceptable. In terms of implementation, for example, there may be some scope to include elements of such self-improvements arising from difficult life experiences in school curricula. Students could work on real-life cases (e.g. analysing the life story of Nelson Mandela), and/or present own examples of people they know who have mastered existential threats (e.g. due to job loss) and how they gained personal strength from them (e.g. due to external help received from job centre employees, significant others, or changed attitudes towards consumption in terms of embracing forced simplicity). Negative stereotypes of poor consumer populations and soulless welfare institutions could be reduced with these initiatives. Also, younger consumers could be further encouraged to critically reflect about the role of consumer culture and related issues, such as overconsumption and its detrimental effects upon the environment as well as overly materialistic lifestyles not being conducive to happiness (Hyman, 2015).

Limitations of the Research and Potential Areas for Future

Research

Like all other empirical studies, this research has its own limitations. From these limitations, several avenues for future research can be derived, which will be highlighted in the following.

The charted process of redemptive consumers' self-change may help to frame how individuals evolve through critical turning points towards lasting lifestyle changes.

However, it has to be noted that this emergent theory is founded upon a small sample of German consumers. Further contextualisation would enrich understandings of culturally-grounded similarities and differences in regards to consumers' self-transformation following difficult life transitions. Although it has been argued, that therapeutic redemptive identity stories may not be culturally bounded (McAdams, 2006; McAdams and Guo, 2017), even serving as universally applicable master cultural narratives, or culturally shared dominant discourses (McLean and Syed, 2015; Hyman, 2015), cross-cultural differences abound. For example, Hammack (2009, 2010) has found that Israeli and Palestinian teenagers construct their life stories differently in light of shared historical events. He notes that young Israelis' identity narratives usually match the upward, optimistic and largely redemptive trajectory of their culture's master narrative. This shared dominant discourse celebrates the triumph of a democratic and enlightened nation state established in 1948, marking a redemptive conclusion to an unparalleled period of suffering during the Holocaust. By contrast, Palestinian youth's life stories are infused with cultural discourses surrounding al-Nakba, Arabic for the "catastrophe", largely referring to these people's violent and tragic displacements by the foundation of the state of Israel (Hammack, 2014). Their dominant shared discourse is about peace-loving people who were cruel-heartedly uprooted from their homeland. As a consequence, Palestinian youth's identity narratives are overshadowed by their historical past in terms of imagining their lives as less optimistic, and downwardly mobile in the future (Hammack, 2010) – which is partially akin to the contamination infused stories told by Resilient Survivors from this study. Future consumer research dealing with self-changes in light of life threatening and difficult experiences should consider these varying person-culture co-

constitutions. Are consumers from specific cultural backgrounds and histories more likely to engage in consumer redemption, and, thus, optimistically perceiving a difficult phase in their lives as vehicles to achieving growth and personal development? Or, are they more prone to adopting less optimistic and stagnant contamination narratives, pursuing transformations from former positive to negative post-crisis lives while holding to the desperate hope for a reversal?

A further limitation of this study is the unit of analysis, that is the individual and particularly the individual's identity re-construction after critical life events through narratives of growth. Given that traumatic experiences, such as slipping into poverty can affect the whole family unit (Hamilton and Catterall, 2006a; Hamilton, 2012), future research should expand the unit of analysis to include other family members within the household. For example, children's experiences of redemption and generativity after overcoming traumatic experiences, such as slipping into poverty should be considered, thereby going beyond self-reports of growth. Some informants from this study (Ulla, Dorothea, Lissie, and Wiebke) indicated that their children have equally embraced a poverty experience as something positive. As a consequence, they have gained important lessons for life out of it (e.g. independently doing bulk purchasing at discounters for the whole family, or learning how to navigate through public libraries). Furthermore, informants' children pro-actively engaged in frugal and creative consumption acts as well as budgeting strategies (e.g. building a river raft out of collected milk cartons, or digging for old metal containers in their garden to re-sell them at local metal trade shops). Interestingly, also signs of leading a post-crisis simplified lifestyle outside normative backgrounds of consumer culture (e.g. considering to get rid of one's smartphone, or continuing to use public libraries), and

generativity (e.g. becoming eco-activists for Greenpeace, or studying public policy) were suggested by informants. Hence, although the data from this study do not include any first-person accounts of other household members' redemptive tales, the findings imply that the whole family unit deserves further study. Here, the concept of consumer redemption may also be a collective and shared identity narrative that projects an aspect of dynamic family identity and concomitant practices of consumption (Epp and Price, 2008).

Building upon the above limitation of this study concerning the unit of analysis, it is worthwhile to consider an inclusion of more informants forming part of redemptive consumers' social network. This inclusion of third party accounts may assist in further illuminating the validity of informants' redemptive self-growth reports after adversity (Infurna and Jayawickreme, 2019). For example, in informants' narratives they derogated past pre-crisis selves and lifestyles in order to re-affirm their redemptive pathways of growth, inner learning and moral development attained. According to McFarland and Alvaro (2000), however, people may often falsely perceive personal growth through adversity by misremembering what they were like prior to a critical life event. Similarly, the notion that one is able to grow from suffering is a staple of many works in philosophy, popular literature on self-help and therapy, as well as theology. As such, experiences of growth may become a self-fulfilling prophecy where people simply report to believe they have grown out of adversity because they have expected it (Tennen and Affleck, 2002, 2009). Hence, an associated methodological issue is whether the sub-themes and themes actually emerged from the raw narratives of the participants, or if they were already part of the aforementioned folklore associated with recovery from traumatic experiences, known to the informants from

literature, or through their own experiences of getting therapeutic help. In fact, as highlighted in the findings, some of the informants reported having consulted counselling services or psychotherapy in the past, and such experiences undoubtedly influenced them in how they have come to make sense and communicated their self-change processes. However, I have no doubt that informants were engaged seriously with me telling their redemptive stories of growth as they experienced them. Still, further examining whether one's social network rated a redemptive consumer as exhibiting growth or not through comparing pre-crisis and post-crisis social identities and associated lifestyle changes could provide valuable additional information on whether they have truly changed as a result of a traumatic experiences.

Finally, a related shortcoming of this research is the narrative methodological perspective deployed. Consumers' identity narratives were used as surrogate data for the longitudinal study of self-change processes and altered consumer behaviours (Shankar et al., 2001; Shankar et al., 2009; Giesler and Thompson, 2016) following adversity. Here, post-poverty informants have recalled retrospectively how they were before the adversity, how they have changed since then, and elaborated on the extent to which they believe this change may be attributed to the adversity. However, such retrospective assessments of self-change may further lead to reality distortions and growth illusions (Tennen and Affleck, 2009), raising questions about the accuracy of the processual theory of consumer redemption outlined in this research study (from negative traumatic experience to lasting positive self-change). Instead of relying on these retrospective accounts requiring consumers to report on how they have changed their consuming identities since the critical life event, an assessment of their standing at regular intervals (e.g. pre-crisis, during crisis, and post-crisis) would be a more

suitable research strategy. This longitudinal approach would allow consumer researchers to further explore whether lasting changes in fact occur and really uphold. The narrative two-tier methodological approach deployed in this study has intended to partially tackle this issue of further validating statements made about meaning-making through adversity, positive self-changes and enduring lifestyle alterations by tracing them over time. This is so as a sample of informants were interviewed after having written their autobiographies about experiences associated with being transitory poor (with a time lapse of 1-10 years between publication of autobiography and interview). However, future research could consider other, more rigorous longitudinal research designs using alternative interconnected life events and their cumulative impact upon identity re-construction. For example, University students could be interviewed at different stages of their study experience, from beginning to end, using a redemptive theoretical lens. Insights could be gained about their consuming identities before embarking on a study experience, while they progress through their studies facing difficulties (e.g. being homesick) and how they master these adversities. Eventually, after having finished their degrees it should be assessed how overcoming difficulties has led to self-changes and altered consumption behaviours compared to pre-study selves.

The Research's Impact on the Researcher's Self and Learning

Outcomes

Du musst Dein Leben ändern.

(You must change your life.)

Rainer Maria Rilke "Archaic Torso of Apollo" (1907-08)

Undertaking this study has had an impact upon shaping, and understanding my identity as a researcher in the social sciences. Consequently, it has provided me with several learning outcomes, which will be highlighted in the following.

Analogous to Rilke's: You must change your life, I naively embarked upon this research a few years ago with the aim to expand my intellectual horizon. I decided to leave my well-paid, yet intellectually somniferous job as a practitioner to receive a re-training as an interpretive researcher in culturally informed consumer behaviour. My primary socialisation in a German socio-cultural context largely favouring positivist and hypothetico-deductive approaches to doing social science research (Holtbrugge and Mohr, 2010), however, made it challenging to adopt this new role in the beginning. Engaging with relevant literature, including Arnould and Thompson's (2005) seminal article on CCT, often resulted in mixed feelings of despair, confusion, anger, and sarcasm. It was not easy for me to identify with these authors' abstracted ways of writing. In this sense, their claim that the CCT framework could be particularly helpful for doctoral students who struggle with the diversity presented by this research tradition (Arnould et al., 2019), like I was doing at that time, seemed to be nothing else than contradictory to me. I must have read this article over a hundred times, and could

recite multiple passages word by word. Yet, if someone had asked me what CCT is, possibly I would not have been able to provide a satisfying answer.

One key learning outcome derived from this struggle to make sense of relevant literature in the field I was hoping to become a member of (CCT), and how it could inform my own research, was to engage in conversations with others on a frequent basis (e.g. participating in reading groups organised by consumer culture colleagues from the department). Further, I tried to get as much critical feedback from participating in different conferences (e.g. EMAC, Macromarketing, EACR), seminars (e.g. ESRC Vulnerable Consumer Seminar series) and doctoral workshops (e.g. Consumption, Markets, and Culture (CMC) seminar in Bilkent, Turkey). Especially, the attendance at the CMC seminar was inspirational with Russell Belk being my mentor throughout the event. His statement, that one should view an interpretivist PhD project as a “piece of art” affording a great deal of creativity has resonated with me. I could further unglue myself from a positivist primary socialisation. Hence, attending these events, and talking to both supervisors and other colleagues from various social science disciplines, has undoubtedly improved my understanding of the CCT research stream. Especially, within its consuming identity bucket, acknowledging how difficult life events may threaten identity projects, and learning about consumers’ coping with these existential fears through consumption have provided me with fascinating theoretical insights and questions. It also opened me up to reading more outside theory that equally mattered in my area of inquiry (e.g. culturally informed socio-psychological narrative identity research, McAdams, 2006).

Moreover, I have been taught, and make a claim here to have also understood, that unique research contexts matter, yet should not entirely drive the research (Arnould

et al., 2006; Figueiredo, Gopaldas and Fisher, 2017). Hence, a key learning has been that constructing a theoretical gap in the research should go beyond making such claims as “no other research has considered consumers moving out of poverty before”. Instead, emphasis should be put on understanding the importance of what theoretical insight such a novel context affords (e.g. how a processual theory of consumer redemption following a difficult life experience makes a contribution to understandings on the dynamics of consumer identity projects within CCT).

Apart from these learnings associated with some core scientific standards of approaching and constructing (qualitative) research, I have further appreciated the importance of perseverance in writing up this research. I have faced various extrinsic and intrinsic obstacles that hindered a smooth and timely progression through my PhD studies in terms of familial difficulties, self-doubts, perfectionism, resignation, or reading FOMO (fear of missing out on important readings), which led to writer’s blocks. As worn out as it may sound (potentially also after having read this thesis from beginning to end), however, embracing these difficulties and successfully mastering them (e.g. getting inspired by the “writing retreat method”, Murray and Newton, 2009), helped me to continue and gain momentum time and again. To an extent, I can relate to the redemptive tales told by informants from this study. For example, I have received a lot of support from other people, including both of my supervisors (e.g. referring me to writing retreat methods), that encouraged me to get going. When I had my own personal PhD rock bottom moment not too long ago, hitting a crossroads, I changed my perspective and retrieved a former self from my time when being a competitive tennis player. This temporarily stalled part of my identity reminded me of an important credo when I was playing tournaments throughout teenage and adolescent

years: to not give up, no matter how many points, games, or sets you are behind in a match. Getting such an inspiration from a past self surely helped me to continue with my PhD write-up. I have become more disciplined when it comes to focusing upon finishing the thesis instead of striving for lofty ideals of perfectionism. Dissimilar to redemptive consumers' self-change processes following difficult life events, I would not go as far as derogating, or entirely rejecting my pre-PhD self. Possibly, I would mildly critique its naivety in regards to approaching Postgraduate studies at PhD level. I can certainly say, however, that the PhD journey, including overcoming many difficulties, has been formative in a positive way. Hence, a key learning outcome is that I will potentially draw upon this experience in my future career as an academic in order to share these insights gained with others and help them progress through their studies. For example, for the next academic year, I am planning on integrating several sessions on how to "deal with adversity as a Postgraduate Student" into research methods modules, which I currently teach across the UK and Germany (Aston University & Hamburg School of Business Administration). Having said that, I would disagree with Giesler's (2019) suggestion to symbolically burn one's PhD thesis to close this chapter of an academic's life. By contrast, referring back to Rilke's opening quote: you must change your life was the impetus for starting my PhD research. Yet, in turn, the PhD equally changed my life. It has been eye-opening. I have become more self-disciplined. And it has sharpened my senses (e.g. developing a sensitivity towards others who struggle financially, emotionally, or educationally). I would, therefore, not consider burning my PhD thesis.

Conclusion

This study showed different ways as to how consumers produce retrospective accounts of their experiences and come to grips with a temporary phase of poverty. They do so via inscription to two converging cultural narratives. One group of people subscribe to a neoliberal subjectivity of viewing the marketplace as a core therapeutic function to attain a happy life. In doing so, they do not find any meaning in their poverty experience and largely restore pre-poverty transition lifestyles in their attempts to re-construct a disrupted identity. Another group of people's narratives, constituting the majority in this study, are reflections of therapeutic socio-cultural discourses surrounding the promotion of self-knowledge, self-actualisation, personal growth and moral development found in adversity. Their altered post-poverty lifestyles are reflective of such culturally-constituted stories of benefit-finding and personal change. Findings surrounding the latter identified socio-cultural discourse make contributions to the theoretical body of knowledge in consumer research on disrupted identities due to traumatic events and their effects upon long-termed identity re-construction, which has been an understudied topic within consuming identity-focused research. Having said that, the study also identified additional knowledge gaps. Several potential areas for future research on further tracing the long-term effects of disruption on consuming identity re-constructions have been offered.

The Hollywood-inspired opening vignette in the introduction chapter of this thesis has briefly charted a romantic perspective on adversity-induced self-change. This research has demonstrated that there is also empirical evidence that people in real life incorporate a similar romantic plot into their personal stories of having overcome life difficulties and how this has shaped their post-event consumption.

References

- Aassve, A., Betti, G., Mazzuco, S. and Mencarini, L. (2007).** Marital Disruption and Economic Well-Being: A Comparative Analysis, *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society. Series A (Statistics in Society)*, 170 (3), 781-799.
- Ackroyd, S. (2004).** Methodology for management and organisation studies: Some implications of critical realism, in: Fleetwood, S. and Ackroyd, S. (eds.), *Critical realist applications in organisation and management studies*, 127-150, London: Routledge.
- Adler, J.M. and Poulin, M.J. (2009).** The political is personal: narrating 9/11 and psychological well-being, *Journal of Personality*, 77, 903–932.
- Ahuvia, A.C. (2005).** Beyond the Extended Self: Loved Objects and Consumers' Identity Narratives, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 32 (1), 171–184.
- Aldwin, C.M. (2007).** Stress, coping and development: an integrative perspective (2nd edition), New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Alexander, S. and Ussher, S. (2012).** The Voluntary Simplicity Movement: A multi-national survey analysis in theoretical context. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 12 (1), 66–86.
- Andreß, H.-J. (2004).** Wenn aus Liebe rote Zahlen werden. Über die wirtschaftlichen Folgen von Trennung und Scheidung, *Informationsdienst Soziale Indikatoren (ISI)*, 31, 1-5.
- Andreß, H.-J., Borgloh, B., Bröckel, M., Giesselmann, M. and Hummelsheim, D. (2006).** The Economic Consequences of Partnership Dissolution – A comparative analysis of panel studies from Belgium, Germany, Great Britain, Italy and Sweden”, *European Sociological Review*, 22 (5), 533-560.

Andreß, H.-J. and Lohmann, H. (2008). Introduction: the working poor in Europe, in: Andreß, H.-J and Lohmann, H. (eds.) *The working poor in Europe. Employment, poverty and globalization*: Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Andriopoulou, E. and Tsakloglou, P. (2011). The Determinants of Poverty Transitions in Europe and the Role of Duration Dependence, *IZA discussion paper No 5692*, Institute of Labor Economics.

Anhorn, R., Bettinger, F. and Stehr, J. (2007). Sozialer Ausschluss und Soziale Arbeit. Wiesbaden: VS-Verlag.

Arnould, E.J. and Price, L.L. (1993). River magic: Extraordinary experience and the extended service encounter, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 20 (1), 24–45.

Arnould, E.J. and Thompson, C.J. (2005). Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): 20 years of Research, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31 (4), 868-882.

Arnould, E.J., Price, L. and Moisio, R. (2006). Making Contexts Matter: Selecting Research Contexts for Theoretical Insights, in R. W. Belk (ed.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods in Marketing*, 106–25. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Arnould, E., Press, M., Salminen, E. and Tillotson, J.S. (2019). Consumer Culture Theory: Development, Critique, Application and Prospects, *Foundations and Trends in Marketing*, 12 (2), 80–165.

Arsel, Z. and Bean, J. (2013). Taste Regimes and Market-Mediated Practice, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39 (5), 899–917.

Athens, L.H. (1995). Dramatic Self Change, *The Sociological Quarterly*, 36 (3), 571-586.

Atkinson, R. (2002). The Life Story Interview, in: Gubrium, J.F. and Holstein, J.A. (eds.), *Handbook of Interview Research: Context & Method*, 121-141, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Inc.

Baker, S.M. (2006). Consumer normalcy: Understanding the value of shopping through narratives of consumers with visual impairments, *Journal of Retailing*, 82 (1), 37–50.

Baker, S.M. (2009). Vulnerability and Resilience in Natural Disasters: A Marketing and Public Policy Perspective, *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 28 (2), 114–123.

Baker, S.M., Labarge, M. and Baker, C.N. (2015). Consumer Vulnerability: Foundations, Phenomena, and Future Investigations, in: Hamilton, K. and Dunnett, S. and Piacentini, M. (eds.) *Consumer Vulnerability: Conditions, Contexts, and Characteristics*, 13–30. New York: Routledge.

Bamberg, M. (2007). Stories: Big or small: Why do we care?, in: Bamberg, M. (ed.), *Narrative: State of the art*, 165–174, Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.

Bamberg, M. and Demuth, C. (2016). Narrative inquiry: an interview with Michael Bamberg. *European Journal of Psychology*, 12 (1), 14–28.

Bane, M.J. and Ellwood, D.T. (1986). Slipping into and out of poverty: the dynamics of spell, *Journal of Human Resources*, 21, 1–23.

Banyard, V.L. (1995). Taking another route: Daily survival narratives from mothers who are homeless. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 23, 871–891.

Barlösius, E. (2002). Die Macht der Repräsentation. Common Sense über Soziale Ungleichheiten, Wiesbaden:VS Verlag.

Barrios, A., Piacentini, M.G. and Salciuviene, L.J. (2012). ‘Your Life When You’ve Got Everything is Different’: Forced Transformations and Consumption Practices, in: Belk, R.W., Askegaard, S. and Scott, L (eds.), *Research in Consumer Behaviour*, Volume 14, Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Baudrillard, J. (1998). The consumer society: Myths and structures, London: Sage.

- Bauer, J.J., McAdams, D.P. and Sakaeda, A.R. (2005).** Crystallization of desire and crystallization of discontent in narratives of life-changing decisions. *Journal of Personality*, 73, 1181-1214.
- Bauman, R. (1986).** Story, performance and event: contextual studies of oral narrative. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Bauman, Z. (2001).** Liquid Modernity, Cambridge: Polity.
- Bauman, Z. (2005).** Liquid Life, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Baumeister, R.F. (2002).** Yielding to temptation: Self-control failure, impulsive purchasing, and consumer behavior. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 28, 670–676.
- Beck, U. (1992).** Risk Society. Towards a New Modernity, London: Sage.
- Beck, U. and Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2002).** Individualization: Institutionalized Individualization and its Social and Political Consequences, London: Sage.
- Beetz, M. (2009).** Was können Soziologen von Moral verstehen? Gesellschaftliche Praxisfelder und ihre moralischen Kompetenzerfordernisse, *Berliner Journal für Soziologie* 19, 248–267.
- Belk, R.W. (1988).** Possessions and the Extended Self, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15 (2), 139-68.
- Belk, R.W. (1995).** Studies in the New Consumer Behaviour, in: Miller, D. (ed.), Acknowledging Consumption: A Review of New Studies. London: Routledge, 58-95.
- Belk, R.W. (2006).** *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods in Marketing*, 1st edition, Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing Inc.
- Belk, R. (2014).** You are what you can access: Sharing and collaborative consumption online, *Journal of Business Research*, 67 (8), 1595-1600.

Bellezza, S., Paharia, N. and Keinan, A. (2016). Conspicuous Consumption of Time: When Busyness and Lack of Leisure Time Become a Status Symbol, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 44 (1), 118–138.

Berger, P.A. (1994). Individualisierung und Armut, in M. M. Zwick (ed.), *Einmal arm, immer arm? Neue Befunde zur Armut in Deutschland*, Frankfurt Am Main/New York: Campus Verlag.

Betzelt, S. and Bode, I. (2018). Einleitung: Angst im neuen Wohlfahrtsstaat, In Betzelt, S. and Bode, I. (eds.), *Angst im neuen Wohlfahrtsstaat: Kritische Blicke auf ein diffuses Phänomen*, 9-31, Wiesbaden: Nomos.

Black, I.R. (2011). Sorry not today: self and temporary consumption denial, *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 10 (5), 267-278.

Blossfeld, H.-P., Mills, M. and Bernardi, F. (2006). Globalization, Uncertainty and Men's Careers. An International Comparison. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

BMAS (2019). Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales: Arbeitslosengeld, retrieved from:
<https://www.bmas.de/DE/Themen/Arbeitsmarkt/Arbeitslosengeld/arbeitslosengeld-1.html>, (Accessed 12/08/19).

Böhnke, P. and Delhey, J. (1999). Lebensstandard und Armut im vereinten Deutschland, Abteilung "Sozialstruktur und Sozialberichterstattung, in Forschungsschwerpunkt III, Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB).

Bonanno, G.A. (2004). Loss, trauma, and human resilience: Have we underestimated the human capacity to thrive after extremely aversive events? *American Psychologist*, 59, 20–28.

Bonoli, G. (2007). Time Matters. Postindustrialization, New Social Risks, and Welfare State Adaptation in Advanced Industrial Democracies, *Comparative Political Studies*, 40 (5), 495–520.

Bosk, C. (1979). *Forgive and Remember: Managing Medical Failure*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Botsman, R. and Rogers, R. (2010). *What's Mine Is Yours: The Rise of Collaborative Consumption*, New York, NY: HarperCollins.

Bothfeld, S. and Rouault, S. (2015). Families Facing the Crisis: Is Social Investment a Sustainable Social Policy Strategy? *Social Politics*, 22 (1), 60–85.

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2012). Thematic analysis, in: Cooper, H. (Ed.), *The Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Brot für die Welt Online (2019). Brot für die Welt, retrieved from <https://www.brot-fuer-die-welt.de>, (Accessed 08/06/19).

Brown, S. (2005). I can read you like a book! Novel thoughts on consumer behaviour, *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 8 (2), 219–237.

Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual minds: Possible worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bruner J. (2004). Life as narrative, *Social Research*, 71 (3): 691–710.

Buhr, P. (2004). Armut und Armutsentwicklung in Deutschland. Status Quo und mögliche Folgen der Reformpolitik, Bremen:Zentrum für Sozialpolitik.

Bundesregierung (2012). *Lebenslagen in Deutschland: Entwurf des 4. Armuts- und Reichtumsbericht der Bundesregierung* (Online), 17th September 2012, retrieved from:http://www.sozialpolitik-aktuell.de/tl_files/sozialpolitik_aktuell/_Politikfelder/Einkommen-Armut/Dokumente/Entwurf%204.%20Armutsbericht%20der%20Bundesregierung%2017.9.2012.pdf, (Accessed 06/10/14).

Butterwege, C. (2009). Armut in einem reichen Land. Wie das Problem verharmlost und verdrängt wird, Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag.

Caldwell, M. and Henry, P. (2017). Transformative and restorative consumption behaviors following attachment trauma. *Psychology & Marketing*, 34, 761–771.

Calhoun, L.G. and Tedeschi, R.G. (2014). The foundations of Posttraumatic Growth: An expanded framework, in Calhoun, L.G. and Tedeschi, R.G. (eds.), *Handbook of Posttraumatic Growth: Research and Practice*, New York, NY: Psychology Press.

Campbell, J. (1993). The Hero with a Thousand Faces. London: Fontana.

Carson, D., Gilmore, A., Perry, C. and Gronhaug, K. (2001). Qualitative Marketing Research. London: SAGE.

Castilhos, R.B. and Fonseca, M.J. (2016). Pursuing upward transformation: The construction of a progressing self among dominated consumers, *Journal of Business Research*, 69 (1), 6–17.

Chase, E. and Walker, R. (2015). Poverty, shame and the vulnerable consumer, in Hamilton, K. and Dunnet, S. and Piacentini, M. (eds.), *Consumer vulnerability: Conditions, contexts, and characteristics*, 198–208, Abingdon: Routledge.

Chen, W. and Nelson, M. (2017). “Champagne taste, beer budget: The new poor’s incongruent capital and consumption”, *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 0 (0), 1-20.

Cherrier, H. (2009). Disposal and simple living: Exploring the circulation of goods and the development of sacred consumption. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 8 (6), 327–39.

Cherrier, H. and Murray J.B. (2007). Reflexive dispossession and the self: constructing a processual theory of identity, *Consumption, Markets and Culture* 10 (1), 1–30.

- Chouliaraki, L. (2012).** The Ironic Spectator: Solidarity in the Age of Post-Humanitarianism, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Cody, K. and Lawlor, K. (2011).** On the borderline: Exploring liminal consumption and the negotiation of threshold selves, *Marketing Theory*, 11 (2), 207–228.
- Cody, K. (2012).** ‘No longer, but not yet’: Tweens and the mediating of threshold selves through liminal consumption, *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 12 (1), 41–65.
- Connelly, F.M. and Clandinin, D.J. (2006).** Narrative inquiry, in: Green, J.L., Camilli, G. and Elmore, P. (eds), *Handbook of Complementary Methods in Education Research*, 3rd ed., Lawrence Erlbaum, Mahwah, NJ, 477-487.
- Cope, J. (2011).** Entrepreneurial learning from failure: An interpretative phenomenological analysis, *Journal of business venturing*, 26 (6), 604-623.
- Cushman, P. (1995).** Constructing the self, constructing America: A cultural history of psychotherapy. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Cutrona, C. E. and Russell, D. W. (1990).** Type of social support and specific stress: Toward a theory of optimal matching, in Sarason, B.R. and Sarason, I.G. and Pierce, G.R. (eds.), *Social Support: An Interactional View*, 319-366, Oxford, England: John Wiley and Sons.
- Dahrendorf, R. (1984).** Reisen nach innen und nach aussen. Aspekte der Zeit, Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt.
- David, C. (1967).** The poor pay more: Consumer practices of low-income families, New York: The Free Press.
- Davies, A. and Fitchett, J.A. (2004).** Crossing Culture: A Multimethod Enquiry into Consumer Behaviour and the Experience of Cultural Transition, *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 3 (4), 315–30.

DeLorme, D.E., Zinkhan G.M. and Hagen S.C. (2004). The process of consumer reactions to possession threats and losses in a natural disaster. *Marketing Letters* 14 (4), 185–199.

Dennett, D. (1995). Darwin's dangerous idea, New York: Simon & Schuster.

Denzin, N. (1989). Interpretive Biography, London: Sage.

Destatis (2016). Pressemitteilung Nr. 249 vom 15. Juli 2016, retrieved from: https://www.destatis.de/DE/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2016/07/PD16_249_12631.html, (Accessed 12/08/19).

Destatis (2018). Lange Reihe für Familien und Familienformen, retrieved from: <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bevoelkerung/Haushalte-Familien/Tabellen/2-4-lr-familien.html?nn=208888>, (Accessed 11/08/19).

Destatis (2019a). Poverty Threshold and Risk of Poverty in Germany, retrieved from: <https://www.destatis.de/EN/Themes/Society-Environment/Income-Consumption-Living-Conditions/Living-Conditions-Risk-Poverty/Tables/eu-poverty-threshold-risk-silc.html>, (Accessed 12/08/19).

Destatis (2019b). Sozialberichterstattung, retrieved from: https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Soziales/Sozialberichterstattung/_inhalt.html, (Accessed 12/08/19).

Deutschmann C. (2009). Geld als universales Inklusionsmedium moderner Gesellschaften. In: Stichweh R., Windolf P. (eds) *Inklusion und Exklusion: Analysen zur Sozialstruktur und sozialen Ungleichheit*. VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Dewilde, C. (2003). The Financial Consequences of Relationship Dissolution for Women in Western Europe, in: Ruspini, E. and Dale, A. (eds). *The Gender Dimension of Social Change. The Contribution of Dynamic Research to the Study of Women's Life Courses*, Bristol: The Policy Press, 81–110.

Dewilde, C. and Uunk, W. (2008). Remarriage as a way to overcome the financial consequences of divorce: A test of the economic need hypothesis for European women. *European Sociological Review*, 24, 393 – 407.

Diener, E. (1984). Subjective Well-Being, *Psychological Bulletin*, 95 (3), 542-575.

DiPrete, T. A. (2002). Life course risks, mobility regimes and mobility consequences: A comparison of Sweden, Germany and the United States, *American Journal of Sociology*, 108 (2), 267-/309.

DiPrete, T.A. and McManus, P.A. (2000). Family Change, Employment Transitions, and the Welfare State: Household Income Dynamics in the United States and Germany, *American Sociological Review*, 65 (3), 343–370.

DIW (Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung) and Zentrum für Europäische Wirtschaftsforschung and Hauser, R. and Becker, I. (2007). Integrierte Analyse der Einkommens- und Vermögensverteilung. Abschlussbericht zur Studie im Auftrag des Bundesministeriums für Arbeit und Soziales, Frankfurt a. M., Riedstadt, Berlin and Mannheim.

Doerre K., Scherschel K., Booth M., Marquardsen K., Haubner T. and Schierhorn K. (2013). Bewährungsproben für die Unterschicht? Frankfurt: Campus Verlag.

Dr Martens (2019). Tough as you, retrieved from: <https://www.drmartens.com/de/de/tough-as-you/about>, (Accessed 11/08/19).

Duhachek, A. (2005). Coping: A multidimensional, hierarchical framework of responses to stressful consumption episodes. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 32 (1), 41-53.

Duncan, G. (1984). Years of Poverty, Years of Plenty, Ann Arbor, MI: Survey Research Center, University of Michigan.

Dwyer, R. and emerald, E. (2016). Narrative research in practice: Navigating the terrain, in: Dwyer, R., Davis, I. and emerald, E. (eds.), *Narrative Research in Practice: Stories from the Field*, 1-25. Singapore: Springer.

Eckhardt, G. M., and Bardhi, F. (2019). New dynamics of social status and distinction. *Marketing Theory*, x(x) 1-18.

EEC (1985). On Specific Community Action to Combat Poverty (Council Decision of 19 December 1984), 85/8/EEC, *Official Journal of the EEC*, 2-24.

Ehlert, M. (2013). Job loss among rich and poor in the United States and Germany: Who loses more income?, *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 32, 85-103.

Elgin, D. (1993). Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life That Is Outwardly Simple, Inwardly Rich, Maryland: World Future Society.

Elgin, D. and Mitchell, A. (1977). Voluntary simplicity: Lifestyle of the future? *The Futurist*, 6 (4), 200-261.

Elliot, V. (2018). Thinking about the coding process in qualitative data analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 23 (11), 2850–61.

Elliott, R. (1995). How do the Unemployed Maintain their Identity in a Culture of Consumption?, in: Hansen, F. (ed.), *E- European Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 2, Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research.

Epp, A.M. and. Price, L.L. (2008). Family Identity: A Framework of Identity Interplay in Consumption Practices, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 35 (1), 50–70.

Erikson, E. H. (1963). Childhood and society (2nd ed.). New York: Norton.

Escalas, J.E. and Bettman, J.R. (2000). Using Narratives to Discern Self-Identity Related Consumer Goals and Motivations, in: Ratneshwar, S., Mick, D.G. and Huffman, C. (eds.), *The Why of Consumption: Contemporary Perspectives on Consumer Motives, Goals, and Desires*, New York: Routledge, 237–58.

Esping-Andersen, G. (1990). The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Estroff, S.E. (1995). Whose story is it anyway?, in: Tooms, K.S., Bernard, D. and Carson, R.A. (eds.), *Chronic Illness: From Experience to Policy*, 77-102, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Etzioni, A. (1998). Voluntary simplicity: characterization, select psychological implications, and societal consequences, *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 19 (5), 619-643.

Fahr, R. and Sunde, U. (2009). Did the Hartz reforms speed-up the matching process? A macro- evaluation using empirical matching functions, *German Economic Review* 10, 284–316.

Fehr, S. and Vobruba, G. (2011). Die Arbeitslosigkeitsfalle vor und nach der Hartz-IV-Reform, *WSI Mitteilungen* 5/2011, 211-217.

Festinger, L. (1957). A theory of cognitive dissonance. California: Stanford University Press.

Figueiredo, B., Gopaldas, A. and Fischer, E. (2017). The Construction of Qualitative Research Articles: A Conversation with Eileen Fischer, *Consumption, Markets and Culture*, 20 (3–4), 297–305.

Finnie, R. and Sweetman, A. (2003). Poverty dynamics: empirical evidence for Canada. *Canadian Journal of Economics*, 32, 291–325.

Firat, A.F. and Shultz, C. (1997). From segmentation to fragmentation: Markets and marketing in the postmodern era”, *European Journal of Marketing*, 31 (3/4), 183-207.

Firat, A.F. and Venkatesh, A. (1995). Liberatory Postmodernism and the Reenchantment of Consumption, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22 (4), 239-267.

- Fischer, E. and Gainer, B. (1993).** Baby Showers: A Rite of Passage in Transition, in: McAlister, L. and Rothschild, M.L. (eds.) *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 20, Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research, 320–24.
- Fleckenstein, T. (2008).** Restructuring welfare for the unemployed: The Hartz legislation in German, *Journal of European Social Policy*, 18 (2), 177-188.
- Flick, U. (2014).** An introduction to qualitative research, London: Sage.
- Flynn, L. (2014).** The stories we haven't told: The lived experience of music used in therapy for bereaved parents, Doctoral thesis, University of Queensland, Australia.
- Folkman, S., Lazarus, R.S., Dunkel-Schetter, C., DeLongis, A. and Gruen, R.J. (1986).** The Dynamics of a Stressful Encounter: Cognitive Appraisal, Coping and Encounter Outcomes, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 50 (5), 992- 1003.
- Fouarge, D. and Layte, R. (2005).** Welfare Regimes and Poverty Dynamics: The Duration and Recurrence of Poverty Spells in Europe, *Journal of Social Policy*, 34, 407-426.
- Fournier, S. (1998).** Consumers and their brands: Developing relationship theory in consumer research, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24 (3), 343–373.
- Frank, A.W. (1993).** The rhetoric of self-change: Illness experience as narrative. *Sociological Quarterly*, 34, 39–52.
- Frank, A. (2000).** Illness and Autobiographical Work: Dialogue as Narrative Destabilisation, *Qualitative Sociology*, 23 (1), 135-156.
- Frank, A.W. (2013).** The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics. 2nd ed. Chicago, USA: University of Chicago Press.
- Frankl, V. (1959).** Man's search for meaning, Boston: Beacon Press.
- Freire, P. (1970).** The Pedagogy of the Oppressed, New York, NY: Herder and Herder.

- Fromm, E. (1976).** To have or to be? London: Jonathan Cape.
- Frye, N. (1957).** Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- FuckUp Night Community (2019).** Retrieved from: <https://fuckupnights.com>, (Accessed 10/12/19).
- Gabriel, Y. and Lang, T. (2006).** The Unmanageable Consumer: Contemporary Consumption and its Fragmentation, London: SAGE.
- Gabriel, Y. and Lang, T. (2008).** New Faces and New Masks of Today's Consumer, *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 8 (3), 21–40.
- Gabriel, Y. (2015).** Identity, Choice and Consumer Freedom – The New Opiates? A Psychoanalytic Interrogation, *Marketing Theory*, 15 (1), 25–30.
- Geißler, R. (1992).** Die Sozialstruktur Deutschlands, Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.
- Gentry, J.W., Kennedy, P.F., Paul, C. and Hill, R.P. (1995).** Family transitions during grief: discontinuities in household consumption patterns”, *Journal of Business Research*, 34 (1), 67-79.
- Gergen, K. and Gergen, M. (1988).** Narrative and the Self as Relationship, *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 21, 7 - 56.
- Giddens, A. (1991).** Modernity and Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Giesler, M. (2019).** 10 things every PhD student should know, retrieved from: <https://www.mgiesler.com/10-things>, (Accessed 10/12/19).
- Giesler, M. and Thompson, C.J. (2016).** Process Theorization in Cultural Consumer Research, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 43 (4), 497–508.
- Goffman, E. (1959).** The presentation of self in everyday life, Garden City, NY: Double-day.

- Goldthorpe, J.H. (2010).** Analysing social inequality: A critique of two recent contributions from economics and epidemiology. *European Sociological Review*, 26 (6), 731–744.
- Gopaldas, A. (2016).** Therapy, *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 19 (3), 264–268.
- Goulding, C., Shankar, A. and Elliott, R. (2002).** Working Weeks, Rave Weekends: Identity Fragmentation and the emergence of New Communities. *Consumption, Markets and Culture*, 4 (5), 261-84.
- Groh-Samberg, O. (2010).** Armut, soziale Ausgrenzung und Klassenstruktur. Zur Integration multidimensionaler und längsschnittlicher Perspektiven, Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Gurr, T. and Jungbauer-Gans, M. (2013).** Stigma consciousness among the unemployed and prejudices against them: development of two scales for the 7th wave of the panel study Labour Market and Social Security (PASS). *Journal of Labour Market Research*, 46 (4), 335–351.
- Habermas, T. and Bluck, S. (2000).** Getting a life: The emergence of the life story in adolescence, *Psychological Bulletin*, 126, 748–769.
- Hagenaars, A. and K. de Vos (1988).** The definition and measurement of poverty” *Journal of Human Resources*, 23 (2), 211-221.
- Halleröd, B. (1995).** The truly poor: direct and indirect consensual measurement of poverty in Sweden, *Journal of European Social Policy*, 5 (2), 111-129.
- Halleröd, B., Bradshaw, J. and Holmes, H. (1997).** Adapting the consensual definition of poverty, in: Gordon, D., Pantazis, C. (eds.) *Breadline Britain in the 1990s*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 213-234.
- Hamilton K., Piacentini M.G., Banister E., Barrios A., Blocker C.P., Coleman C.A., Ekici A., Gorge H., Hutton M., Passerard P. and Saatcioglu B. (2014).** Poverty in consumer culture: towards a transformative social representation, *Journal of Marketing Management*, 30 (17-18), 1833-1857.

- Hamilton, K. (2009a).** Low-income families: Experiences and responses to consumer exclusion, *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 29 (9/10), 543–557.
- Hamilton, K. (2009b).** Those Left Behind: Inequality in Consumer Culture, *Irish Marketing Review*, 20 (2), 40-54.
- Hamilton, K. and Catterall, M. (2005).** Towards a Better Understanding of the Low-Income Consumer, *Advances in Consumer Research*, 32 (1), 627–32.
- Hamilton, K.L. (2012).** Low-income families and coping through brands: inclusion or stigma? *Sociology*, 46 (1), 74-90.
- Hamilton, K.L. and Catterall, M. (2006a).** Transitions into poverty: An exploratory study into how families cope when faced with income reduction and limited consumption, *Marketing Review*, 6 (2), 123-136.
- Hamilton, K.L. and Catterall, M. (2006b).** Keeping up appearances: Low-income consumers' strategies aimed at disguising poverty. In: *Asia-Pacific Advances in Consumer Research Volume 7*, M. Craig Lees, T. Davis, and G. Gregory (eds.), Sydney, Australia: Association for Consumer Research: 184-189.
- Hammack, P.L. (2009).** Exploring the reproduction of conflict through narrative: Israeli youth motivated to participate in a coexistence program, *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 15 (1), 49–74.
- Hammack, P.L. (2010).** The cultural psychology of Palestinian youth: A narrative approach, *Culture & Psychology*, 16 (4), 507–537.
- Hart, H., McAdams, D.P., Hirsch, B.J. and Bauer, J.J. (2001).** Generativity and social involvements among African Americans and White adults, *Journal of Research in Personality*, 35, 208 – 230.
- Heady, B., Krause, P., and Habich, R. (1994).** Long and Short Term Poverty? Is Germany a Two-Thirds Society, *Social Indicators Research*, 31 (2), 1-25.

Hellmuth, L. and Urban, D. (2010). Das Working-Poor-Problem in Deutschland. Empirische Analysen zu den Ursachen von Armut trotz Erwerbstätigkeit, in: Schriftenreihe des Instituts für Sozialwissenschaften der Universität Stuttgart, 4-29.

Helson, H. (1964). Adaptation-Level Theory: An Experimental and Systematic Approach to Behavior. NY: Harper and Row.

Hemetsberger, A., Bauer, M., von Wallpach, S. and Broger, K. (2013). "On Transit" - Changes of Role Identity and Consumer-Brand Relationships during Transition from Student to Professional Life, *Marketing ZFP*, 35 (1), 40 – 49.

Hibbert, S. and Piacentini, M. (2003). ‘Grocery Shopping on a Low Income: How Do People Cope?’, in Turley, D. and Brown, S. (eds.) *E - European Advances in Consumer Research*. Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research, 277–282.

Higgins, L. and Hamilton, K. (2018). Therapeutic Servicescapes and Market-Mediated Performances of Emotional Suffering, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 45 (6), 1230-1253.

Hill, R.P. and Stamey, M. (1990). The homeless in America: An examination of possessions and consumption behaviors. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 17 (3), 303–321.

Hill, R.P. (1991). Homeless Women, Special Possessions, and the Meaning of “Home”: An Ethnographic Case Study, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 18 (3), 298-310.

Hill, R.P. (2001). Surviving in a material world evidence from ethnographic consumer research on people in poverty. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 30 (4), 364-391.

Hirschman, E. (1992). The consciousness of addiction: Towards a general theory of compulsive consumption, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 19 (2), 155–179.

Hirschman, E. and Hill, R.P. (2000). On Human Commoditization and Resistance: A Model Based Upon Buchenwald Concentration Camp, *Psychology and Marketing* 17, 469–491.

Hirschman, E., Ruvio, A. and Belk, R. (2012). Exploring Space and Place in Marketing Research: Excavating the Garage, *Marketing Theory*, 12 (4), 269–89.

Hirschman, E.C. (1990). Secular immortality and the American ideology of affluence. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 17 (1), 31–42.

Hogg, M.K., Curasi, C.F. and Maclaran, P. (2004). The (Re-) Configuration of Production and Consumption in Empty Nest Households/Families', *Consumption, Markets and Culture*, 7 (3), 239–59.

Holbrook, M.B. and Hirschman, E.C. (1982). The Experiential Aspects of Consumption: Consumer, Fantasies, Feelings, and Fun, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 9 (3), 132–40.

Holt, D.B. (1998). Does Cultural Capital Structure American Consumption? *Journal of Consumer Research*, 25 (1), 1–25.

Holtbrugge, D. and Mohr, A. T. (2010). Cultural determinants of learning style preferences. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 9, 622–637.

Hopkinson, G.C. and Hogg, M.K. (2006). Stories: how they are used and produced in market(ing) research, in: Belk, R. W. (ed.), *Handbook of qualitative research methods in marketing*, 156–174, Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing Inc.

Hopson, B. and Adams, J. (1976). Towards an Understanding of Transition: Defining Some Boundaries of Transition Dynamics, in: Adams, J, Hayes, J. and Hopson, B. (eds.), *Transition: Understanding and Managing Personal Change*, 3-25, London: Martin Robertson.

Huneke, M.E. (2005). The face of the un-consumer: an empirical examination of the practice of voluntary simplicity in the United States", *Psychology & Marketing*, 22 (7), 527-550.

- Hutton, M. (2016).** Neither passive nor powerless: reframing economic vulnerability via resilient pathways, *Journal of Marketing Management*, 32 (3-4), 252-274.
- Hyman, L. (2015).** Happiness: Understandings, narratives and discourses, Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Illouz, E. (2007).** Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism. Cambridge, Polity.
- Infurna, F.J. and Jayawickreme, E. (2019).** Fixing the Growth Illusion: New Directions for Research in Resilience and Posttraumatic Growth, *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 28 (2), 152–158.
- Jacobi, L. and Kluve, J. (2006).** Before and After the Hartz Reforms: The Performance of Active Labour Market Policy in Germany, *IZA Discussion Paper No. 2100*.
- Jafari, A., Dunnett, S., Hamilton, K. and Downey, H. (2013).** Exploring Researcher Vulnerability: Contexts, Complications and Conceptualisation, *Journal of Marketing Management*, 29 (9-10), 1182-1200.
- James, W. (1958).** The varieties of religious experience, New York: New American Library.
- Jaspers, K. (1919).** *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, 5th edition, Heidelberg-Berlin, Springer, 1960.
- Jayawickreme, E. and Blackie, L.E.R. (2014).** Post-traumatic growth as positive personality change: Evidence, controversies and future directions. *European Journal of Personality*, 28, 312–331.
- Jenkins, R. (2014).** Social Identity, Fourth Edition. Oxford, UK: Routledge.
- Jenkins, S. (1999).** Modelling household income dynamics, *Journal of Population Economics*, 13, 529-567.

Jones, B.K. and McAdams, D.P. (2013). Becoming generative: Socializing influences captured in life stories in late midlife, *Journal of Adult Development*, 20 (3), 158-172.

Jovchelovitch, S. and Bauer, M.W. (2000). Narrative Interviewing, in: *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound*, edited by Martin W. Bauer and George Gaskell, 57– 74. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Karanika, K. and Hogg, M.G. (2016). Being Kind to Ourselves: Self-Compassion, Coping, and Consumption, *Journal of Business Research*, 69 (2), 760–9.

Kastarinen, A. (2017). Narratives of grandparental consumption. Tampere: Tampere University.

Kellner, D. (1992). Popular culture and the construction of postmodern identities”. In: *Modernity and Identity*, (eds.) Lash, S. and Friedman, J., Oxford: Blackwell.

Kilbourne, W., McDonagh, P. and Prothero, A. (1997). Sustainable consumption and the quality of life: a macromarketing challenge to the dominant social paradigm, *Journal of Macromarketing*, 17 (1), 4-24.

Kilbourne, W.E. and Carlson, L. (2008). The Dominant Social Paradigm, Consumption, and Environmental Attitudes: Can Macromarketing Education Help?’ *Journal of Macromarketing*, 28(2), 106 – 21.

Kingdon, G.G. and Knight, J. (2006). Subjective well-being poverty vs. Income poverty and capabilities poverty?, *The Journal of Development Studies*, 42(7), 1199-1224.

Klein, J.G., Lowrey, T. M. and Otnes, C.C. (2015). Identity-Based Motivations and Anticipated Reckoning: Contributions to Gift-Giving Theory from an Identity Stripping Context, *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 25 (3), 431-448.

Klocke, A. and Hurrelmann, K. (2001). Einleitung: Kinder und Jugendliche in Armut, in: Klocke, A. and Hurrelmann, K. (eds.), *Kinder und Jugendliche in Armut. Umfang, Auswirkungen und Konsequenzen*, 9-26, Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag.

Kotre, J. N. (2000). Generativity and the gift of meaning. *Generations*, 23, 65–70.

Kozinets, R. V. (2002). The field behind the screen: Using netnography for marketing research in online communities. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 39(1), 61—72.

Larsen, G. and Patterson, M. (2018). Consumer Identity Projects, in: *Sage Handbook of Consumer Culture*, (eds.) Kravets, O., Maclaran, P., Miles, S. and Venkatesh, A., 194–213. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Layte, R. and Whelan, C.T. (2002). Cumulative Disadvantage Or Individualisation? A Comparative Analysis Of Poverty Risk And Incidence, *European Societies*, 2(4), 209-233.

Lazarus, R.S. and Folkman, S. (1984). Stress, Appraisal and Coping, New York: Springer Publishing Company.

Lechner, S. and Antoni, M. (2004). Posttraumatic Growth and Group-Based Interventions for Persons Dealing with Cancer: What Have We Learned so Far? *Psychological Inquiry*, 15 (1), 35-41.

Leisering, L. and Leibfried, S. (1999). Time and Poverty in Western Welfare States: United Germany in Perspective, Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Leisering, L. and Walker, R. (1998). The Dynamics of Modern Society: Poverty, Policy and Welfare. Bristol: Policy press.

Leisering, L. and Buhr, P. (2012). Dynamik von Armut, in: Huster, E.-U., Boeckh, J and Mogge-Grotjahn, H. (eds.), *Handbuch Armut und Soziale Ausgrenzung*, Wiesbaden:Springer.

Levy, S. (1959). Symbols for Sale, *Harvard Business Review*, 37(4), 117-124.

Lewis, J. and Sarre, S. (2006). Risk and intimate relationships, in: Taylor-Gooby, P. and Zinn, J. O. (eds.), *Risk in social science*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 140–159.

Lincoln, Y. and Guba, E. (1985). Naturalistic Inquiry, London: Sage.

Luedicke, M., Thompson, C. and Giesler, M. (2010). Consumer Identity Work as Moral Protagonism: How Myth and Ideology Animate a Brand-Mediated Moral Conflict, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 36 (6), 1016–32.

MacInnis, D. (2011). A Framework for Conceptual Contributions in Marketing, *Journal of Marketing* 75 (4), 136–54.

MacIntyre, A. (1981). After virtue. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

Mack, J. and S. Lansley (1985). Poor Britain, London: Allen & Unwin.

Marcoux, J.-S. (2017). Souvenirs to Forget, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 43 (6), 950–69.

Markus, H. and Nurius, P. (1986). Possible selves. *American Psychologist*, 41(9), 954-978.

Mason M.J. and Pavia, T.M. (2015). Health shocks, identity and consumer vulnerability, in: Hamilton K., Dunnet S., Piacentini M. (eds.), *Vulnerable consumers: Conditions, contexts, and characteristics*. New York, NY, Routledge, 145-156.

Mathur, A., Moschis, G. and Lee, E. (2003). Life events and brand preference changes, *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 3, (2), 129-141.

Mathur, A., Moschis, G. and Lee, E. (2008). A longitudinal study of the effects of life status changes on changes in consumer preferences, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 36 (2), 234-246.

May, R. (1991). The Cry for Myth, New York: Delta Books.

McAdams, D.P. (1985). Power, intimacy, and the life story: Personological inquiries into identity, New York: Guilford.

McAdams, D.P. (1993). The Stories we Live by: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self, New York: The Guilford Press.

McAdams, D.P. and Guo, J. (2017). The cultural shaping of life stories, in: Church, A.T. (Ed.), *The Praeger handbook of personality across cultures*, 2, 185-210, Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.

McAdams, D.P. and Jones, B.K. (2017). Making meaning in the wake of trauma: Resilience and redemption, in: Altmaier, E.D. (ed.), *Reconstructing meaning after trauma: Theory, research, and practice*, 3-16, Cambridge, MA: Academic Press.

McAdams, D.P., Diamond, A., de St. Aubin, E., and Mansfield, E. (1997). Stories of commitment: The psychosocial construction of generative lives, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 72, 678-694.

McAdams, D.P., Reynolds, J., Lewis, M., Patten, A. and Bowman, P.J. (2001). When bad things turn good and good things turn bad: Sequences of redemption and contamination in life narrative, and their relation to psychosocial adaptation in midlife adults and in students, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 27, 472 – 483.

McAdams, D. P. (2006). The redemptive self: Stories Americans live by, New York: Oxford University Press.

McAdams, D.P. (2011). Narrative identity, in: S.J. Schwartz, K. Luyckx and V.L. Vignoles (eds.), *Handbook of identity theory and research*, 99-115, New York, NY: Springer New York.

McAdams, D. and Bowman, P. (2013). Narrating Life's Turning Points: Redemption and Contamination, in: McAdams, D.P., Josselson, R. and Lieblich, A. (eds), *Turns in the Road: Narrative Studies of Lives in Transition*, Washington: American Psychological Association (Electronic edition).

McAlexander, J.H., Dufault, B.L., Martin, D.M. and Schouten, J.W. (2014). The Marketization of Religion: Field, Capital, and Consumer Identity, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 41, 858–75.

McCracken, G. (1988). The Long Interview, London: SAGE Publications.

McDonald, S., Oates, C.J., Young, C.W. and Hwang, K. (2006). Toward sustainable consumption: researching voluntary simplifiers, *Psychology & Marketing*, 23 (6), 515-534.

McFarland, C. and Alvaro, C. (2000). The impact of motivation on temporal comparisons: Coping with traumatic events by perceiving persona growth, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79, 327–343.

McGouran, C. and Prothero, A. (2016). Enacted Voluntary Simplicity – Exploring the Consequences of Requesting Consumers to Intentionally Consume Less, *European Journal of Marketing*, 50 (1/2), 189-212.

McLean, K.C. and Syed, M. (2015). Personal, Master, and Alternative Narratives: An Integrative Framework for Understanding Identity Development in Context. *Human Development*, 58, 318 - 349.

McManus, P.A. and DiPrete, T.A. (2001). Losers and winners: the financial consequences of separation and divorce for men, *American Sociological Review*, 66, 246–268.

Mick, D. (2017). Buddhist Psychology: Selected Insights, Benefits, and Research Agenda for Consumer Psychology, *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 27 (1), 117–32.

Miles, M.B. and Huberman, A.M. (1994). Qualitative data analysis. 2nd ed. London: Sage.

Miller, D. (2010). *Stuff*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Mishler, E. (1995). Models of Narrative Analysis: A Typology, *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 5 (2), 87-123.

Mitchell, A. (1983). *The nine American lifestyles*. New York: Warner Books.

Mittal, B. (2006). I, me, and mine—how products become consumers' extended selves, *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 5 (6), 550-562.

- Moisander, J. and Pesonen, S. (2002).** Narratives of sustainable ways of living: Constructing the self and the other as a green consumer, *Management Decision*, 40 (4) 329-342.
- Mueller, M., Pfeil, P., Dengel, U. and Donath, L. (2018).** Identitätsarbeitsstrategien im Überschuldungs-/Insolvenzverlauf, in: *Identität unter Druck*, Springer VS, Wiesbaden.
- Muffels, R., Fouarge, D. and Dekker, R. (2000).** Longitudinal poverty and income inequality: a comparative panel study for the Netherlands, Germany and the UK. *EPAG Working Paper No.1*, European Panel Analysis Group, Tilburg.
- Muffels, R. and Fouarge, D. (2004).** The role of European welfare states in explaining resources deprivation, *Social Indicators Research*, 68 (3), 299–330.
- Muñiz A.M. and O’Guinn, T.C. (2001).** Brand Community. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27 (4), 412-32.
- Murray, J.B. (2002).** The Politics of Consumption: A Re-Inquiry on Thompson and Haytko’s (1997) ‘Speaking of Fashion’, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29 (3), 427-40.
- Murray, R. and Newton, M. (2009).** Writing retreat as structured intervention: margin or mainstream? *Higher Education Research and Development*, 28, 527–539.
- Natter, E. and Riedelsperger, A. (1988).** Einführung. Wirksam beteiligen statt lautlos ausgrenzen, in Natter, E. and Riedelsperger, A. (eds.), *Zweidrittelgesellschaft. Spalten, splitteln – oder solidarisiern?*, 7-21, Vienna and Zurich: Europaverlag.
- Newman, K.S. (1998).** Falling from grace: Downward mobility in the age of affluence. Berkley: University of California Press.
- Noble, C.H. and Walker, B.A. (1997).** Exploring the relationships among liminal transitions, symbolic consumption, and the extended self, *Psychology & Marketing*, 14, 29–43.

Nolan, B. and Whelan, C.T. (1996). Measuring Poverty Using Income and Deprivation Indicators: Alternative Approaches, *Journal of European Social Policy* 6(3), 225-240.

O'Boyle, E. J. (1998). Transitions Into and Out of Poverty, *International Journal of Social Economics*, 25 (9), 1411-1424.

O'Donohoe, S. (2015). Consuming Childhood Grief, in: Hamilton, K. and Dunnett, S. and Piacentini, M. (eds.) *Consumer Vulnerability: Conditions, Contexts, and Characteristics*, 89-102, New York: Routledge.

O'Leary, V.E. and Ickovics, J.R. (1995). Resilience and thriving in response to challenge: An opportunity for a paradigm shift in women's health. *Women's Health: Research on Gender, Behavior, and Policy*, 1, 121-142.

O'Rand, A.M. (2006). Stratification and the life course: Social origins, life course capital and cohort inequality, in: Binstock, R. H. and George, L. K. (eds.), *Handbook of Aging and the Social Sciences*, 145–162, 6th edn. New York: Academic Press.

Oates, C.J. and McDonald, S. (2002). What can marketing do for recycling? Proceedings of the Academy of Marketing Conference, Nottingham, July.

OECD (2019). OECD Better Life Index Germany (online), retrieved from: <http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/countries/germany/>, (Accessed: 31/06/19).

Orthner, D.K., Jones-Sanpei, H. and Williamson, S. (2004). The resilience and strengths of low-income families. *Family Relations*, 53, 159–167.

Otnes, C.C., Ruth, J.A., Lowrey, T.M. and Commuri, S. (2006). Capturing time, in: Belk, R.W. (eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research in Marketing*, 387-399, Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing Inc.

Ourahmoune N. (2016). Narrativity, Temporality, and Consumer Identity Transformation Through Tourism, *Journal of Business Research*, 69 (1), 255–263.

- Pals, J.L. (2006).** Narrative identity processing of difficult life events: Pathways of personality development and positive self-transformation in adulthood, *Journal of Personality*, 74, 1079–1109.
- Parmentier, M.-A. and Fischer, E. (2015).** Things Fall Apart: The Dynamics of Brand Audience Dissipation, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 41, 1228–51.
- Patton M.Q. (2001).** Qualitative research and evaluation methods, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Paugam, S. (1996).** The spiral of precariousness: a multidimensional approach to the process of social disqualification in France, in G. Room (eds.), *Beyond the Threshold: The Measurement and Analysis of Social Exclusion*, Bristol: Policy Press.
- Pavia, T. and Mason, M. (2004).** The Reflexive Relationship between Consumer Behavior and Adaptive Coping, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31 (2), 441–54.
- Pearlin, L. and Schooler, C. (1978).** The structure of coping. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 19, 2–21.
- Pellerin, L.A. and Stearns, E. (2001).** Status honor and the valuing of cultural and material capital. *Poetics*, 29 (1), 1-24.
- Penaloza, L. (1994).** Atravesando fronteras/border crossings: a critical ethnographic exploration of the consumer acculturation of Mexican immigrant', *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21 (3), 32-54.
- Piachaud, D. (1987).** Problems in the definition and measurement of poverty, *Journal of Social Policy*, 16 (2), 147-164.
- Pintelon, O.B., Cantillon B., Van den Bosch, K. and Whelan, C.T. (2013).** The social stratification of social risks: The relevance of class for social investment strategies, *Journal of European Social Policy*, 23 (1), 52– 67.
- Polkinghorne, D.E. (1991).** Narrative and self-concept, *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 1 (2 -3), 135 – 53.

- Pratt, M.W., Norris, J.E., Arnold, M.L. and Filyer, R. (1999).** Generativity and moral development as predictors of value-socialization narratives for young persons across the adult life span: From lessons learned to stories shared, *Psychology and Aging*, 14, 414 – 426.
- Price, L.L., Arnould, E.J, and Curasi, C.F. (2000).** Older Consumers' Disposition of Special Possessions, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27 (3), 179-201.
- Price, L., Coulter, R., Strizhakova, Y. and Schultz, A. (2017).** The Fresh Start Mindset: Transforming Consumers' Lives, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 45 (1), 21–48.
- Quelch, J.A. and Jocz, K.E. (2009).** How to Market in a Downturn, *Harvard Business Review*, 87 (4), 52–62.
- Ravallion, M. and Lokshin, M. (2002).** Self-rated economic welfare in Russia, *European Economic Review*, 46, 1453–73.
- Ricoeur, P. (1985).** Temps et Récit, Le temps raconté. Paris: Seuil.
- Riessman C.K. (1993).** Narrative Analysis. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Riessman C.K. (2008).** Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Ringen, S. (1988).** Direct and indirect measures of poverty, *Journal of Social Policy*, 17 (3), 351-365.
- Roberts, S. (1991).** Consumption responses to involuntary job loss, in: NA - Advances in Consumer Research, Volume 18, (eds.) Rebecca H., Holman and Michael R. Solomon, Provo, UT: *Association for Consumer Research*.
- Rojas-Gaviria, P. and Bluemelhuber, C. (2010).** Consumers' Transformations in a Liquid Society: Introducing the Concepts of Autobiographical-Concern and Desire Assemblage, *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 9 (2), 126-38.

- Rokka, J. and Hietanen, J. (2018).** On positioning videography as a tool for theorizing, *Recherche et Applications En Marketing (English Edition)*, 33 (3), 106–121.
- Rossi, A.S. (2001).** Caring and doing for others: Social responsibility in the domains of family, work, and community. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Rowntree, B.S. (1902).** Poverty: A Study of Town Life, London: Macmillan.
- Rudmin, F.W. and Kilbourne, W.E. (1996).** The meaning and morality of voluntary simplicity: History and hypothesis on deliberately denied materialism, in: R.W. Belk, N. Dholakia and A. Venkatesh (eds.) *Consumption and marketing: Macrodimensions*, 166-215, Cincinnati, Ohio: South-Western College Publishing.
- Runciman, W.G. (1966).** Relative Deprivation and Social Justice, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ryff, C.D. and Singer, B. (1998).** The contours of positive human health. *Psychological Inquiry*, 9, 1–28.
- Saatcioglu, B. and Ozanne, J.L. (2013).** Moral Habitus and Status Negotiation in a Marginalized Working-Class Neighborhood, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40 (4), 692-710.
- Sablonniere R.D.L., Taylor D.M. and Perozzo C. (2009).** Reconceptualizing relative deprivation in the context of dramatic social change: The challenge confronting the people of Kyrgyzstan, *European Journal of Social Psychology* 39 (3), 325–345.
- Saldaña, J. (2013).** The coding manual for qualitative researchers, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Samsung (2018).** Samsung Commercial World Cup 2018 Mario Goetze, Youtube Video, retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BCC7YLRH8Is> (Accessed 12/12/19).

Sarbin, T.R. (2003). The poetics of my identities, in: G. Yancy and S. Hadley (eds.). *Narrative identities*, 13–35, London, UK: Jessica Kingsley.

Sassatelli, R. (2015). Il ceto medio sotto pressione: come cambiano i consumi, *IL MULINO*, 64 (3), 452-461.

Sayre S. (1994). Possessions and identity in crisis: meaning and change for victims of the Oakland Firestorm, in: *Advances in Consumer Research*, Allen, C.T., John D.R. (eds). Association for Consumer Research: Provo, UT.

Sayre, S. (2006). Using vide-elicitation to research sensitive topics: understanding the purchase power following natural disaster, in: Belk, R. (ed.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods in Marketing*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, 230-243.

Schau, H.J. (2018). Identity Projects and the Marketplace, in: Arnould, E. and Thompson, C. (eds.) *Consumer Culture Theory*. London: SAGE.

Schau, H.J., Gilly, M.C. and Wolfinbarger, M. (2009). Consumer identity renaissance: the resurgence of identity-inspired consumption in retirement, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 36 (2), 255-276.

Schlichting, G. and Reinbach, N. (2007). Wie arm ist Deutschland wirklich? Anmerkungen zur "Neuen Armut" in Deutschland, *WiST*, (10), 522-526.

Schneider, J. and Lang, C. (2014). Social mobility, habitus and identity formation in the Turkish-German second generation. *New Diversities*, 16, 89–105.

Schouten, J.W. (1991). Selves in transition: Symbolic consumption in personal rites of passage and identity reconstruction. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 17 (4), 412–425.

Schouten, J.W. and McAlexander, J.H. (1995). Subcultures of consumption: An ethnography of the new bikers. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22 (1), 43–61.

Schreurs, J., Martens, P. and Kok, G. (2012). Living with less as a transformation process, *Qualitative Market Research*, 15, 188-205.

Sedikides, C. and Brewer, M.B. (2001). Individual self, relational self, and collective self, Philadelphia: Psychology.

Sen, A. (1983). Poor, Relatively Speaking, *Oxford Economic Papers*, 35(2), 153–169.

Shama, A. and Wisenblit, J. (1984). Values of voluntary simplicity: Lifestyle and motivation. *Psychological Reports*, 55 (1), 231-240.

Shankar, A. (2000). Lost in Music? Subjective Personal Introspection and Popular Music Consumption, *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 3 (1), 27-37.

Shankar, A. and Fitchett, J. (2002). Having, being and consumption, *Journal of Marketing Management*, 18, 501-16.

Shankar, A., Elliott, R. and Fitchett, J.A. (2009). Identity, Consumption and Narratives of Socialization, *Marketing Theory*, 9 (1), 75–94.

Shankar, A., Elliott, R. and Goulding, C. (2001). Understanding Consumption: Contributions from a Narrative Perspective, *Journal of Marketing Management* 17, 429–453.

Shankar, A., Whittaker, J. and Fitchett, J. (2006). ‘Heaven Knows I’m Miserable now’, *Marketing Theory*, 6 (4), 485–505.

Shaw, D. and Newholm, T. (2002). Voluntary simplicity and the ethics of consumption, *Psychology & Marketing*, 19 (2), 167-85.

Shepherd, D.A. and Williams, T.A. (2018). Hitting rock bottom after job loss: Bouncing back to create a new positive work identity, *Academy of Management Review*, 43 (1), 28–49.

Shibutani, T. (1961). Society and Personality, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

- Shildrick, T. and MacDonald, R. (2013).** Poverty Talk: How People Experiencing Poverty Deny Their Poverty and Why They Blame 'The Poor'. *The Sociological Review* 61, 285-303.
- Silver, R.C. and Updegraff, J.A. (2013).** Searching for and finding meaning following personal and collective traumas, in K. D. Markman, T. Proulx, and M. J. Lindberg (eds.), *The psychology of meaning*, 237–255, Washington, DC:APA Books.
- Simmel, G. (1908).** The Poor, *Social Problems* 1965, 13 (2), 118-140.
- Sirgy, M.J. (1982).** Self-Concept in Consumer Behavior: A Critical Review, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 9, 287-300.
- Slater, D. (1997).** Consumer Culture and Modernity, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Smart, E. (2014).** My story, New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Smith, B. and Sparkes, A.C. (2008).** Contrasting perspectives on narrating selves and identities: an invitation to dialogue. *Qualitative Research*, 8 (1), 5–35.
- Snel, E., Reelick, F. and Groenenboom, N. (2013).** Time and Poverty Revisited: A Replication of Leisering and Leibfried', *Journal of European Social Policy*, 23, 179–91.
- Somers, M. (1994).** The narrative constitution of identity: A relational network approach, *Theory and Society*, 23, 605-649.
- Sorensen, A. (1994).** Women's economic risk and the economic position of single mothers, *European Sociological Review*, 10, 173-188.
- Sorensen, A. (2000).** Symposium on class analysis. Towards a sounder basis for class analysis', *American Journal of Sociology*, 105, 1523-1558.
- Sorokin, P.A. (1959).** Social and Cultural Mobility, Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- Spiggle, S. (1994).** Analysis and Interpretation of Qualitative Data in Consumer Research, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21 (3), 491-503.

Staub, E. and Vollhardt, J. (2008). Altruism born of suffering: The roots of caring and helping after victimization and other trauma, *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 78 (3), 267-280.

Stephan, J., Hamilton, K. and Jafari, A. (2018). 'Riches to Rags to "Riches" – Consumers' Identity (Re-) Construction After Having Overcome a Spell of Poverty", in: Geuens, M., Pandelaere, M., Pham, M.P. and Vermeir, I. (eds), *E - European Advances in Consumer Research*, Volume 11, Duluth, MN : Association for Consumer Research, 59-62.

Stern. B. (1995). Consumer myths: Frye's taxonomy and the structural analysis of consumption text', *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22 (4), 165-85.

Taylor, C. (1989). Sources of the self: The making of the modern identity. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Tedeschi, R. G. and Calhoun, L.G. (2004). Posttraumatic growth: the conceptual foundations and empirical evidence. *Psychological Inquiry*, 15, 1–18.

Tedeschi, R.G. and Calhoun, L.G. (1995). Trauma & Transformation: Growing in the Aftermath of Suffering, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Tennen, H. and Affleck, G. (2002). Benefit-finding and benefit-reminding. In C. R. Snyder & S. J. Lopez (eds.), *Handbook of positive psychology*, 584–597. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Tennen, H. and Affleck, G. (2009). Assessing positive life change: In search of meticulous methods, in: C. L. Park, S. C. Lechner, M. H. Antoni, & A. L. Stanton (eds.), *Medical illness and positive life change: Can crisis lead to personal transformation?* 31-49, Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.

Thaler, R.H. (1999). Mental Accounting Matters, *Journal of Behavioural Decision Making*, 12, 183-206.

- Thompson, C.J. and Hirschman, E. (1995).** Understanding the socialized body: a poststructuralist analysis of consumers' self-conceptions, body images, and self-care practices, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22 (4), 139-53.
- Thompson, C.J. (1996).** Caring Consumers: Gendered Consumption Meanings and the Juggling Lifestyle, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22 (4), 388-407.
- Thompson, C.J. and Haytko, D.L (1997).** Speaking of Fashion: Consumers' Uses of Fashion Discourses and the Appropriation of Countervailing Cultural Meanings, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24 (1), 15-42.
- Thompson, C.J., Arnould, E. and Giesler, M. (2013).** Discursivity, Difference, and Disruption: Genealogical Reflections on the Consumer Culture Theory Heteroglossia, *Marketing Theory*, 13, 149–74.
- Thompson, C.J., Henry, P.C. and Bardhi, F. (2018).** Theorizing Reactive Reflexivity: Lifestyle Displacement and Discordant Performances of Taste, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 45 (3), 571–594.
- Thomsen, T.U. and Sørensen, E.B. (2006).** The first four-wheeled status symbol: Pram consumption as a vehicle for the construction of motherhood identity, *Journal of Marketing Management* 22 (9–10), 907–27.
- Tomkins, S. (1987).** Script theory, in: Aronoff, J., Rabin, A. and Zucker, R. (eds.), *The emergence of personality*, 147-216, New York: Springer.
- Tonner, A. (2019).** Consumer culture poetry: insightful data and methodological approaches, *Consumption, Markets & Culture*, 22 (3), 256-271.
- Townsend, P. (1979).** Poverty in the United Kingdom. A Survey of Household Resources and Standard of Living. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Treber, L. (2014).** Mythos Trümmerfrauen: Von der Trümmerbeseitigung in der Kriegs- und Nachkriegszeit und der Entstehung eines deutschen Erinnerungsortes, Essen: Klartext-Verlag.

Turley, D. and O'Donohoe, S. (2012). The sadness of lives and the comfort of things: Goods as evocative objects in bereavement, *Journal of Marketing Management*, 28 (11-12), 1331-1353.

Turner, V.W. (1974). Liminal to liminoid, in play, flow and ritual: An essay in comparative symbology, *Rice University Studies* 60 (3), 53-92.

Ulver, S. and Ostberg, J. (2014). Moving up, down or sideways? Exploring consumer experience of identity and status incongruence, *European Journal of Marketing*, 48 (5), 833-853.

Ulver-Sneistrup, S. and Ostberg, J. (2011). The Nouveaux Pauvres of Liquid Modernity, in: R.W. Belk, K. Grayson, A.M. Muniz and H.J. Schau (eds.), *Research in Consumer Behaviour*, Vol.13, Emerald Group Publishing Ltd.

Ustuner, T. and Holt, D. (2007). Dominated Consumer Acculturation: The Social Construction of Poor Migrant Women's Consumer Identity Projects in a Turkish Squatter, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 34 (1), 41-56.

Ustuner, T. and Holt, D. (2010). Toward a Theory of Status Consumption in Less Industrialized Countries, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 37 (3), 37–56.

Uunk, W. (2004). The Economic Consequences of Divorce for Women in the European Union: The Impact of Welfare State Arrangements, *European Journal of Population*, 20, 251–285.

Van Gennep A. (1960). The Rites of Passage. Routledge & Keegan Paul: London.

Van Maanen, J. (2011). Ethnography as work: Some rules of engagement, *Journal of Management Studies*, 48 (1), 218-234.

Vandecasteele, L. (2010). Poverty Trajectories after Risky Life Course Events in Different European Welfare Regimes. *European Societies*, 12 (2), 257–278.

Vandecasteele, L. (2011). Life course risks or cumulative disadvantage? The structuring effect of social stratification determinants and life course events on poverty transitions in Europe. *European Sociological Review*, 27 (2), 246–263.

Veblen, T. (1899). *The theory of the leisure class*, New York: Random House.

Veer, E. and Shankar, A. (2011). Forgive me, Father, for I did not give full justification for my sins: How religious consumers justify the acquisition of material wealth, *Journal of Marketing Management*, 27 (5-6), 547-560.

VOICE Group (2010). Buying into Motherhood? Problematic Consumption and Ambivalence in Transitional Phases, *Consumption, Markets & Culture*, 13 (4), 373-397.

Walker, R. (1994). *Poverty Dynamics: Issues and Examples*, Aldershot: Avebury.

Wallendorf, M. and Belk, R.W. (1989). Assessing trustworthiness in naturalistic consumer research, in: Hirschman, E.C. (ed.), *Interpretive Consumer Research*, Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research.

Wattanasuwan, K., Buber, R. and Meyer, M. (2009). Das narrative Interview und die narrative Analyse, in: Buber, R. (ed.), *Qualitative Marktforschung: Konzepte – Methoden – Analysen*, Wiesbaden: Gabler, 359-380.

Webster, J.D. (2003). The reminiscence circumplex and autobiographical memory functions, *Memory*, 11, 203–215.

Weinberger, D.A. (1990). The construct validity of the repressive coping style, in: J.L. Singer (ed.), *Repression and dissociation*, 337-386, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Wendt, E.D. (2010). Sozialer Abstieg und Konsum. Auswirkungen finanzieller Verknappung auf das Konsumverhalten, Wiesbaden: Gabler.

Wendt, E.D. (2011). Social decline and consumption: emotional and behavioural coping strategies of members of the middle class in cases of financial losses, *ZFP Journal of Research and Management*, 33, 133-146.

Woodstock, L. (2006). All about me, I mean, you: The trouble with narrative authority in self-help literature, *The Communication Review*, 9, 319-344.

Woodward, C. and Joseph, S. (2003). Positive change processes and post-traumatic growth in people who have experienced childhood abuse: Understanding vehicles of change, *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, & Practice*, 76, 267-283.

Zacharakis, Z. (2014). Ein Mixer als Statussymbol, in Zeit Online, retrieved from: <https://www.zeit.de/wirtschaft/unternehmen/2014-12/thermomix-vorwerk-mixer>, (Accessed 12/12/19).

Zapf, W. (1994). Modernisierung, Wohlfahrtsentwicklung und Transformation, Berlin: Edition Sigma.

Zavestoski, S. (2002). The social-psychological bases of anticonsumption attitudes, *Psychology & Marketing*, 19 (2), 149-163.

Appendix

*The appendix has been removed from the digital version of the thesis by the author
due to copyright reasons.*