

# **Transitions into Poverty: An Exploratory Study into How Families Cope When Faced With Income Reduction and Limited Consumption Opportunities**

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*This paper discusses transitions into poverty and the consequent effects on consumption experiences. It argues that the transitory poor, a group which has been largely neglected, offers considerable research potential on issues surrounding changes in income and consequent coping strategies in terms of both the construction of identity and the construction of poverty. Findings are drawn from families that have recently made the transition into poverty. Results indicate that the transition into poverty may reduce attachment to material possessions and lead consumers to re-evaluate what is important to them. Transitions into poverty will also have an impact on the way in which poverty is constructed as pre-transition lifestyles may be used as a point of comparison. As a result, the exchange restrictions and negative consequences associated with poverty may appear worse than they do for the long-term poor because the transitory poor have become accustomed to a higher level of consumption.*

**Keywords:** consumer behaviour, transition, poverty, coping strategies, family

## **Introduction**

This paper discusses the transition into poverty and the consequent effects on consumption opportunities. Such a transition necessitates the employment of coping strategies as consumers are forced to alter their attitudes towards material possessions, consumption experiences and the ways in which they attempt to define themselves. Previous research in the domain of what Arnould and Thompson (2005) refer to as Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) has included studies on consumer transitions relating to a natural disaster (Sayre and Horne 1996), aesthetic plastic surgery (Schouten 1991) and mothers whose children have recently left home (Hogg, Maclaran and Curasi 2003). These studies tend to relate to the influence of the transition on consumer identity.

It is estimated that between 10.9 million and 12.8 million people in the United States are in transition into or out of poverty in any given year

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(O'Boyle 1998). This suggests that poverty is not a permanent state, yet research on low-income or poor consumers tends to overlook the time span, giving little attention to how long such a lifestyle has been experienced. This paper argues that this group, which has been largely neglected, offers considerable research potential on issues surrounding changes in income and consequent coping strategies in terms of both the construction of identity and the construction of poverty.

The paper begins with a review of related literature and this is followed by a brief description of the methodology employed. The findings are then presented with emphasis placed on 2 families where the transition into poverty was the most dramatic. This is followed by a discussion on income reduction and what this means for the construction of poverty. The paper ends with conclusions and a call for future research on both transitions into and out of poverty.

### Literature Review

Relevant literature on transitions and poverty is briefly reviewed in this section to provide a background for the study.

Hopson and Adams (1976, 7) defined a transition as "*a perceived discontinuity in one's life space.*" They stated that in order for an experience to be transitional there must be (a) personal awareness of a discontinuity in one's life space and (b) new behavioural responses required because the situation is new. All transitions whether macro or micro, predictable or unpredictable, voluntary or involuntary involve some stress (Hopson and Adams 1976). For example, transitions often result in identity strain which occurs "*when an individual feels unable to implement his self-image in social roles he perceives to be important*" (Hopson and Adams 1976, 8).

Role transitions are derived from work and financial changes; changes in home life; losses in relationships; and personal or inner changes (Young 1991). More specifically in relation to poverty, O'Boyle (1998) suggested that both familial and personal factors contribute to the transition into poverty. Personal factors include lower wages, unemployment, on-the-job injury or illness, rejection, exploitation and old age, frailty and dependency. Familial factors include the death of the breadwinner, family dissolution, increase in family size and drop in net worth.

The main debate surrounding poverty concerns whether it should be defined in relative or absolute terms. The traditional approach involved setting an absolute threshold which differentiated between poor and non poor families by comparing annual income with an arbitrary cut-off figure. Absolute poverty is sometimes referred to as subsistence poverty in that poverty occurs only when and where people have insufficient resources to provide the minimum necessary for physical survival (Becker 1997).

The absolute measure of poverty is often criticised for being an "*abstract and formal statistical exercise in which little or no consideration is given to how people in fact live*" (Ringen 1988, 363). It ignores social and psychological needs by focusing only on physical subsistence (Bauman 1998, 37). Peter Townsend (1979) was one of the first authors to define poverty in terms of relative deprivation. He believed absolute measures

were inappropriate and misleading as people's needs vary depending on the society to which they belong. Many authors now adhere to this viewpoint and define poor consumers as individuals who lack the resources necessary to participate in the normal customs of their society (Darley & Johnson 1985, Bauman 1998, 37). This study follows this relative perspective.

Poverty affects a significant percentage of the population. In the UK, the General Consumer Council (2001) estimated that between 13 and 14 million people live in poverty and 100,000 people die each year through poverty related issues (Curtis 2000). However, there has been relatively little sustained academic research on the poor as consumers. Academic interest began with the pioneering work of Caplovitz (1967) and his influential book *The Poor Pay More*. Research has not been continuous and there have been long periods of silence on the topic. Since the 1990s there has been a slight revival of interest and more recently Ronald Paul Hill (1991, 1997) has been a welcome contributor to this area. Hill and Stephens' (1997) model of impoverished consumer behaviour identifies three main areas of research interest on low-income consumers, namely exchange restrictions, consequences of disadvantage and strategies for coping with disadvantage.

The exchange relationship between marketers and low-income consumers is imbalanced in favour of the marketers (Alwitt and Donley 1996). Exchange restrictions imposed by the supplier include higher prices (Curtis 2000) and limited product availability (Hill and Stephens 1997). Many studies have investigated the price of food for low-income consumers and evidence has confirmed that supermarket prices are often higher in poor neighbourhoods, resulting in the poor paying more for grocery products because the stores that charge the lowest prices are not located in areas convenient to their homes (Chung and Myers 1999). The poor may also have to suffice with lower quality goods and services due to the necessity of turning to the second hand market (Williams and Windebank 2001).

Poverty leads to a variety of negative consequences including isolation from the consumer society. Bauman (1998) highlighted that poverty is a social and psychological condition that can lead to feelings of distress, agony and self-mortification. Additionally, feelings of powerlessness often accompany alienation from the primary consumer culture (Andreasen 1975).

Low-income consumers often show great skills in exploiting their environment to exert some control within their lives (Alwitt and Donley 1996; Hill and Stephens 1997). Coping has two major functions; regulating stressful emotional situations and altering the troubled person-environment relation causing the distress, often referred to as emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping (Lazarus and Folkman 1984). Low-income consumers employ various emotional coping strategies including distancing or fantasizing about a better future (Hill and Stephens 1997). Homeless people use distancing to distinguish themselves from others in similar situations (Hill and Stamey 1990) while fantasies about future home lives are used to reduce the stress associated with current circumstances (Hill 1991). Kempson, Bryson and Rowlingson (1994) identified a hierarchy of behavioural coping strategies employed in low-income families. These

included finding (better-paid) full-time work, selling non-essential items, delaying paying bills and begging.

To summarise, previous research has confirmed that although poor consumers' disadvantaged position in the marketplace results in various negative consequences, they are effective in employing coping strategies to deal with this. However, it is not known whether the recently transitioned poor demonstrate the same resourcefulness.

### **Methodology**

This research forms part of a wider project on the lived experience of poverty which involved 30 low-income families. Throughout the data collection process it became evident that for some families poverty has not been long term and many respondents indicated that they had recently enjoyed a more affluent lifestyle. This paper focuses on those families that have recently undergone a transition into poverty. Particular attention is given to 2 families in which the decrease in financial resources has had a dramatic impact. Although findings from families who have experienced more long-term poverty are not included, understandings gained from the wider project are used to aid data interpretation in these transition cases.

A family perspective was adopted because poverty is something that affects the whole family unit. Although the majority of families consisted of lone parents, this is justified because lone parents account for a significant percentage of the poverty population and lone parenthood is the main cause of family poverty (Field 1996).

In-depth family interviews were the main data collection tool. Given the sensitive nature of the research, every effort was made to create an informal atmosphere, for example, interviews were carried out in respondents' homes. Topics of discussion included family background information, financial circumstances, everyday life, budgetary strategies and hopes for the future. The respondents were encouraged to provide details about their daily lives and the emphasis was on obtaining subjective perspectives at the level of lived experience. A guide of interview topics was prepared but rather than being locked into one set of questions, a flexible approach allowed questions to be adapted to suit the direction of each interview. This can lead to the discovery of issues not included on the original interview guide. The ease of redesign encourages the researcher to truly hear the meaning of what the interviewees say without discarding pieces that do not fit with the initial conception of the research problem (Rubin & Rubin 1995). Interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of informants.

### **Findings**

The findings section begins with a general discussion of some of the reasons for and consequences of a transition into poverty. This is developed by providing a more detailed analysis of 2 cases where the transition into poverty in terms of the difference between pre- and post- transition lifestyle was the most apparent.

In line with previous literature (O'Boyle 1998), one of the main reasons for the transition into poverty was through job loss. For example, 27 year-old Tammy is a lone mother with 2 children. The loss of her job resulted in a drop of £600 per month in the family's income. One of the main concerns for Tammy is the unexpected nature of this income reduction has created difficulties in meeting credit commitments that were obtained while her income was at a higher level. Tammy has debts with 2 catalogues and is also making payments on a bank loan. While meeting these payments was "*easy at the time*," this is no longer the case.

Thus those who have recently transitioned into poverty have to budget not only for their current lifestyle, they may also have to pay for a previous more affluent lifestyle. This is in marked contrast to some of the longer term poor in the study. A large majority of these respondents preferred to operate on a cash-only basis expressing almost a fear of credit and debt. Amongst these consumers, the general consensus appeared to be that credit cards ultimately lead to increased debt with many feeling that they would "*abuse*" them and "*go bananas*."

The transition into a low income may therefore necessitate a change in the way these consumers budget their money. In Tammy's case it appears that she has become more forward thinking in terms of saving for future events rather than turning to forms of credit. To illustrate, although Tammy's interview took place at the beginning of September she was already thinking ahead to Christmas: "*I'm starting to worry about Christmas because this is the first Christmas when I haven't had a job*."

In other families the transition into poverty paralleled a change in family structure. Take the example of Eva, (aged 45) who, having left her husband 3 years ago after 25 years of marriage, now lives alone with her 12 year-old daughter. Eva's case illustrates that the transition into poverty not only has financial implications but also psychological implications. In this case, financial hardship and disadvantage is greatly augmented by feelings of isolation.

*At the minute I'm very lonely...and when you get to my age you're nearly put on the shelf, you can't get jobs or nothing...there's nothing really for you. At the minute I'm just existing, I get her to school in the morning and I do my housework and I sit here.*

Eva is currently unemployed and lack of financial resources means that her opportunities for social interaction are limited. As such she is reduced to a monotonous lifestyle demonstrating how the transition into poverty can also be accompanied by alienation. Separation from the primary consumer culture can have negative emotional impact on people's lives.

For other respondents the transition to motherhood acted as a catalyst for the transition into poverty. Melissa, a 31 year-old lone mother with 5 children, noted that her children have made a difference in her ability for personal consumption.

*I don't buy new clothes for myself unless I really need something. Before I had kids I loved my fashion, I loved clothes, I was just normal, now I can't.*

In Melissa's case, her inability to engage in continual consumption experiences makes her feel abnormal. Melissa no longer feels that she is a "normal" consumer. She has internalised the ideology of the consumer society and because she does not follow its exact specifications, she feels excluded.

The transition into poverty can provoke a dramatic change in lifestyle. We now go on to a more detailed analysis of 2 families where this change was most apparent.

**Case 1: Philip and Joanne - "It's a real culture shock coming down to being a single parent and trying to live off social security benefits"**

Philip (48 years old) is a single parent living with his 16-year-old daughter, Joanne. Philip's wife died 4 months ago and Philip is currently unemployed because he left work to care for her during her illness. Philip and Joanne's current household income is £82 a week which is a substantial drop from their previous income. Philip has had to cope with both emotional and practical transitions related to the grief associated with the loss of his wife and the adaptation to single parenthood. The following extract demonstrates Philip's 2 stage income reduction. The initial reduction occurred when he quit his job and the second was when his wife died resulting in the loss of both her sickness benefits as well as Philip's carer allowance.

*Before I would have been probably better off than a lot of people around here but my wife got really bad with her arthritis and she was in a wheelchair so I resigned from work to look after her and that was a bit of a drop but we managed but now it's impossible.*

Philip and Joanne not only have to cope with the loss of an important family member but also the resulting alteration to family identity. Philip has found it difficult to adjust to the practical considerations associated with this transition. Before the death of his wife household duties were divided between both parents; now Philip has sole responsibility for these tasks. Even tasks that were routine for Philip such as food shopping have acquired new specifications. The income decrease has limited the family's scope for consumption and necessitated a change in the type of products purchased; branded products are no longer an affordable option. As such, Philip is finding it difficult to budget and is spending a large percentage of his already limited income on food.

*It's been strange over the last few months since my wife went trying to adjust to shopping just for me and Joanne... it's been really difficult. I would probably spend between £50 and £60 a week on food, but I'm going to have to reduce that, I don't need to spend*

*that amount now. Before we had quite a healthy diet but the last few months the diet has gone down the pan really.*

Joanne is also finding it difficult to become accustomed to her new lifestyle. She describes how in the past her parents would provide the financial resources necessary to make desired purchases. This is no longer possible, creating feelings of dissatisfaction: *"I know it's selfish but I would like it to go back to the way it was."*

There have also been changes in the role and importance Philip and Joanne attach to different possessions. To cope with their reduction in income Philip has been forced to sell certain possessions in order to survive, for example, after his savings were exhausted he sold his car to raise money. Young (1991) suggested that there is a strong relationship between role transitions and possession dispositions. Philip selling his car is an example of a possession disposition carried out to facilitate his role transition. Much of the disposition literature focuses on voluntary dispositions (for example, Price, Arnould and Curasi 2000). However, in this case, although it was a conscious decision for Philip to sell his car, this was a last resort and not something that he looked on in a positive light. The loss of such an important possession had a detrimental affect on self-image. Possession disposition was very stressful for Philip and his health suffered due to the anxiety that was created by financial difficulty.

*I ended up in hospital about 4 weeks ago. One of the main factors in that, I suffer from depression at the moment, and one of the main factors in that was well, I'm not destitute, I have my own house but there was no money to buy food and you think to yourself, am I going to have to start selling everything but you struggle through.*

Philip's health problems are also linked to alcohol consumption. Joanne admits that she also spends some of her money on alcohol. This can be interpreted as a type of denial and an attempt to escape from the harsh reality of their everyday life. Another contributing factor to depression may be feelings of isolation. The task of caring for his wife created a sense of exclusion from mainstream society. Although Philip wants to *"get back into society,"* the emphasis on consumption means that he is unable to fully participate in what is deemed as appropriate behaviour in the consumer society.

The loss of some possessions may result in other possessions taking on increased importance. Philip places a great deal of emphasis on the television, *"I watch too much, I'm trying to cut it down, I actually think I've got addicted to it."* Lack of financial resources denies Philip the opportunity of participating in the leisure society. His income is tied up with the necessities of life with little remaining for entertainment. Television therefore has become all the more important as it becomes one of the only sources of entertainment that Philip can afford.

The pressures of life on a low income can lead to family conflict. Philip describes how lack of financial resources has affected his relationship with Joanne. Joanne is a full-time student and consequently has to rely on her father for financial support. However, he feels that providing for both

himself and his daughter overstretches his limited income causing *real friction* between them. At a time when the family should be joining together to cope with adversity, the stress of financial insecurity is creating extra strain.

**Case 2: Zoe and Jenny - "When you are working and healthy you do take things for granted but you get a shock, a wake up call"**

Zoe (aged 43) is a single parent with 2 teenage children. Zoe's older daughter is 19 and no longer lives in the family home. Jenny, 16, still lives at home and is a student. Four months before the interview Zoe had to leave a well-paid full-time job due to a medical condition. The household income is now £169 per week from benefits. This income reduction has resulted in a dramatic change in the family's lifestyle as the family have had to curtail their spending in certain areas.

*when I think back now to what I was earning and what I was spending, it was ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous and I swear when I go back to work there'll be changes in this house because believe you me there's no need to go to the supermarket every week and spend £80 a week or to have takeaway meals every night of the week which we were doing.*

Zoe has reassessed her attitude to money and questions some aspects of her old lifestyle. However, one of the most significant constraints for Zoe is the loss of holidays. The inability to afford foreign holidays is something that is raised several times during the interview.

*I've come from earning £400 a week, if we wanted to go somewhere we went, even if we wanted to go on holidays, I mean last year I had 3 holidays, this year I had none.*

Foreign holidays accounted for an important part of Zoe's identity and as such, she seems to be more affected by this loss than Jenny. Zoe took three holidays a year; one on her own, a family holiday and one with her friends. Zoe maintains that she is "very serious" about moving abroad and it is something that she would be very tempted to do when Jenny is older. Although Zoe is unable to afford holidays at the present time, talking about past holidays as well as future fantasies allows her to communicate her preferred identity to others. In his study of homeless women Hill (1991) found a similar situation in that the women were prone to engage in fantasies about future home lives. In this case, talking and thinking about the past and future helps Zoe to cope with her current threatened identity. Kleine, Kleine and Allen (1995) emphasised that identity is reflected in life stories so as well as the present self it will also include past and future selves. This is something that the transitory poor may have to rely on due to their current diminished sense of self.

One reason why the change in lifestyle has affected Zoe to such an extent is because her family seem to be very aware of social comparison. Self-definition is at least partly determined by our perceptions of how we

are viewed by others (Solomon 1983). It follows that consumers use possessions as portrayals of their identities in efforts to influence the ways in which others perceive them. The interpretation of goods as signs is indicative of the consumer society (Baudrillard 1998). Zoe seems to be very conscious of the fact that she is the only member of her social network who does not have a job: *"All my family work, all my friends work."* As a result, she is currently trying to find a part-time job that will not have a negative effect on her health. Zoe's 19 year old daughter is also very aware of social comparison and places demands on her mother because of this: *"she would be the type that would demand you buy her a new car because her mate's mother bought her a new car."* She fears social difference and does not want to be judged as inferior by her peers.

To deal with feelings of inferiority Zoe has attempted to alter her point of comparison by using those who are in a worse financial position as a reference point.

*Compared to some people and compared to what's going on in the world I've got a lot to be thankful for, that sounds a bit patronising but that's just how I feel.*

Extending her point of comparison to encompass those who are not in her narrow social group can be interpreted as a way of coping with financial constraints. Although Zoe herself feels that she is *"definitely living below the poverty line,"* the realisation that there are others in more severe financial difficulties may reduce feelings of dissatisfaction with her own current situation.

As well as this type of emotional coping strategy, the family have adopted behavioural strategies in terms of budgeting to help with the transition into poverty. Coping strategies aimed at dealing with their income reduction are family wide. Both Zoe and Jenny have had to adopt new budgeting strategies. Zoe admits that previously she never thought about what she was spending whereas now she has to divide her money into portions. Jenny now contributes financially to the house with money earned from a part-time job. To illustrate, she helped to pay the last electricity bill. This is something that was not necessary before the transition.

### **Discussion: Income Reduction and the Construction of Poverty**

As was noted in the literature review, both academic and policy makers have found it difficult to define poverty. This paper argues that it would be inappropriate to adopt a universal definition of poverty because it should be viewed as an individual construct. One way in which consumers define their own situations is by making comparisons with others. As was shown above, Zoe's oldest daughter seems to have internalised the ideologies of the consumer society and consequently makes demands for increased possessions. Those consumers who use the consumer society as a reference point are made to feel inadequate if they are unable to acquire their share of the ever-increasing range of consumer goods and services (Bauman 1998).

Those who make the transition into poverty have their previous lifestyles as a reference point and as a result, the exchange restrictions and negative consequences associated with poverty may appear worse than they do for the long-term poor because the former group has become accustomed to a higher level of consumption. The long-term poor may never have had a good income and the associated consumption experiences that this offers. As such it may be a case of not missing what they have never had. However those who make the transition into poverty will be fully aware of what they are missing. Both case families provide evidence of comparing their pre-transition lifestyles with post-transition lifestyles in areas such as food purchases and opportunities for entertainment and travel.

It has been suggested that people with few resources are relieved of the anxiety and stress often associated with displaying appropriate consumption behaviour because they interact with others in similar circumstances (Warde 1994). The social network of low-income consumers is often comprised of others who are in similar financial positions. What is different about this study is that the families studied have only recently undergone the transition into poverty; both families previously led comfortable lifestyles and as such they are not members of low-income neighbourhoods. This may accentuate feelings of poverty if they are surrounded by better-off others. As was mentioned above Philip used to consider his family to be "*better off than a lot of people around here*" while Zoe is surrounded by friends and family members who are in employment. Being surrounded by more affluent others results in low-income consumers feeling less satisfied with their own situations.

Although these families are used to much higher levels of consumption activities, they have made efforts to adjust to their new situations. To illustrate, despite the fact that Joanne no longer has the financial resources to frequently purchase new possessions, this has not prevented her from obtaining pleasure from the shopping experience. Joanne regularly goes shopping with her friend and treats this as an opportunity to socialise rather than an opportunity for acquiring new possessions. Although there is no doubt that she would prefer a more affluent lifestyle she has attempted to cope with current circumstances by disengaging herself from the world of rising consumer aspirations. This represents the consumption of the retail space and people rather than the consumption of products.

After an income reduction these consumers place less emphasis on their current material possessions as part of their extended self (Belk 1988) and more emphasis on people and places with which they come in contact. This is consistent with Hill's (1991) study on homeless women that suggested that poverty reduced attachment to typical consumer goods whereas the value placed on intangible possessions such as memories, relationships and religious beliefs increased.

Other people such as family, friends and neighbours play a central role in the lives of both families. Previous research has confirmed that low-income consumers have high levels of social capital from which they can obtain support during difficult times (Lee, Ozanne and Hill 2000). The importance placed on social support is especially evident for Philip and

Joanne. Philip highlighted how his neighbours helped him cope during a difficult time including offering financial support: *"if I didn't have good neighbours I would really have struggled over these last few months."* Likewise Joanne seems to place a lot of emphasis on her *"best friend,"* mentioning her several times throughout the interview.

Although Zoe and her family also mention friends and family, they do not seem to rely on other people to the same extent. The reason for this may be the circumstances that contributed to the transition into poverty. Philip and Joanne have to deal with the loss of a wife and a mother respectively. If other people can form part of the extended self (Belk 1988), the death of a wife or a mother will create a sense of self-loss for those left behind. The loss of one relationship has resulted in Philip and Joanne placing more emphasis and value on the relationships that they still have.

This shift in emphasis from possessions to relationships can be interpreted as a withdrawal from the accepted norms of the consumer society. It has been argued that people are motivated to buy because it is believed that happiness and the meaning of life can be found in the marketplace (Ger 1997; Ahuvia and Friedman 1998). However, those consumers who have limited financial resources construct their own guidelines for defining happiness. Zoe also displays evidence of a change in perspective. Money is no longer her main priority: *"I suffered a suspected heart attack and was rushed into hospital, that's something to worry about; worrying about money is the least of my problems."* As a result possessions may no longer play such an important role in Zoe's self-definition.

### Conclusions and Further Research

A substantial drop in income can result in changes to lifestyle in terms of consumption opportunities. Financial constraints both limit possession acquisition and require the disposition of possessions. A considerable reduction in income can have both practical and emotional affects on people's lives. These families employed a number of coping strategies to help them to adapt in such a way that makes the most of their situations. For example, less emphasis is placed on material possessions as a means of self-definition and defining oneself to others. This alteration may be forced in that acquiring new possessions is no longer an option or it may arise due to people re-evaluating what is important to them.

The transition into poverty impacts on different families in different ways. In case 2 there was a collective approach to coping as Jenny made a direct financial contribution to the household. However case 1 demonstrates that financial worries can also place a strain on family relationships.

One of the main contributions of the paper is that it attempts to resolve some of the difficulties surrounding the definition of poverty by suggesting that it should be viewed as an individual construct. It has been shown that the reference point used as a point of comparison will impact on the way in which poverty is constructed.

There are a number of limitations to the current study. Both case families are involved in two types of transition where income reduction is only one of them. As such, some of the consequences (for example, Philip's

feelings of isolation) may be partly attributable to the other transitions. However, for the most part, every effort has been made to concentrate on the consequences of and coping strategies associated with income reduction.

A further limitation is that interviews took place after the transition so respondents' descriptions of what their lives were like before may not be completely accurate due to time lapses. Future studies on the effects of income reductions could adopt before and after or continuous approaches, for example, identifying families approaching retirement or families in communities facing significant job losses or redundancies from the closure or downsizing of employer companies.

Previous research has suggested that poverty is a temporary state with estimates of average length of time spent in poverty ranging from four months (O'Boyle 1998) to just over four years (Alwitt and Donley 1996). As such, at any given time there are millions of consumers either entering into poverty or escaping from it. Research to date has focused on the experiences and hardships people endure while living in poverty with little attention given to the actual transition process. Transitions therefore offer considerable potential as sites for future research inquiry. Whilst this study has focused on the transitions into poverty, future studies could consider transitions out of poverty. The ways in which families escape from poverty, how they adapt to an increase in income and the reconstruction of identity after the transition from poverty all offer potential as future research topics.

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