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Consuming the way into working life

Analyzing the changing consumption behaviors and corresponding identity movements of young people during their transition from student to work life

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Thesis purpose: To gain a deep understanding of changing consumption behavior and corresponding identity movements in the transition from student to work life.

Methodology: The ontological position of constructionism linked to the epistemological orientation of interpretivism is applied to fulfill the purpose of this thesis. This research has an inductive focus and uses a hermeneutical approach.

Theoretical perspective: The study builds on previous literature of transition mainly derived from Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), but also takes into account the fields of sociology and psychology. The nature of transition in general is considered as well as its influence on consumption and identity.

Empirical data: Empirical data was gathered through existential-phenomenological interviews with seven young people who had recently started their career.

Conclusion: This research confirms previous studies stating that in transition periods people are more likely to change their product preferences and use consumption as a tool to support the new role, as well as to keep and construct stable and harmonious identity. This study contributes to the identity domain of CCT by identifying the changing relationship to possessions in this specific transition and the separation of one life into two: the private and the professional. Moreover, it proposes the process of transition as a concept to analyze common consumption patterns within a certain group of people and therewith contributes to the domain of sociohistoric patterning of

consumption. With regards to the transition process, the study proves that, also within CCT, the process should be considered as starting before the external life-changing event. Additionally, a "reverse transition" is identified, when the wish to go back to studies stops the transition process.

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Spotlight on Transition

"(...) for individuals life itself means to separate and to be reunited, to change form and condition, to die and to be reborn." (van Gennep, 1960: 189)

Transition phases in life and their impact on individuals, especially on their buying behavior, are slowly receiving increased attention within the field of marketing as these specific periods may represent numerous marketing opportunities for companies (Dodd et al., 2005; Schewe and Balazs, 1992). For example creating relationships with people in transition can be very lucrative for companies, since consumers typically re-evaluate and change consumption needs at the turning points in their lives (Mathur et al., 2006). This is especially important with today's competition reaching an all-time high (Mergenhausen, 1994). More specifically, the transition into new roles in society caused by a life-changing event can result in a change of consumer behavior as new goods and services are needed to restructure one's lifestyle and value system, as well as to properly enact the new identity (Levinson, 1986; Schewe and Balazs, 1992; Wilkes, 1995). Thus the conscious product choice can be a means for the individual to encourage the identity changes in transition or it can be a consequence as the individual may show interest in goods he/she would formerly not have considered (Andreasen, 1984). Thus, transition phases in life seem to be "highly sensitive for the interplay of sociostructural, institutional and individual forces" (Heckhausen, 2002: 174) and therefore present a must for consumer researchers to understand.

There has always been a general tendency for humans to seek out for new situations in life (van Gennep, 1960), but during the last decades, the phenomenon of transitions has changed significantly (e.g. Lee and Gramotnev, 2007). Nowadays timing and frequency of transitions may differ a lot among individuals. Transitions cannot be predicted or identified

that easily anymore. Marriage and parenthood are delayed in many Western societies and do not necessarily follow a certain pattern. The school-to-work transition is blurred because people can switch back and forth between work and education several times throughout their life (Mergenhagen, 1994). Today, individuals take on gradually several roles of adulthood which are socially agreed-upon, or, for certain transitions such as marriage and parenthood, roles are not taken on at all (Arnett, 1998). The de-standardization of transition is a result of the trend towards a more individualized biography replacing formerly standardized and institutionalized transition processes (Beck et al., 1994).

Even though these changes towards a more individualized society make research on transition more challenging, the importance and relevance of the transition phenomenon for marketing is still valid and encourages further investigation efforts. The emerging framework of the life course paradigm, which has been largely ignored by marketing researchers so far, is crucial since life-event and lifestyle segmentation can provide significant improvements over age- or cohort-based segmentation models (Shankar et al., 2001; Moschis, 2007). While transition has not been studied to an adequate level of attention in the field of general marketing yet, within the area of "Consumer Culture Theory" (CCT) a number of research deals with this phenomenon. Schouten (1991) was the first researcher in CCT who analyzed the relation between transition processes and consumption by looking at plastic surgery. He concluded that there was a substantial gap on transition research and called for more studies analyzing changing consumption patterns within transition. This gap was subsequently addressed by several authors, contributing to transition studies by focusing on e.g. Indian immigrants (Mehta and Belk, 1991), college freshmen (Noble and Walker, 1997), tattooed people (Shelton and Peters, 2006) and empty-nesters (Therkelsen and Gram, 2008). Although these studies started filling the gap identified by Schouten (1991), only one research focused on transitions of young people and none of the studies has focused on the specific transition from student to work life yet.

The fact that the transition from student to work life has not been researched yet is quite surprising as this specific transition has been identified as a central milestone within the phase from adolescence to adulthood by studies in the fields of sociology and psychology. One reason for this is that in early adulthood, the first preliminary identity creation happens (Levinson, 1978). In addition, especially work plays an essential role in the formulation of this adult identity (Haase et al., 2008; Lee and Gramotnev, 2007; Plunkett, 2001). Thus entering working life “holds chances for upward as well as risks for downward social mobility” and influences also the long-term development of individuals (Heckhausen, 2002: 174). The transition period from student to work life is a time full of opportunities in which the individual has to make choices for a lifetime and at the same time tolerate the anxiety of not knowing the final outcome of these choices (Plunkett, 2001). One is to realize the ideal self, but also to question and adapt it with one’s own desires (Ibid). Especially in the post-modern society of today, identity achievement has become increasingly uncertain (Bynner, 1998). Delayed or unsuccessful transitions into working life can have various negative effects, possibly resulting in depression or lower well-being and leading to a higher risk for substance misuse (Dooley and Prause, 2004).

As the transition from university to work stands for an important and also complex period in people’s lives and brings along new identity creation processes, this study sees the strong need to research this period in the context of consumption and identity changes. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to gain a deep understanding of changing consumption behavior and corresponding identity movements in the transition from student to work life. The aim is to identify emerging themes which characterize the change in consumption behavior caused by the external and internal factors of the transition and to analyze these with regards to modifications in identity.

Theoretical Foundations

In order to lay the theoretical foundations for this study, transition literature in "Consumer Culture Theory" (CCT), psychology and sociology will be reviewed. Although this study resides in the field of CCT, the relative newness of the transition concept in this field makes it necessary to include literature from the other fields as well where transition has been discussed for decades. One can argue that the rather internal perspective of psychology on transition might be in some points contradicting with the external one of CCT and sociology; however, to gain a wholesome view and grasp the transition phenomenon entirely, both approaches should be considered here.

Theoretical Departure

This thesis takes its departure in the research domain of Consumer Culture Theory, or CCT, in which grand theory is applied to individual micro-level examples (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). What constitute to the body of consumer culture theory are the theoretical discussions about consumption and marketplace behavior under "sociocultural, experiential, symbolic and ideological aspects" (Ibid: 868). In other words, the individual's consumption behavior is researched considering the cultural background. By projecting both consumption and background into the marketplace, consumption is seen as a "historically shaped mode of sociocultural practice" (Ibid: 875). While respecting the contexts of experiential, social and cultural dimensions, CCT is concerned with the every day life meanings of consumption for consumers and the influences shaping the consumers experience and identity (Thompson et al., 1990).

Studies within CCT contribute to one or more of the four theoretical areas which shape the holistic research tradition of CCT, being "marketplace cultures", "mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumer's

interpretative strategies", "identity projects" and "sociohistoric patterning of consumption" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005: 871). The first domain of marketplace cultures is concerned with the interplay of marketplace and culture, thus the influence the cultural blueprint has on the human practice of consumption and vice versa. The second domain of consumer ideology deals with the meaning systems consumers construct through interpreting media messages. This study on transitions will contribute to the two remaining domains: identity projects and sociohistoric patterning of consumption. The first considers how the consumer creates a sense of self based on the meanings which are available in the marketplace, while the latter deals with how consumption preferences and behaviors are influenced by institutional and social structures such as class, community, ethnicity and gender (Ibid).

The research focus within CCT lies on the topics of acquisition (e.g. Thompson et al., 1990), consumption, possession and disposition processes such as gift giving (e.g. Belk, 1976). The consumption and possession studies and their relation to consumer's identity or self-concept have received most attention by researchers. A very essential theory which characterizes the research within CCT is Belk's (1988) notion "we are what we have" which has encouraged consumer researchers' interest in the topic how consumption helps to define people's sense of self (Ahuvia, 2005). This idea that the individual defines him/herself through his/her possessions has also been transferred to consumption in general. The theory of conspicuous consumption entails that individuals buy products consciously which are potentially viewed by others as status symbols (LaBarbera, 1988). Thus conspicuous consumption, the conscious acquisition of goods, is seen as one of the strongest measures of social success and achievement (O'Cass and McEwen, 2004). Although daily consumption does not always require dramatic considerations by the individual, daily products reflect an individual's self-conception (Kleine et al., 1993). These ideas on possession and consumption are very crucial for consumer culture research because they imply that the behavior around possessions and consumption can

give insights on the underlying self-concept, also, or especially, in times of transition.

The notions of self, self-conception, sense of self and identity are crucial for the discussion of the above mentioned consumption related topics within this field of consumer research. After Belk's (1988) article there have been two major areas of contributions in consumer research on identity: on the one hand the conceptualization of self as a narrative and on the other hand studies dealing with different aspects of identity constructions (Ahuvia, 2005). For example Sirgy (1982) claims that the motivation to express one's own self is often the driving force for the consumer to purchase goods and services. Although Belk (1988) has used the above mentioned terms of the self as synonyms (Ahuvia, 2005) this view is not shared by all other authors. Turner (1987) sees self-conception as a hierarchy of social identities and Stone (1954) states that identity describes what and where the person is in the social context and thus is not a substitute word for self. Self-conception is thought to embrace things like role identities, personal attributes, relationships, fantasies, possessions and other symbols that individuals use for the purposes of self-creation and self-understanding (Belk, 1988; Turner, 1987). Thus, the identity is rather an element of the self-conception but central to an individual's conception of him/herself, because often "who I am is little more than where I fit" (Turner, 1987: 124). This is supported by Sirgy (1982) who introduced the "social self-concept" which divides a person's self-conception into two parts: "I" refers to how a person sees himself or herself while "me" is how a person believes others see him or her. This "me", the identity which describes the individual in the social context is the part of self-concept which seems the easiest to grasp for empirical research. Also, it is the most relevant for the transition analyzed in this study as initially the major difference arises through the change of roles in society.

Some studies within CCT have already considered transition phases as the ideal phenomenon to research identity formation through consumption,

respecting the cultural background and marketplace context of the individual (e.g. Schouten, 1991; Mehta and Belk, 1991; Cherrier and Murray, 2007; Therkelsen and Gram, 2008). Whereas people in non-liminal stages (Schouten, 1991) spend their time in relatively stable self-concepts which reflect certain social roles within their social context (Levinson, 1978), a life changing event triggering a transition can lead to a major restructuring of life-styles, relationships and values (Levinson, 1986). These people going through status changes in their lives become more receptive to goods or ideas that they would not have considered beforehand and consequently they become more prone to spontaneous changes, for example in their brand preferences (Andreasen, 1984). Therefore, a common notion within the existing research is that people going through transition use consumption as a means of their identity (re-) creation. Based on this assumption, this study will investigate consumption changes in the transition phase and analyze them in order to find corresponding identity movements.

Review of Transition

As mentioned before, psychology literature tends to have a rather internal perspective on transition as it focuses on the emotional effects that transition has on the individual. The more external focus, considering factors such as social environment and income, is provided by CCT and sociology. Both perspectives are seen as delivering valuable contributions to this study.

The internal perspective

Starting within the field of psychology Levinson (1978; 1986) was among the first to recognize the importance of transitions and thereby is one of the most influential contributors to this phenomenon, providing valuable insights to this research. The significance of his work lies in the fact that he regards change in life as important as the life structure itself. Levinson (1986) uses

the metaphor of season to describe the course of life and identifies four age-based transition phases according to age to bridge these seasons, being early childhood transition, early adult transition, mid-life transition and late adult transition. What sets Levinson apart from many other transition researchers (e.g. Piaget, 2008; Thurnher, 1983) is the already mentioned fact that he clearly sees transition phases as stages in their own right which form part of life just as the life stages do, instead of treating transition only as a zone of ambiguity between the different life structures (Levinson, 1986). In favor of treating life stages and life transitions equally, he argues that a transition is a shift from one state (A) to the other (B), thereby it is as important to study A and B as it is to study the intervening process of change (Ibid). Transition periods typically last between 5 to 7 years, until the created life structure is questioned and must be modified. In transition periods a new life structure is created, which can lead to a major restructuring of life-styles, relationships and values (Ibid). Thus Levinson calls transitions "structure changing" periods as opposed to the life seasons which he calls "structure building". In a structure building phase, once certain key choices (e.g. entering work life, divorce) have been made, the overall objective is to build a lifestyle according to those choices. The person transiting from student to work life is according to Levinson in the era of "entering the adult world" (22-28 years) and thus the biggest task is to make a place for oneself in the adult world. In this transition he identifies two types: people who only build a provisional life structure by keeping all options open and the ones who create a stable life structure directly. Levinson's work has triggered other researchers to look into transition: popular transition phases for investigating are for example marriage, parenthood (Doss et al., 2009), moving out (Koroloff, 1990), cohabitation (Baizán et al., 2004), divorce (Sakraida, 2005), entering working life (Haase et al., 2008) and retiring (Pinquart and Schindler, 2007) as well as bereavement (Stroebe and Hansson, 1993). Although Levinson provides a thick explanation on transitions in life, he does not provide a framework to consider the transition phase itself in-depth.

The external perspective

Moving from the internal perspective given by the field of psychology, studies in sociology and CCT which focus mainly on the external perspective are subsequently consulted. Despite taking a mainly external perspective, sociology, and also to some extent CCT, accept the existence of an internal trigger for transitions. Examples of transition studies in sociology are Pavis et al. (1998) researching the transition from school to employment with regards to alcohol and smoking behavior, Hamilton and Catterall (2006) looking at the transition of families into poverty and McGuire (1988) considering transition similar to the process of socialization when analyzing professors in job changes.

According to Adams et al. (1976) transition can be seen as triggered either by external forces or within individuals. Transition is seen as "a perceived discontinuity in one's life space" (Hopson and Adams, 1976: 7). Thus the term transition can describe changes such as from child to adult, school to work, single to married, job to job, married to divorced and migration, which is what Young (1991) calls role transitions. This is supported by Heinz (2002) who believes that transition is not necessarily only triggered by external factors, but can also be self-initiated, mediated by different personality traits of the individual. He links life transitions to processes of self-socialization (Ibid). This means that transitions are regarded as biographical accomplishments, meaning an active process of a meaningful integration of events across time (Ibid).

Based on the before mentioned perspective, Spencer and Adams (2002) provide a very detailed description of the transition process consisting of seven stages. The first stage is "loosing focus" in which the person finds himself in disbelief of the situation, followed by "minimizing the impact", the "pit" in which the person starts questioning himself, "letting go of the past", "testing the limits" which is marked by new dynamic and energy, "searching for meaning" in which the person looks back and reflects on

transition and finally “integrating” in which the person puts the experience into the new life. Although Spencer and Adams provide a detailed framework for the analysis of transitions here, ironically it can be argued that this degree of detail also limits this framework’s usability at the same time. The division of transition processes into seven stages could cause fragmentation, possibly destroying the overall context in which the different stages have to be ultimately analyzed to achieve a wholesome view.

The work of anthropologist van Gennep (1960), who provided with his research on native tribes the basis for many contemporary transition studies, has not only influenced sociology and anthropology, but has also been taken up by the field of CCT. Van Gennep (1960) was the first to research transitions, stating that the life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another. With the purpose to structure these life transitions and to reduce their harmful effects he identified what he calls “rites de passage”. In order to pass from one situation to another to join individuals in other sections, often identified by an external territorial passage, the individual has to participate in ceremonies which can vary according to the culture and passage, but mostly follow a scheme, including pre-liminal rites, liminal rites and post-liminal rites. When identifying this pattern of rites de passages, van Gennep divided a passage into three phases, which he called “separation”, “transition” and “incorporation”. In the first phase the person was separated from his or her social environment; in the second phase the person found him/herself in isolation in a no-man’s-land; and finally in the third stage, when the inner changes had taken place, the person was reintegrated into society on a new basis. Although in van Gennep’s framework the term transition only describes the time between two life situations, rather than the whole passage, in this paper the word transition will refer to the whole passage instead.

Transition in contemporary consumer culture

As brought about before the significance of van Gennep's (1960) groundbreaking work has also emerged to the field of CCT. Studies in CCT have transferred his framework in order to study consumption and identity changes accompanying transition periods in people's lives. In the following paragraphs, these studies, mainly building their research on van Gennep's rites de passages, are discussed and reviewed.

Van Gennep's (1960) transitional stages are directly taken up by Noble and Walker (1997), incorporating van Gennep's framework without any modification into Belk's (1988) theory of extended self. Their study reveals that in order to cope with a major life transition from high-school to college, young people rely on possessions that symbolize their past (e.g. teddy bears or pillows taken from home) and that support the new role (e.g. new computer). An interesting finding is that the significance of these possessions decreases for the students as they move closer to the graduation from college. Additionally, transitional people are identified to have higher levels of inconsistency in their actual and ideal self and to experience lower psychological well-being than non-transitional people.

Noble and Walker (1997) develop a model which is very similarly to the one of van Gennep (1960) and contains three phases, labeled slightly different as "separation", "liminal period" and "aggregation". The separation stage starts with an external triggering event such as graduation from high school. After this external event has happened, one must first symbolically disconnect from the previous role and start preparation for the new role. Detachment from the previous role is followed by the vague liminal period, representing the starting point for a new identity search. This period may vary in its lengths according to individuals' personality and character. After completing the liminal period, one enters the aggregation phase in which one's internal self-view is more aligned to the external role state, leading to a better state of psychological well-being.

The primary focus of Noble and Walker's (1997) research is on the social group of college freshmen, who are assumed to be facing the middle phase of transition, the liminal period. The categorization of participants into transition phases is exclusively made by taking into consideration external factors, mainly age and time already spent studying. However, it might be argued that not all the freshmen are facing the liminal period: due to the individuality of transition some of them might have still been in the first separation phase or might already have reached the aggregation phase.

Although also using the transition process of van Gennep (1960) as a foundation, Schouten (1991) provides a more differentiated view on the phenomenon of transition and related consumption changes. His study looks at plastic surgery and how this might be used by people to improve their performance in key social roles. Changes of appearance can be symbolically important in coping with certain role transitions, therefore plastic surgery is often decided upon simultaneously with major life changes happening which bring along new social roles (Ibid). These new roles often lead to feelings of incompleteness, perceived by the transitional person as an unconvincing role performance. Plastic surgery is seen as an act of symbolic self-completion during or following the role transitions. In his research, Schouten connects plastic surgery to van Gennep's rites of passage and states that nowadays there are fewer rites of passage because of the increasing individualization of transitions. Therefore people might create their own rites of passages with symbols and activities from consumer culture. In this context plastic surgery becomes a rite for different transitions which allows a person to separate from physical attributes associated with the past and incorporate another appearance connected with the future. Surgery provides physical symbols of transition and in addition can hasten the transition passage (Ibid).

Instead of directly applying van Gennep's model of three stages in his research, Schouten chooses to regard transition stages as not clearly separated, but as a continuum. In his study, he focuses on the beginning and the end of the transition process. This is reflected in the two main meanings that plastic surgery can hold: it can either serve as a means for reintegrating the self-concept at the end of the transition or function as a catalyst for further change, thus marking the beginning of a transitional period (Ibid). In the case of self-concept reintegration, plastic surgery supports people who have recently adopted new roles to feel more complete in these roles. Surgery is elected when the transition process is almost over, serving as final piece to complement the new self-concept. When used as a catalyst for further change, surgery is chosen at the beginning of the transition phase. It is among the first steps to often large-scale reconstructions of identity and helps to visualize the desired new identity the individual will strive for in the following time.

In contrast to Noble and Walker (1997), Schouten (1991) also sees the possibility for transitions to be started by an internal trigger instead of an external triggering event such as graduation or motherhood. According to him, people in transition are often also engaged in identity play. The formulation of a possible self can sometimes act as internal trigger, especially when the possible self seems more appealing than the actual self (Ibid). Independent from the external or internal nature of the transition trigger, symbolic and experiential consumer behaviors are always important for successful transitions as they facilitate the exploration and establishment of new roles and identities and continuously support these. Consumption activities play a significant role in keeping and building a "stable, harmonious self-concept" (Ibid: 412). Schouten influences this research by contributing a perspective on transition that includes the possibility for both internal and external triggering events.

Therkelsen and Gram (2008) take a very similar approach to the research of transition using van Gennep's (1960) framework of three stages as a

foundation. The focus of research is on a different group of people though, namely couples in the transitions from empty to full nesters and from employment to retirement that are analyzed by looking at their changing holiday consumption. Holiday consumption is considered as a good means to research meaning and identity production in these transition phases, since the changing financial situation is likely to open more possibilities and in addition holidays symbolize the "good life" and "who I am". Here, transition starts with a separation phase triggered by either children leaving home or job retirement. In this phase the couple may stop vacationing at typical sea, sun and sand destinations. In the following liminal phase they start experimenting with different holiday forms to discover their personal interests and focus on their own interests as they try to create a new identity after the children- or job-related one is fading. This way the couples create a new life situation that they eventually will internalize in the incorporation stage which represents the end of this transition.

Whereas the transition from student to work life stands for the first adult identity creation the transitions discussed by Therkelsen and Gram (2008) present a reconstruction of adult identity and the possibility to characterize the new self. Apart from considering a different transition phase, they contribute to the body of transition research by using the holiday consumption of couples as a tool to study the "we" identity formation. Since the new identity creation is closely aligned with the partner's identity, the study defines the couple as a central identifying unit going through the transition phase. Due to Therkelsen and Gram's focus on the couple forming a unit while going through the transition process, it is questionable if their findings have the same validity and significance when taken out of this context. Transferring their findings to the rather individualistically characterized transition of study to work life can be therefore problematic.

Similarly to the previously discussed research by Therkelsen and Gram (2008), Hogg et al. (2004) focus in their study on the transitions resulting from empty nest households as well. Though, instead of researching couples

going through transition, they focus only on women. Their study contributes by looking at women whose children have recently moved out and researches how women negotiate this transition period and their changed motherhood through the modification of consumption and production activities. The transition from full to empty nester is perceived as particularly stressful by women because their lives had been organized around their children for a long time and now that they are gone, this pattern of life is not valid anymore, resulting in deep role insecurity. With the children leaving home, mothers found themselves struggling with the question of how to enact their mothering role under these changing circumstances. When the children were still living at home, this role was enacted through production led activities like cooking and cleaning. Production was used by the mother to express her love for the children, but with children moving away, it is not longer possible to perform these production-related activities on a regular basis due to the children's absence. Instead a new way for expressing their love is sought by the mothers: the focus is now on consumption-related activities such as sending care packages and buying presents. Consumption becomes "a bridge to connect parents with their children's new lives" (Ibid: 249) and can also be regarded as one of the copying mechanisms which empty-nester mothers develop to manage the transition process. In addition to substituting production-led activities by consumption, the mothers also hold on to possessions that their children left behind. These possessions have a special meaning now and are almost sacred. In addition, their child's bedroom gains in importance for the mothers as well, being regarded as almost a shrine to the child.

Hogg et al. (2004) look at the transition from full to empty nester as a shift from production to consumption as well as a change in emphasis from physical to emotional labor. The whole transition process is seen as blurry and therefore not divided into strictly defined stages, but still has a rather clear beginning and ending. At the beginning of this transition, women are still connected to the role of mother in a complete household. In the following, they have to detach from this role and search for ways to

connect to their new role, mother in an incomplete household. The end of this transition is marked by a re-socialization of the women as mothers once the tasks of mothering are adjusted to the new role. Although Hogg et al. follow Schouten's (1991) call for further research focusing on special transition periods; their research does not contribute new boundary-breaking findings interesting for this study.

A more radical type of transition is analyzed by Cherrier and Murray (2007). While the studies discussed above focus mainly on role transitions, Cherrier and Murray research transitions that include a reshaping of the entire normative background of life by analyzing people who significantly have adjusted their consumption by consuming less or downshifting. While the participants in the studies of Schouten (1991), Noble and Walker (1997) and Therkelsen and Gram (2008) are neither politicized, nor are they critiquing society or want to change consumer culture, the ones in the study of Cherrier and Murray do so by gradually dismantling their entire consumption lifestyle and constructing a new lifestyle and life background. The focus is here on the process of disposition rather than acquisition of possessions (Ibid). Although Cherrier and Murray look at a more radical type of transition than the researchers mentioned before, they still stick to the idea of dividing transition into different stages. The transition process is split up into four stages: "sensitization", "separation", "socialization" and "striving" (Ibid). Even though Cherrier and Murray use four instead of van Gennep's three stages, it still can be said that their stages are heavily influenced by the ones of van Gennep. Combined into one, the sensitization and separation stages represent what van Gennep refers to as "separation", the socialization phase can be connected to his "transition" phase and striving relates to van Gennep's stage of "incorporation".

Looking at the four transition stages of Cherrier and Murray (2007) in detail, the first phase, sensitization, stands for a close examination of one's life triggered by an external event. This event breaks down the pre-established framework on how to live life and interrupts the stability in life. The event

can be a rather natural life passage such as going from high school to college or motherhood or the event can arise from circumstances, for example a video watched about animal cruelty. All these events drive the respondents to re-evaluate their lives and to reflect on the meaning of pre-established norms and values (Ibid). The second transition phase, separation, describes the period in which people distance both emotionally and physically from their former normative background of life. They try to escape social shaping and separate themselves from the sources of social input from their "previous" life. In this period people might start changing their consumption habits. This disconnection from the past is followed by the socialization phase. Here people shape a new normative background for their lives because it is "only against a background (...) that individuals can express different dimensions of the self" (Ibid: 20). As identities are intrinsically relational, life examples of other persons are sought to envision the new way of living (Ibid). The new social sphere that is reached consists of people who coach, approve and support the new identity definition and the revised consumption lifestyle of the person in transition. The last period in Cherrier and Murray's transition process is the one of striving. In this phase people learn how to live in their new life reality. Striving is a highly reflexive stage in the transition process which involves both answering the existential questions posed by the self and considering the interaction with other people.

Although Cherrier and Murray (2007) provide with their research a valid and detailed framework to look at transitions, their framework is not chosen for this study due to two main reasons. Firstly they see the transition process inevitably starting with an external triggering event. This excludes the possibility for transitions to start earlier, before any event even occurs, on forehand. Secondly, Cherrier and Murray's transition process is developed for a change in life background. As the transition from school to work life does not necessarily include such a dramatic change but instead often involves "only" changes in social role with the normative background for

life remaining rather stable, their framework is probably not transferable to this research.

Another study which combines the aspect of transition and disposition in a similar way to Cherrier and Murray (2007) is provided by Shelton and Peters (2006) who interview individuals who are either planning to or have already removed their tattoos. The researchers discuss product disposition in form of tattoo removal as means of identity negotiation. Disposition is seen as a process which can have different functions, either to separate from an inconsistent self-concept, for ongoing identity management or as further incorporation of an identity. Thus the authors claim that disposition is not only the means to end something but also to begin and therefore one can say that disposition could be meaningful in any stage of the transition. Thus if an individual chooses to dispose of a product when it is not compatible with his/her identity, this would symbolize the beginning of a life-transition. As function for identity management, disposition can be a means for impression management when the postmodern consumer makes its strategic consumption decisions. This can be described as a "symbolic transition"; tattoos are thus removed because they no longer fit into the self image.

A new insight which Shelton and Peters (2006) contribute to the body of transition literature is that disposition can also be a function for further incorporation of an identity. Normally it is seen almost as a prerequisite to acquire products in order to define the new self-concept. However, the authors claim that this is also possible with the contrasting activity of disposing of something. Transferred to the transition phenomenon this means that acquisition to proof the successful transition into the new identity is not necessary. Although this study provides interesting insights on what role disposition can play within transition, there is no discussion on the particular transition phases the participants are in when they remove their tattoos.

The up to now discussed research studies all look at the entire, the complete process of transition. Even though some of these studies follow van Gennep's (1960) idea of three stages, while others create new stages and again others do not look more detailed into the stages, the sample under investigation is always assumed to run through the entire transition process. In contrast Mehta and Belk (1991), although also influenced by van Gennep's (1960) stages framework, investigate in their study examples of "partial transition". A transition is here assumed to start by disposing former possessions, a geographical move and, after some liminal time, the acquisition of possessions which symbolize the new role in society. The researchers observed Indian immigrants in the United States and found out that possessions play a major role in their identity, since possessions define the individual and secure identity. Therefore possessions become particularly important in transition times. Additionally, few people ever voluntarily rid themselves of all identity-relevant possessions, since these symbolic possessions help to ease the psychological difficulties caused by transition. In acquiring and displaying mementos and souvenirs that belong to Indian identity, they are more patriotically Indian than those left behind in India. In conserving all their rituals from back home, it seems that they follow a strategy of identity preservation and only the external dimensions which are needed to be accepted in the community are adapted. This conscious choice of the immigrants to only adapt externally to a certain extent but to try to stop the transition internally by keeping their possessions shows that the immigrants only run through some kind of "partial transition". This does however not necessarily count for all immigrants, since there are certainly some which run through the entire transition process and either reconstruct a new identity different from the Indian one or create an identity which still preserves some of the Indian characteristics, but is adapted to the new American social context as well. Summing up, the most important finding of Mehta and Belk is that possessions are not only important in the transition process to a new identity, but they can even be used to limit the transition process to an extent that only a "partial transition" takes place.

Another study dealing with the phenomenon of partial transitions is provided by Thompson and Tambyah (1999) who focus on cosmopolitan identity and its maintenance through consumption and leisure practices. Cosmopolitan people seem to have a special desire for change and thereby actively choose transition as a tool to satisfy this desire. Every time they move to a new environment, these people go through transitions. But instead of allowing for a full transition of themselves, they strive to limit the transitional effects to selected parts (Ibid). Cosmopolitans control the transition process by exerting a certain level of control over cultural differences encountered and “the pace at which these differences are (selectively) incorporated into their lives” (Ibid: 228). This means that cosmopolitans are constantly trying to acquire enriching cultural experiences by going behind superficial tourist experiences and experiencing the “backstage”. But, although they go through a partial transition towards being local to gain access to this backstage, they refuse to completely transform themselves. Instead cosmopolitans choose to live as “cultural bricoleurs who incorporate cultural differences into their identities by incrementally transforming their consumption patterns, tastes, and the material record of special possessions” (Ibid: 228).

In addition to the partial nature of this transition, it is also important to acknowledge that the choice for this transition is a voluntary one actively decided upon by the cosmopolitan him or herself. The process of transition is here regarded as temporary as these people know “they can go home when it suits them” (Ibid: 216). This sets Thompson and Tambyah apart from most of the studies discussed above and provides also the reason why their view on transition is not directly applicable here: the transition from student to working life is usually not regarded as having an explicit temporary nor voluntary character and thereby differs significantly from the transition type described in the study above.

Ulver-Sneistrup (2008) offers a new way of looking at transitions which differs from all studies discussed above. Instead of seeing life as a row of life structure transitions such as leaving home, getting married or having children, she uses the idea of life as a sequence of different status stages. Contrasting with the studies mentioned above, these status transitions are not divided into different stages, but are rather seen as movements into one direction. By analyzing status consumption at home, Ulver-Sneistrup identifies three transition themes – “descending”, “ascending” and “floating” – to describe lifestyle transitions. People in the descending phase experience downhill movements in their status hierarchies and their homes are seen as healing places for their cracked identities. Contrary to this, the stage of ascendance describes the movement upwards in the status ladder and home presents a rehearsal stage for that. The last theme of floating illustrates the period in which people feel that they have reached the status level they wanted to achieve. Status floating reflects people’s accomplishments and control over their life and is the stage towards which people in descending or ascending status movement desire to reach for (Ibid). Although this study looks at transition-related consumption changes, the specific transition from student to work life should not be evaluated as an up or downhill status movement since status is considered as only one of the aspects in the investigation of this process.

Theoretical Framework

After having reviewed the literature currently available on transition, it has become clear that for the purpose of this study, a mainly external perspective on transition as represented in the field of CCT should be taken. However, as mentioned above, a certain degree of influence that internal factors might have on the transition process also has to be accepted. In addition, it is assumed that the trigger for transitions can be an external event or internally initiated. In the case of the transition from student to work life this means that the graduation from university signifies

the external life changing event. However, the transition might already start before this event, since in today's Western society the sequence of graduation and following work entry is seen as given and can therefore be prepared for.

In line with the external perspective chosen for this research and to grasp changes in consumption through external effects such as income and social environment, van Gennep's (1960) well recognized three stages model of transition would present a useful framework for this study. However, to also consider internal aspects like the inner reorientation and self-redefinition of the people in transition, Bridges's (2004) interpretation of van Gennep's stages is chosen as a theoretical framework. Bridges (2004) describes transition as something psychological as opposed to change which is rather situational, as for example a move to a new city. He translates van Gennep's transitions stages into "the ending phase" (see van Gennep's separation stage), "the neutral zone" (transition stage) and "the new beginning" (incorporation stage). According to Bridges, endings are the first phase of the transition process; each transition starts with letting go of what no longer fits or is adequate to the life stage one is currently facing. The second phase, the neutral zone, is a time of abandonment and emptiness before life resumes an intelligible pattern and a direction. It is a time when an inner reorientation and realignment are occurring. The third phase, the new beginning, marks the start of a new life structure.

As stated earlier on, in order to provide a wholesome view on the phenomenon of transition, it is regarded as necessary to not limit research here to the time segment that follows the external event of graduation from university. Instead it is essential to also look at the time before this external event to include the possibility for internal transition triggering. Bridges (2004) provides with his three stages a valid framework to fulfill this aim: especially his ending phase is not limited to the separation act following an external event. Instead it refers to a potentially longsome

process of separation. To properly understand the separation happening, it is often necessary to look back much further than to any external event.

Summing up, Bridges (2004) is chosen to provide the theoretical framework for this research as he takes a rather external perspective on transition, basing his work on van Gennep's transition model. However, he also recognizes the influence of internal aspects and accepts that transition can be triggered internally or externally. Therefore he offers a perfect mixture of external and internal perspective and aspects which enables this research to present a wholesome view on the transition from study to work life.

Method

Methodological Departure

The purpose of this study, to gain a deep understanding of changing consumption behavior and corresponding identity movements in the transition from student to work life, is approached by the ontological position of constructionism. This study recognizes that the categories people employ to understand the social world, as well as their individual backgrounds that shape their perspectives, are built up through the interaction between individuals and are constantly being revised (Bryman and Bell, 2007). The essential feature of human life is the interpretation of self and world, each being inside the other; "the fish is in the water and the water is in the fish" (Miller, 1958: 39). Thus this research presents a specific version of social reality rather than an objective reality (Bryman and Bell, 2007). The consumption practices people have are thus influenced by and changed according to the social environment. This is supported by the notion of conspicuous consumption which entails the acquisition of material goods that are potentially viewed by others as status symbols (LaBarbera, 1988). Although the term "status symbols" is often related to products of a luxurious nature which purchase signifies a special occasion (e.g. diamonds, cars etc.), it is important to note that also rather "ordinary" products (e.g. groceries, clothes, home decoration) from daily life can be subject of conspicuous consumption and be important for identity creation. Identity creation, which is in this case influenced by consumption, is also put in the context of society, since a person's identity "is his generalized position in society deriving from his statuses in the groups of which he is a member, the roles which stem from these statuses and the social categories that his group memberships lead him to assign himself" (Kuhn, 1964: 630-631). Thus when the social environment changes in the transition from student to work life, the differing social interaction is likely to make an individual revise its consumption and identity.

Closely related to constructionism is the epistemological position of interpretivism. This research aims to understand human behavior rather than only rationally explain it, which can be related to Weber's approach of Verstehen (Bryman and Bell, 2007). In line with the hermeneutic-phenomenological tradition, it is assumed that consumption is meaningful to individuals in terms of creating identity, which makes it essential to look at things from those individuals' perspective (Ibid).

No hypotheses are formed beforehand since this would mean that pre-existing ideas were imposed on the data, resulting in researchers missing out on important aspects, which could not emerge during the research process as they were excluded beforehand (Sackmann, 1992). Therefore, this research has an inductive focus. Still, the order "data → theory" is not static or one-way; instead an iterative strategy, also called hermeneutic circle, is used for going back and forth between data and theory since some research on the topic is necessary to position oneself clearly in a field (Thompson et al., 1994). This allows for a holistic understanding of the research topic and a thorough analysis of the empirical material as pattern/theory arising during the collection of data can be used for eventual adaptation of the further empirical material collection process.

Research Strategy

In order to gain a deep understanding of the changes in consumption behavior and the corresponding identity movements in the transition from student to work life, this study is conducted within the field of ethnography. This method of research is characterized by four elements, being immersion, immediacy, intimacy and insight. Resulting in a thick, in-depth description of people's life experience in a certain cultural context (Sherry, 2008) and supports the search for patterns of interrelationships between categories (McCracken, 1988a).

Since the two main features of a case study are offering rich descriptions of social scenes and examining the context in which events occur (Dyer and Wilkins, 1991), the research strategy of case study seems appropriate here. A single case study will be conducted, meaning the in-depth analysis of one case. By "case" it is here referred to a case of a population (Levay, 2009), being a group of individuals holding a university degree who recently entered the working life for the first time. The analysis of a particular case provides insights into the operation of larger societal processes (Burawoy, 1991) and is widely recognized as a good strategy to collect qualitative data (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

Data Collection

In this study interviews have been chosen as means for data collection since they are considered as the most powerful tool to attain an in-depth understanding of another person's experience (Kvale, 1983). The interviews conducted within the study underlie the existential-phenomenology philosophy which sees the human subject not merely as the thinking but as the acting, feeling and living human individual, and tries to make these conscious acts the objects of reflection and analysis (Thompson et al., 1989). The idea is to gather thematic description of experiences and to identify recurring experiential patterns on consumption or hints on identity changes (Ibid).

Three key characteristics are considered when working with existential-phenomenological interviews. Firstly, experiences are seen as contextual, meaning that they are described and analyzed as they have been experienced by the respondents. Secondly, experience is a dynamic process and therefore different events can be standing out while others stay in the background. This means that a person's experience has to be understood within its life situation. This describes the essence of this study, since the consumption experience is considered within the transition from student to work life. Thirdly, there are reflected and un-reflected

experiences which attempt to make the interviewee reflect on events/aspects they have not reflected upon before (Thompson et al., 1989; Thompson et al., 1990).

In order to satisfy these requirements the interview style applied here is one of conversational type and attempts to start the research without presuppositions, staying flexible for readjustments and obtaining rich detailed answers (Bryman and Bell, 2003). Therefore it is important that the course of the interview is set by the respondent, as opposed to being guided by a fixed set of questions (Thompson et al., 1990). Similar as in story telling methods, the researcher is subject to the narrative's momentum; he or she should never control it but be engaged in it (Gabriel, 2000).

Although this study researches changes in consumption, to facilitate conversation on the rather complex concept of consumption, shopping is used as the starting tool for the participants to talk in context. In order to grasp consumption and identity changes, questions are focusing on direct changes in consumption, leisure time and spending but also on emotions, feelings and personality changes witnessed within the transition. To secure a relevant outcome for the study and to counteract a possible lack of comparability through the work of three different researchers, an interview guide containing a range of possible questions was designed. Questions are ordered according to cultural categories and analytic categories, such as "shopping in general", and related to student vs. work life comparison, such as "shopping", "money & spending", "leisure time" and "transition" (McCracken, 1988a). After explaining the interviewee the area of research, bibliographical question to open the interview is asked (Ibid). A general opening question, what McCracken (1988a) calls "the grand tour", asking the person about his/her personal thoughts on shopping, aims to establish a common ground for the dialogue. In the course of the interview a grand tour question ("Can you think of...?") should open each category to let the participant express his/her own thoughts, followed by follow-up questions, named as floating prompts ("What was x like?", "How did you feel..?"). In

case the conversations on the categories do not emerge spontaneously, planned prompts such as descriptive category questions (“Can you describe what x is for you?”) and key incident questions on events (“Can you tell me about...?”) are used. When a category seems to be discussed to a satisfactory level, a question on the “absent” will finalize the category to prompt for potentially new insights (Ibid). Why-questions on respondent’s statements are avoided to prevent rationalizations; the aim is here to make the respondent talk about a specific experience/event which leads to that statement (Thompson et al., 1989). The interview duration lasts anywhere between one and two hours and interviews are transcribed verbatim.

According to Levinson (1978), transition phases can last approximately up to five years. However, for this study a length of two years was chosen to ensure that respondents can still relate easily to the events before and after the graduation event. The transition phase is here defined as starting with the end of student life and lasting about up to two years into working life. The external event which is according to theory triggering the transition is the graduation from university. However, in this study the time before the entry of this event is also considered to be able to grasp the transition’s wider effects. This quantitative definition is necessary to facilitate the sampling and research process and to guarantee a certain level of both validity and comparability of results. For this study young professionals with between three months and two years of work experience were chosen. Three months of work experience are considered as necessary to track relevant changes in consumption behavior. Seven participants were recruited purposively following the idea of theoretical sampling. As already pointed out by McCracken (1988a), this sample number is sufficient as it is more important to work with fewer people in-depth and this study does not aim to mirror a certain population in society. After interviewing four participants similar themes could be recognized and the results of the following two interviews provided new insights which however fit within the same themes. After six interviews, one more was done to see if any new

insights or contradictions would come up and to prove the redundancy effect.

Recruitment of interviewees took place through advertising on the website of and direct mailing from the Lund University's alumni network LUSEM and through snowballing in the area of Lund. The aspects of gender and nationality did not play a significant role in this study and are therefore not seen to cause a validity problem. Since the focus was not on particular acquisitions, product groups or shopping behavior, but rather on the general change in consumption from student to working situation, no significant differences could be seen between male and female participants. While the majority of participants was Swedish, the minor differences in nationalities arising from having one German and one British in the sample are not considered to be evaluated, since the focus of this study is on what these participants have in common. Moreover in both countries the transition circumstances are very similar. Most adolescents move out when they start studying and student funds are provided in all countries when needed and have to be partly paid back within the first years of working. At the time of graduation individuals have approximately the same age and it is common in all countries that graduation is followed by entry to working life. Additionally all three countries, Sweden, Great Britain and Germany, are ranked within a close range on the scale for the relevant cultural dimensions of Hofstede, individualism and power distance (Hofstede, 1984). Moreover, Lewis (2005) states that all three countries can be categorized within one similar cultural type. Finally, national culture differences are also believed to decrease in times of globalization (Askegaard and Kjeldgaard, 2002). This is especially valid for geographically close countries and for the generation under consideration which grew up with travel and abroad experiences.

Data Analysis

The analysis follows the hermeneutic approach, part-to-whole, whole-to-part movement described as the hermeneutic circle (Arnold and Fischer, 1994). This circle is considered in the two phases of interpreting the experiential phenomenological interviews. In the first phase the interview results are understood intra-textual, this means separate passages of the interview are analyzed within its overall content. In the second phase analysis is inter-textual, which means parceling out little bits of different persons' interviews and putting it under categories to identify patterns and common themes (Thompson et al., 1989; Marshall, 1981). Moreover, the hermeneutic view of understanding is considered which means that the frame of reference of the researcher serves as provisional perspective to develop the understanding of the phenomenon (Thompson et al., 1994). However, at each level the analysis moves from the participant's lived experience to a theoretical abstraction by the researcher in order to describe lived experience and the meaning that emerge from it.

The methodological criterion of the emic approach, implying that respondents' own terms will be used and the meaning will be understood without external verification, combined with an acknowledgement of the autonomy of text, meaning that no interpretation is done by pre-conceptions or hypotheses, are used in this research (Thompson et al., 1989). In the first step, transcripts are read by all participants of this research individually over and over again, making general notes on important passages, relevant quotes and names for possible themes (Bryman and Bell, 2007). The process of first reviewing the codes for each participant separately and then on a comparing basis across all participants was done in the group of all three researchers. This way a first idea of possible themes could be identified. In the following each researcher read through the transcripts separately again and tried to fill in the preliminary themes with quotes from each respondent, also gathering quotes which seem important but did not fit into the preliminary quotes at that point in time. In the final step, a review of the preliminary themes took place in the group,

discussing interpretations and meanings for the research and final theme naming as well as theory which serve to support the findings.

In order to increase trustworthiness, triangulation through combination of different methods, such as interviews with observations or diaries is a possible method for relativist research. However, apart from presenting a different ontology, limitations such as time and resources did not allow so. Moreover, according to the argument of Denzin (1970) multiple observers who cross-check each others interpretations, which has been done in this research as elaborated before, can also be seen as a method to increase trustworthiness. This is supported by Thompson et al. (1989) recommending what he calls "interpretive groups". This allows re-analysis of the data on several occasions towards mutual agreement in interpretation within the research group.

Analysis

In order to provide a solid foundation for the understanding of the participants' transition stories, their context and background as well as their individual transition process will be analyzed and categorized accordingly.* Subsequent to this, the empirical material derived from the interviews will be analyzed in-depth, using the inductive approach of identifying common themes within the participants' transition processes.

Participants in Their Transition Process

In line with the hermeneutic approach applied in this study, several aspects arose during the interview process which had an influence on the theoretical framework chosen for the data analysis. The initial selection process of interviewees was based on the external time criteria of graduation date and time passed since work entry. When conducting the interviews and reviewing the data derived from them, it turned out that apart from external factors of consumption and social environment changes, additional ones such as individual context and personality influenced the transition process as well. These individual characteristics can impact the intensity of the transition and the pace in which the individual moves through the different stages (Adams and Spencer, 1988). To satisfy both, external perspective and internal influences, the three transition stages of Bridges (2004) serve here as theoretical framework. This implies that all participants are categorized into one of the three different stages in the transition process, being "ending phase", "neutral zone" or "beginning phase" (ibid.) As discussed already before, the ending phase refers to the first phase of the transition process; the neutral zone describes the following time of abandonment and emptiness, and the third and final phase of the transition process, the new beginning, marks the start of a new life structure.

* For additional information on interviewees' background, please refer to the appendix.

The ending

Peter seems to still be at the beginning of the transition, thus in what Bridges (2004) calls the ending phase. The fact that he went to Italy as his first job experience, makes his transition different to the one of other participants. He saw this time abroad as an adventure, trying to get the full experience by trips on the weekends and testing the local cuisine. Moreover, the very low salary in Italy and the temporariness of the stay did not encourage him to do any major purchases. After the six months in Italy, Peter moved back into the apartment he lived in before, at the end of his studies in Sweden. Thus one factor supporting the assumption of him being in the ending phase could be that he has not done a geographical change (van Genneep, 1960) or disengagement (Bridges, 2004) since he started working. Geographical changes and disengagement are two major external factors which influence the self-awareness of transition.

The fact that Peter did not really have clear expectations on what work life might mean for him is also a sign that he has not really found the inner ending of his student time at the time of his graduation. This inner ending is what apparently really initiates the moving on within the transition (Bridges, 2004). It is partly influenced by changes in habits and relationships which do not seem to have changed much for Peter. Although he is eating out more often since he now has the financial possibilities, he still spends his spare time with friends from university and does not seem to integrate too much into a new social group. According to Levinson (1986) relationships mirror the life structure, which is the pattern or design of life at a certain point of time. If, as in the case of Peter, there has not been much change in life structure so far, this also means that the transition is not far in process. Another very significant aspect in Peter's case is the general state of his life, with potentially other transitions happening at the same time. It does not seem that the entry into work life has yet provided him with a structure and stability for his life. This might be because he is already planning to take on

a different job in another city or because he still seems to deal with another transition, as he recently ended a long-term relationship. These facts do not encourage him to finish with his old life situation and prevent making commitments towards a new one.

"(...) the first thing would be the electrical guitar because right now I don't really know what is going to happen with my life. When I know I have a girlfriend living here I would spend more money on big things, furniture and TV. But now I feel like I don't know what is going to happen. I rather spend my money on amusement, travel (...) less on things which are more pricy and also more volume." (Peter)

The neutral zone

"Yes, it is strange...cause when I moved down here for my master thesis, I did not quite feel like I was working and I did not really feel like I was studying cause I did not have...I wasn't around universities. Funny feeling, you were like in between." (Daniel)

With these feelings **Daniel** expresses that he has not really finished with his student identity, but also not yet started to identify himself with work life. He moved away from his home university in the North of Sweden to do his master thesis in a company in Copenhagen. In Copenhagen he did not know anyone, thus he experienced a quite distinct geographical and social change. However, this time of still being a student but working in a company did not allow him to draw a clear cut between student and work life. However, the neutral zone in this transition does not always need to be marked that obvious and can, since it is an internal process, well overlap with either the events of student life or the beginning of job entry (Bridges, 2004). This means in Daniel's case that on the one hand, as he did not have the daily habits or the relationships of his former student environment anymore, it made it possible for him to disengage and dismantle easier from his student identity. On the other hand, he continued living in a student corridor, which did not provide a working life or young professional environment for him either. Still, the facts that this student corridor was not his old student environment and that he actually went every morning to the company, made him more feel like becoming a part of the working population. Despite the blurry change of situations, which did not really allow him to say goodbye to his student life, David already distanced

himself from it through taking a year off after his third year to travel in which he started losing contact to his fellow study mates. He considered his study length as the right amount of time to be prepared for life and thus calculated on ending up working in the company where he would write his master thesis. Daniel is clear about the fact that he already has changed too much in terms of life style and structure to want to go back to study: "I prefer not to. I think I would have to drastically change my way of living before I could see like going back to study..."

Since work entry as Daniel got over his initial anxieties dating back to the end of his studies - "woah, what a big step to start working and stuff" - and the urge to "maintain a good profile, not doing anything that is not work-related", he is now being quite settled down in his position. However, several things point that he has not started identifying himself fully with the work life and the associated social role yet, as he clearly separates himself from his colleagues when talking about them: "They are actually more immature than you are! You know, like surveying the web and being unproductive."

Tim is not as clear to categorize within one of the three stages of transition, since although working, he seems to have made the decision again to go back to study. On the one hand one cannot say that he went through the whole transition phase, but on the other hand some indicators show that he is not stuck in the ending phase anymore either. This could mean that Tim moved through a part of the transition from student to work life, but then decided either consciously or through the trigger of work entry, that he wants to go back to study. Tim entered the ending phase already towards the final year of his studies when he started to apply for jobs in different cities, making up his mind about where he wants to work and live. He also had a quite sound imagination of how his work should look like - "I expected it to be more strategic work". At his graduation day, he felt really proud and was happy and looking forward to the fact that he would earn money now, even though he did not have a job at that point in time.

The end of the ending phase and beginning of the neutral phase can be placed within the weeks after his graduation, where Tim took two months to apply for jobs and prepare for job interviews. He had many different interviews and possibilities, and this variety of choice made him feel not too happy anymore about the job offer he finally got. As many of the other participants Tim had to move through a disengagement process (Bridges, 2004) when he moved to Frankfurt, his current work place. However, living in a shared apartment with a student and another employee and leaving most weekends to visit old friends and family might be two reasons why Tim does not seem to have arrived entirely at working life. Although he now starts meeting new people through both work and flat mates, the one weekend per month where he actually stays in Frankfurt seems to be the one where he relaxes and mostly stays at home without much social interaction. Thus one can say that Tim's old habits and modest parts of his social environment have evidently changed since the week (and weekend) structure has changed, but that is not so much valid regarding his relationships. Tim recognizes that his social interaction has become more formal, more adult and more professional; however he does not seem to feel comfortable with it.

"Like when I was a student you could invite friends to your home and now after work if you go out for some drinks, you wouldn't ask your colleagues to your place and have some drinks over there (...) when I'm going out in the evening most times I feel very young in Frankfurt, because most people are in their end twenties, in thirties and I'm still 24." (Tim)

Tim had trouble to get used to the work lifestyle initially, but claims to have managed to adapted to it now. He still does not seem to be very confident in his job and thinks a lot about his current situation.

"When its 8 p.m. in the evening and I'm still in the office. And then I'm sometimes thinking why am I doing it? I'm not going to get paid for it...I try to go to the gym, but it's not that easy as I'm starting to work at around 9 and I'm finished around about 7. Yeah. So I'm getting home which is like 20 minutes, having some dinner and try to go to the gym afterwards, which is really complicated, because once you arrived at home, you don't wanna go out anymore..." (Tim)

Thus, one could observe that Tim still seems to be stuck in the neutral phase, where he does not really know where he belongs to and what life he wants

to choose yet. The fact that he does not seem too satisfied about his life at the moment is a sign for the emptiness and the being in-between two life structures, effects of the neutral phase (Bridges, 2004). According to Bridges (2004) the neutral phase is where the real business of transition starts. In the case of Tim however, instead of committing to the work life he started, he made the conscious decision to go back to studying in the next summer. One reason could be because he has different ideas about where he wants to work later and thus needs another education, but the most striking reason seems that he is not prepared to enter working life yet. Therefore Tim stopped his transition process.

The beginning

Sara seems to have mentally realized that she has finished her student life. She sees a big difference between the beginning of her student life and the end of it. Sara already had a job offer before she graduated, so she started thinking about the upcoming work life already during her student life. During her first year of studying she took it quite easy because of the previous knowledge acquired in high-school, whereas the final year consisted more of studying, working out and job applications. Thus in this final year, Sara was already dismantling from old habits such as partying and adapting to a more work life like daily structure. She also moved through inner disenchantment in her last year (Adams and Spencer, 1988), which was expressed in her feelings of fear to not meet the new expectations of work life - "I was quite anxious during the last year if I could meet all the demands and such at the work life".

In the time between graduation and work entry, Sara took her time to travel and mentally prepared for the new situation at work, thinking through different situations and scenarios. The fact that today she has already regained her self-confidence in the new environment could point towards the fact that she is already quite far in her transition towards work life. Although it seems that she still misses certain characteristics of her

student life, she looks at student life from a different perspective today, realizing that she already has adapted a different life structure, which involves less flexibility and less social interactivity. With the beginning of work life, Sara was also separated from most of her former social relationships, as they moved away for work. This forced her to find new friends and resulted in spending overall less time with friends. The fact that Sara could imagine going back to study in case she does not find a job can be explained by Levinson's (1986) two approaches to building a life structure. One approach is exploratory and leaves all options open and the other one involves commitment to creating a rather stable life structure. Sara seems already far in the transition process, because she already adapted her life structure to the new situation - "I love the student life, everything with it, but I also feel like you have to let go of it some time and just be happy with memories you have". However, she has not completely excluded the possibility of going back to studies yet: "It depends on in which area I would go back to study and why... Like if I would not be able to get a job after this my trainee program is over, I might go back."

Steve seems to be more the kind of person who aims to create a quite set life structure already today. He is convinced in his thought that student life has nothing to do with him anymore:

"I don't wanna go back, I have done that now. I am glad that I am over with and it's finished. It would feel like a backward step. (...) That would feel like the wrong direction." (Steve)

He is quite open about the fact that he has never really worried about the future much in his student life, nor did he think about which direction his life should take after graduation: "It is alright when you are student, you are still not really in the real world kind of thing". But none the less after graduation he seemed quite self-conscious about his future steps:

"I got the masters, I am sorted and done, it was a good day, thinking finally, I was looking forward to go to work because I had enough of not having money and being how it was. Now you are done with learning and can get yourself a job, earn money." (Steve)

Steve used the time after his graduation to look for job; he was working part-time in a restaurant and applied for many different jobs. He did not

seem to use this time to figure out what he wants to do, as he was quite determined at that point to enter work life as soon as possible: "I was just thinking I don't wanna do this for long, you wanna go and work in economy." The fact that he did not find anything in the beginning stressed him and made him wonder if he has to find alternatives. Steve passed the first months of his work life grasping and realizing that he indeed had started a new life situation; thinking back, he talks about his confusion:

"I remember the first months I started to work at Maersk, every month I had no money, you know when I was a student I probably got in terms of loans a quarter of what I have now, but even now I have no money left at the end of the months, so I am wondering what the hell am I doing." (Steve)

Work life seemed to make Steve realize that he wants to change something in his life and his mentality. The professional work environment made it clear for Steve that he had grown into an adult world. Nowadays when he spends his free time with work colleagues, he adapts to their style. He feels lucky about having his job and wants to do his best. Steve feels the urge of having something more fixed in his life, as he is for example currently in the process of looking for an apartment to buy.

"I have always been told that I am crap with money just finally hit me that I am, before I was more like yea I am crap with money so I am, but now it is more like I am crap with money but if you wanna do stuff you have got to plan for it. (...) I am now thinking in the future and putting a lot aside, the whole mentality has changed because I realize that I have more responsibilities when I buy a flat and maybe next year maybe a car, trying to prepare. That has changed in the way how I consume because I think about how I consume in the future, whereas as a student I haven't thought about the future, more about now." (Steve)

However, when talking about future plans, it becomes clear that Steve is still in transition. Though in the beginning stage of transition already, he cannot really picture what will happen in the next five years. Although he feels some kind of stress about this, he cannot answer the future question and says that he has not made any goals for him yet in this long-term span. It will probably only happen in the new set life structure after transition that the individuals think about the next major steps in the long-run.

This is also the case for **Elin**: she does not have any expectations or plans for the future yet, she takes it rather easy and knows that she still has to learn in

the job she is doing now, so she is not stressed in thinking further ahead. However, she seems to have adapted to her new life situation quite well already, which means that she is in the beginning phase:

"No, I still feel the same. I do not feel more grown up. I think that came with time while I was still studying. It is more a big difference between the first year and last year of your study." (Elin)

Although she feels that she has personally more changed during her studies when she was already preparing for a work direction through her specialization and getting more of an idea on what she will be working later on, it was at the time around her graduation that she actually realized that her life will change.

"The first week after you start searching for jobs, but you only slowly realize you have graduated. I got worried quickly because of you know, the economy and the financial crisis and finding a job in that situation...it was good we moved into the new apartment then, so I had stuff to do, to occupy my mind, like painting the walls (...) before I did not really think about it. And later I thought like 'Hmm, maybe I should have started thinking about it earlier'." (Elin)

When Elin moved into a new apartment, this gave her a first start to realize the changes going on and she used the renovation of the apartment to keep herself busy and her mind occupied. The start of working life enabled her to realize her dream of a bigger apartment which she always had during student life. Elin also used this time to prepare for work life, buying clothes which she saw as more appropriate for work and started creating a rough idea in her mind of how she imagined work, which turned out to be quite right. Looking back, she realizes that her life has changed in different ways; since working she does not feel as stressed as during study life because she does not bring the stress from work home. In addition, since her study friends moved away, her social environment has changed a lot as well. But overall she seems to have already quite well adapted to the new situation:

"But still, you have less time in the week to do something. You can still do things in the weekend and you do that with the ones that are still here. And I think you meet more friends of friends that you might not have hung out with that much before, so it is more like 'ah, we are going there, do you also wanna come'." (Elin)

The assumption that clear expectations guide an individual quicker through transition (Bridges, 2004) seems to describe **Gustav's** transition quite well. He

seemed to have already developed a rather detailed picture of what his life would look like once he would start working during his study time, formulating many wishes and creating a number of desires which he wanted to realize upon work entry. Now as he is working, he has found his way into the new situation and seems to be happy with it:

"I expected it to be early mornings, fixed hours every day and then I'm done when I come home... I'm off. There's no anxiety or not being able to sleep because of you haven't done your project or...I mean, once I leave my office I could... I'm off. That's the most amazing thing and I knew that it would be less free time, I knew it would be weekend based and then you really have to ... put meaning into your weekends to really appreciate that. I've accepted that I have smaller free time. I mean... if I choose to go to the gym, it's all roughly 2 hours.... I mean its something I really want to do. So therefore I mean I'm taking good care of my free time." (Gustav)

Gustav was quite thoughtful and realistic when entering his student life, already thinking about working life as he referred to studying being "just a step":

"I was already aware that when I do move out...I knew... I mean...that my plates won't match my cups, my cutlery would be 6 different sets and how do you even... but I mean it's just fine. It's just a step. And you add to that the study for 5 years knowing that you don't have any real income..." (Gustav)

He accepted his student life, knowing that "somewhere along the game, five years later, I will have a job and I will have my own furniture". When thinking back to the time of work entry, Gustav remembers:

"... when you are working you have triple or quadruple amount of money and your lifestyle...it totally changed, but it doesn't change at once and for me it was just a shock to be able to save 10-15 000 every month". (Gustav)

Today he is used to the situation of working and its benefits, as he is talking about a list of wishes through which he can go quicker now because he can do a bigger investment every month and the list does not build up anymore as it used to do while he was a student. He also recognizes that he takes the salary for granted now and that he can buy whatever he wants within much shorter periods of time, but also acknowledges that this seems to give him less satisfaction. Gustav has already adapted to a higher standard of living and feels comfortable sharing that with his work colleagues. His personality and maturity about life made Gustav move through the process of transition quicker than the other participants. He started the beginning stage of his transition rather early after job entry and

moved quite far if not even towards the end of transition: "I've finished walking the path...like up to the day when I got hired I feel that that's where I would start my life."

Themes

According to McCracken (2005) consumer goods play a significant role in today's society as individuals are free to construct the self. These goods are one of the most important templates for the self and the consumption of them helps people select, assume and display, but also change new personal meanings (Ibid). Consumption is thus an instrument to build the identity of individuals. As already mentioned earlier on, transition phases usually require quite substantial changes in identity. These changes are reflected in the consumption behavior of the transitional person. Transition-related identity changes are expressed through changing consumption (Ibid). Therefore it is very interesting to analyze the consumption patterns of individuals in transition in order to gain insights about identity changes that are taking place. In the following, the empirical material collected from the seven conducted interviews is analyzed regarding striking changes appearing in the transition from student to work life.

A little bit extra

"It is more like you can give yourself a treat. You deserve it more...like when you don't have that much money or you lack the economics, you go like always eat cheap, live cheap basically. Now it is more like, you don't have to bother that much anymore."
(Daniel)

There is nothing new about the fact that being a student means mostly living with a tight budget and respondents in this study were no exceptions. Expressions such as "little bit poor" and "didn't want to spend too much money" were often used to illustrate interviewees' lives as students. Now with an increased income, they do think about the way they spend their money, but worrying about it is not as central anymore. This is expressed in

the beginning quote by David and also stated by Sara - "I feel like I am not as price sensitive now as I was before" - and Peter - "I am not concerned about prices, it doesn't concern me because I know that my income will come". These young people feel that now they can allow and even treat themselves more from time to time. Besides buying long dreamed about and wished for bigger items such as TVs or furniture, a general upgrading of their everyday life consumption was identified as a theme - "a little bit extra".

"I actually changed...how to say... my food habits a little bit. Because before you always bought like the cheapest cheese or you would always buy the most cheapest stuff and now... I still look for prices, I still look...I want good prices, I go to stores I know the prices are lower. But I can afford to buy that cheese that's much better or tastes much more than cheaper one. So I changed... I eat much more fish or fresh fish and that kind of stuff, but I couldn't afford that before. (...) Well, I still eat a lot of vegetables and fruits and....but I would say much more healthy now. Yeah, I would say that I also try to buy more organic food now..." (Sara)

Sara has always been into sports and healthy life-style, but it is only now when working that she has started buying organic food and eats healthier. Even though she argues whether her interest to organic food is caused by increased knowledge of this kind food in general in society or by her bigger income, the fact is that organic food was not in her priority list when she was a student and she never bought it back then. Sara's recent interest to organic food supports Andreasen's (1984) study, which states that a new life situation can make people more open to new products and cause spontaneous changes in their brand preferences. Similarly to Sara and also in line with Andreasen's (1984) study, Peter tries to buy more things for himself today which satisfy his wants perfectly:

"Yeah, as a student I was really aware of prices in food and clothes and now I buy food that I like and clothes that I like." (Peter)

Besides buying the clothes and food that he likes, he has in addition changed his store preferences. Whereas as a student he went to discount chains, now he is visiting more expensive food stores. Similar to Sara, he tries to see more reasons behind his changed habits than just his increase in wealth, claiming that he prefers other stores now as he does not support how discount stores handle their products. Besides preferring more

expensive food stores, Peter also notes changes in other aspects of his consumption: currently he eats lunch every day in a restaurant and also goes out for dinner much more often. Enjoying life by adding a little bit extra to smaller things from everyday life can be identified also for Elin, who treats herself by buying a bundle of flowers on her way home or going for a nice cup of coffee, whenever she feels like it. In addition, Elin is passionate about cheese and can enjoy visiting cozy little cheese shops now more often. The topic of food is also taken up by Gustav:

"Cause I mean if I wanted a beef loaf or something or 3-course meal, I would make that and then I would just buy toast or something. Which is very much alike how is it now... I make the most out of every time...every day." (Gustav)

Even though Gustav was treating himself with good food already during student life and although he sees similarities between now and then, he definitely buys good food more often now and does not have to really think about cutting down on something else afterwards like he had to do in his student life. Whether he is picking a wine in the store or chooses between different types of pasta, he usually goes for the more expensive one:

"(...) if I want a more expensive brand cause...my brain thinks that it tastes better than some sort of other, then it will taste better. Then I don't care that it cost 20 SEK more." (Gustav)

Different food shopping habits can be noticed as well with Tim, who spends now more time doing his shopping compared to his student life, in order to find the best quality food:

"I am not...I try not to buy things that are already like packed. For example if I'm going to buy some salami, I'm going to ask in the vendor to just give me few slices of that and of the other one. So it's more expensive, but its better quality I guess." (Tim)

Besides buying better salami, Tim tries to purchase high-quality products in other food categories as well. As good quality and freshness are his main shopping criteria, he even stopped visiting a food store conveniently located nearby his current home as this store sells fruit in "not so good conditions". Changes are not limited to area of supermarkets: even though Tim keeps visiting mainly the same clothing store as he did when he was a

student, he claims to have switched to more expensive labels which he could not afford before.

According to McCracken (1988b), goods carry meanings which are used by consumers to constitute and define themselves. Changes brought along by transition have made young people in this study adjust their consumption habits according to their changed roles. Summing up, "a little bit extra" might mean for one respondent buying more quality food while it implies buying flowers for another. Upgrading their consumption habits has made the lives of these young people more enjoyable and has enabled them, as Gustav put it, to "make the most out of every day".

More money, more problems

While studying, respondents in this research covered their everyday expenses with money either provided by their parents or the government. Apart from few summer jobs, this is the first time they really earn their own money and their monthly income depends on this one job. Being in charge of their income flow has brought along an increased responsibility of how to use this money. Steve is a good example for this as he recently has taken up anxiety over his future and is for the first time in his life worried about the way he handles his money:

"It is alright when you are student, you are still not really in the real world kind of thing, but now I realized Jesus, I wanna buy a flat and look more into the future! When you are young you have your family who helps and as a student you are just like you don't care about the future, you don't care about the past, but now I have to do my own kind of thing. It think the turn was, I remember it was November, December time. I actually have no money, you earning now but what are you doing with it... So I realized you have got to do something about it..." (Steve)

After this turning moment when he realized he needs to be more serious about the way he handles his money, Steve has started saving and has noticed a change in his mentality. As more money has also brought along more responsibility on how to use it, he feels that the way he used to be as a student, characterized by spending all his money without giving much thought to it, has to change. Concerns over future and the wish to buy an

apartment made him also adjust his consumption: for example he tries to do his groceries now once a week in a bigger supermarket chains, compared to previous more frequent visits to little stores. He also tries to cut down on eating out. Even though Sara has been good in handling her money when she was a student, she does feel a similar responsibility regarding the use of her money now:

"(...) I think I had a quite good relationship to money at that time as well. But I feel like when I was a student...I feel like there was a lot of things I wanted to buy, but I couldn't buy them, cause I didn't have the money. And now when I work, I feel I wanna buy all this stuff! But I have to think, do I really need it? Or are they really important to me." (Sara)

Sara feels that she has to control her expenses and, even though she has the money and can afford a lot, not everything of that is also worth buying. During student life, she had to avoid some shops to not be tempted to buy something she could not afford:

"(...) It's quite expensive, so I couldn't have ever afforded anything when I was a student. So...I have been there, but I haven't bought anything yet. But I never went there when I was a student, because I was afraid that I would love everything so much and I would just feel bad because I didn't have the money..." (Sara)

Belk (1988) argues that money is usually incorporated to the sense of self and broadens it by widening the imaginable options of what could be done and bought with it. When people think of money as strongly being part of their extended selves, their well-being is related to the welfare of their money as well. Additionally, having more money gives one more power to choose or reject purchasable objects and thus forming his or her extended self (Ibid). Accordingly, both Sara's and Steve's increased incomes have enlarged the possibilities of what they could buy with the money and the decisions to not purchase certain things or carefully select others both help shaping their extended selves. Peter also mentions this widened options:

"Yea I know that I can buy more things now, so I have opened a new door, now I have more options and I can buy things that I couldn't before, more money, a wider choice." (Peter)

Similarly to others, the increasing need for being more responsible with money when working can also be found in Gustav's comments, though in a slightly different way:

"I feel... the only thing I felt really was that it feels nice to be able to give something back to your parents. Every time we were going out to a restaurant until now, they were always the ones paying for it. And it's really nice to be able to give something back. And I've always... it's not related to money but it just feels a bit nice that you are... that you can pay the bill in the restaurant." (Gustav)

Even though Gustav notes that nobody is expecting him to cover the expenses when he is out dining with his family, he definitely enjoys this new role and the fact that now he can actually be the one responsible for paying the bill. Gustav's choice to do it represents his wish to show his family his new role and changed life situation.

Increased responsibility can be noticed not only in terms of money, but it also becomes apparent in the descriptions of respondents' work life, which is often referred to as more serious and formal than their previous student life was:

"I think I have changed a bit in a personal way, become a bit more stressed and stuff like that. Before I had no pressure, it was all down to me. I had no responsibility apart from getting my degree. Now it is a high pressure environment ... you have a lot responsibilities and you are kind of at the bottom." (Steve)

As expressed in Steve's quote, the change from student to work life brings along increased responsibilities and more stress, factors which are often identified to accompany transition periods (e.g. Adams et al., 1976). Noble and Walker (1997) support this by stating that people going through transition periods experience higher levels of stress and a lower level of well-being than people in post-transitional periods. Adaptation to new life situations can be challenging and takes its time:

"Very professional, very formal, after four years of uni you have to learn to be really responsible, being in an adult environment. Coming from student, get drunk, don't care, and now Maersk is a very formal environment, very high level and professional, all very structure, I haven't been like that, I am not that way as a person, so that hit me in the first weeks..." (Steve)

Increased feelings of responsibility can be identified also in the case of Peter, who acknowledges differences between his student and work life as well:

"You know you could just stay home one day when you feel tired as a student, it is more you could decide on your own what to do and you do not feel responsible to anyone else. Basically you do whatever you want to." (Peter)

When Steve and Peter were students they felt responsible only for themselves and decisions were made taking into account mostly their own interests. As Steve puts it, his only task was to get his degree and this mainly depended on him. The same goes for Peter, who says that he could decide to just stay at home on days he did not feel like doing anything. Since starting their work, things have changed.

"They rely on that I do something and then I know I have to deliver something because otherwise my colleagues will get in trouble. I am more concerned, as a student you are more like: "Ok. I will do it tomorrow." Now I have to do it." (Peter)

Whether they decided to study or not, mostly affected only themselves and not anyone else, but now as Peter expresses it there are other people depending on his activities as well. Before these young people were in charge of their own time and of themselves only, now suddenly they have to cope with a changing situation.

To conclude, the increase in income has definitely affected interviewees' lives positively, but it also resulted in more responsibilities. As for the first time they have more money available than needed to cover essentials, respondents feel that their expenditures should be considered carefully. Increased responsibility can be identified also at work: as their work influences also other people, they feel that the responsibility has shifted from them to include others as well.

Investing in the new me

Changing roles can also bring along changes on the inside. Levinson (1986) found out that changes in life triggering a transition can lead to a reorganization of values, lifestyles and relationships. Interviewees in this study also discovered that the new life situation brought along different needs and wants, new social environments and even novelty into their way of thinking.

"Back then, I mean, I had a couch... it was not nice... but I had a couch and to me... back then a couch served its purpose. I mean I had one ... and that was about it. Now I wanted a couch that actually fits...its nice... and then I want the couch table to

match the couch and then I want the carpet to match the couch table and then I want the TV to match...you know, it's just building. Back then I had a ... how to you call it... the ones you roll on...the big...well I had that under my TV and that one was too small for the TV, it seemed like it was hanging out from the sides. I had like a round table which was too high to have it as a couch table. I mean... I was fine! They all served their purposes. But now I guess when I do have the income... I want all of them to match. (Gustav)

The quote above represents that some things are acceptable as a student, but once moving out of this status, these things need to change. As Gustav notes, during study life his furniture served their purpose and he was fine with them. But now, suddenly things have changed and he wants everything to match according to his taste. Of course his increased income makes it possible to get nicer furniture, but perhaps more important is that he seeks the furniture to fit his new identity. Gustav uses the metaphor of "walking the path" to describe his student years; the beginning of his career represents the starting point of his "real" life. All these five years while he was on the way, he dreamed of having a nicer home and all these things he could afford when he would start working. Thereby it is significant for him to follow up these dreams and support the new role he has been given, the one of a young professional. Besides the above mentioned couch, TV and carpet, Gustav is even more passionate about another recent purchase, an espresso machine:

"I mean it's to wake up and the first thing you go to do is to put on your fresh coffee beans and you grind them and you make an espresso... Its priceless to me, I'm not... I can't put a price tag on that. It's something that keeps with me all the day. Same when I come home, I make an espresso again...I sit down on the couch... I mean, I don't care... that point ... I don't care even if this machine was 100 000 Crowns... cause its something I really enjoy." (Gustav)

Preparing and drinking espresso is almost a ritual for Gustav. It represents both the beginning and ending of his workday and thereby also marks the changing of roles from going to work to being home again. This is supported by McCracken (1988b), who states that rituals are used to carry the meaning contained in goods to individuals. By using the espresso machine on a daily basis, Gustav claims the possession as his own. Additionally, according to Solomon (1983) consumers often lean on social meanings of products as guidance while performing their social roles. This becomes particularly evident when the role is new and choosing correct

products can help successfully completion of the transition (Ibid). Gustav seeks his newly acquired and carefully selected espresso machine, couch, TV and carpet to support and communicate his new lifestyle. These possessions have definitely played a crucial role in making his transition process as successful and easy as it has been up to now.

Whereas Gustav was planning his new life and dreaming about it a long time ahead, it took Steve the first couple of months in working life to realize that the old him, the way he used to be as a student, was not suitable anymore:

"Yea, I have never been good, never had any money... I am trying to change and I think I am changing now a little bit. But yea even as a student the little money I had always went before the new one went in. Yea not good..." (Steve)

While Gustav focuses on desired possessions, Steve is more concerned about the way he handles his money, because eventually as also brought out before, he wants to buy an apartment. He uses the expression "not fitting anymore with the new life" to represent his changed mindset and really tries to keep a better eye on his everyday spending in order to save some money for the upcoming purchase of an apartment:

"Yea food is my biggest problem. I just buy food from little shops instead of going to Netto or ICA Maxi. I buy every day food from little shops...and now it started lately if you plan it and put some money aside at the beginning of the months and do a big shopping once a week or once every two weeks. Yea I have been cutting down on eating and eating out, stuff like that. It is probably one of the biggest areas, yea I like food (laughs)" (Steve)

As Gustav was using the path metaphor for his student life, Steve referred to it as not being "in the real world kind of thing", representing the huge gap between old and new life. Besides adjusting their consumption to the revised needs and wants affected by their new roles, respondents also often brought up the topic of their appearance and shared their thoughts about dress-code at offices, like Elin:

"You know, I did not have appropriate shoes. I could not wear my old sneakers with holes to my job. (...) New pants I bought. I really needed them. I felt I had to have proper ones." (Elin)

Elin felt that her old student wardrobe was not fitting with the new working environment and therefore had to buy more suitable shoes and pants.

Similarly, Sara and Tim did some preparation beforehand and bought office-style clothes. Sara realized later on that the dress-code in the office was not as strict as she thought it would be and actually she could wear the clothes she was used to as a student as well.

"How should I present myself...it is always good, you know, to dress up, but the thing is, you know, you don't feel really comfortable, walking around in a suit...so I started wearing a lot of shirts.." (Daniel)

Daniel is somewhere in-between testing what is appropriate to wear at work and, although not entirely in favor of wearing formal suits, he still tries to maintain to some extent an official dressing style. Daniel's thoughts around the dress-code could be representing his inner search of who he is and mirror the reorganization of his identity. Tim has very strict rules for office dress-code and has to wear suit every day, but as he expresses it, he does not mind doing it:

"It's not that bad, because you don't need to think about what you are going to wear. You always choose between one of your suits, pick a shirt and that's pretty much all." (Tim)

The examples above show that buying new clothes is used as a means to cope with the new role, to represent the new identity and to blend in to the office environment. These findings are in line with a study by McAlexander and Schouten (1989) which states that changes of looks are symbolically important in dealing with role transitions.

Supporting Levinson (1986), who has stated that changes in relationships usually accompany transition periods, respondents in this study also experiences changes in their social environments.

"... But then of course what I miss about being a student is the social...How easy it is to meet new people, you are always meeting new people, you are always getting new friends and that's not easy when you are working. I have a lot of friends...If I would have moved to Stockholm, I would have a lot friends and you will, of course... But if I had moved to another city, I think it would be really hard for me to get new friends, because it's not such social environment as being a student." (Sara)

Even though Sara stayed in the city of her student life and did not change her geographical location as did Gustav, Peter, Tim or Daniel after graduation, she sees a remarkable difference between her social life now and back then, mainly due to the fact that most of her study mates moved

somewhere else. Several times during the interview she refers back to the friends who moved away and her regret about them not being around anymore. The yearning for her friends and moving to Stockholm, where many of her friends live today, is more clarified when she reveals that she had always pictured herself moving to Stockholm to work as well. But she had to alter her original plans as the current trainee program she is occupied with was a too good chance to miss. According to Belk (1988) people's friends become part of their extended selves and losing them can represent a sense of self-loss. Even though Sara's friends are still reachable for her by traveling, the fact that they are not geographically close anymore definitely has an impact on her. In order to keep in contact with them, Sara has increased her traveling. Likewise to Sara, other respondents also claim that since they have started working, they also have started to travel more. One main reason behind this is to visit their friends.

"One thing I really enjoy is that I can go traveling. Most of my friends live all over Sweden, so I really enjoy that if I want to go to a northern part I can take a flight which I couldn't as a student." (Peter)

Peter really enjoys the freedom which increased income has given him. When he was a student, a trip by plane really affected his budget and influenced his consumption for the couple of next months as well. Now that he works, he can travel more frequently and freely.

According to Schouten (1991), in the development of new role and identity, consumption activities play a significant role and are often necessary for keeping and constructing stable identity. This is also evident in this study, where young people going through transition support their new roles by modifying their consumption according to their new situation. Steve's expression of "not fitting anymore with the new life" represents his new mindset and is applicable for other interviewees in this study as well, who seek support for their role in new possessions, for example in furniture or clothes. The changed life situation has also brought along changes in their social environment, which in turn has made respondents spend more on traveling in order to keep in contact with their friends and family.

Consuming for the private

While studying, respondents experienced life as being one wholesome unit: social and working (here: studying) lives were completely interwoven. This created one big environment, in which social and study activities were undertaken with the more or less identical group of people. Elin refers to this when she says:

"I still think people you met the first year you hang with for the rest of your studies. They were really important for school work as well. You meet very often." (Elin)

Two common topics brought up by respondents when talking about their study time are the feelings of pressure and anxiety many had felt during their study life and which have decreased for some of them since they started working. Sara mentions this as the most negative thing about studying:

"You are never actually free, because you could always study a little bit more. You could always study a little bit more! And you are always comparing yourself to all of your friends and how much they were studying and that kind of stuff...So, I don't miss that." (Sara)

Gustav shares Sara's feelings. He says that deadlines stressed him much more when he was a student. Now that he is working he admits to still have deadlines, but seems to feel less responsible for keeping them as he states that even with a deadline to keep, if he has finished his eight hours of work, he would leave and deal with it the next day. When he was a student he "could not let go of it". Since entering working life, Gustav experiences a reduction in pressure and anxiety:

"I'm done when I come home... I'm off. There's no anxiety or not being able to sleep because of you haven't done your project or...I mean, once I leave my office I could... I'm off. That's the most amazing thing." (Gustav)

Sara refers to this issue by focusing on the shift in how one structures time. She felt responsible for structuring all her time when she was a student and now that she is working, a big amount of her time is arranged by someone else. Sara connects this to the loss of flexibility she was afraid of when she started working:

"When I started work I was a little bit of afraid, because when you are a student you have a lot of free time...or its not actually free time, but you are responsible for

yourself for structuring your time. But if...when you are a student, if I wanna go do my shopping during the day, it's possible, but when you are at work all day, you don't have that...what do say...flexibility! I was a little bit afraid, that I would feel like locked up...that I would feel like I have no flexibility in my life. But I didn't feel that at all, cause I really enjoy my work, so...(laughs)...It didn't feel like an hassle." (Sara)

Even though Sara claims to be not bothered by the loss of flexibility in arranging her time, she is not ready to give up that flexibility yet as she continues:

"But then of course, as I said I miss the flexibility that you have when you were a student, but I believe that in the future when you have a job, you might be able to get the flexibility yourself. Maybe, I will start my own company and then I will have the flexibility by myself, even if I'm not a student." (Sara)

Although respondents usually state that they have experienced a quantitative decrease in free time since entering working life, or as Elin puts it "time is an issue since I am working", it seems that the quality of free time has increased ever since. Free time is often described as more enjoyable and respondents disconnect spare time from the feeling of guilt that they often experienced while studying. Elin for example, who initially stated that free time has become problematic since she works, on the other hand says about her expectations of working life:

"Oh, I expected to have more spare time. Like work until 5 and then you are off. And free weekends. When you study you always feel you should do this or that, every day. So when you work it's more like...when you get home, you're free." (Elin)

Although Elin states that partly she traded in free time for money, on the other hand she talks about experiencing more freedom in a way and clearly appreciates and enjoys her free time now more:

"I think I do more on the weekend now than when I was a student. I appreciate the time more. I enjoy the time more. I think it is a big difference to not have these 'I should do this or that' thoughts that you have when you study. But I always do something on the weekends now." (Elin)

Besides the changes in the areas of anxiety/pressure and time, which both suggest that the former student life, that was experienced as one, at times rather stressful unit, is now split up into two units of life, being working and private life, this life division into two becomes also apparent in for example the consumption of clothes. People can use fashion discourses to forge self-defining social distinctions and to construct boundaries (Thompson and Haytko, 1997). According to Corrigan (1997), the difference between work

and private life is also reflected in differing sorts of clothing for these two occasions. The consumption of clothing can deliver rich insights as clothing makes culture material in diverse ways (McCracken, 1988b). In addition, Sahlin (1976) claims that clothing can be read in a systematic way to reveal social differentiations within society.

Clothing is a means by which cultural categories are encoded and made manifest (McCracken, 1988b). Therefore clothing is also a means of communicating rituals in general and rites of passage, thus transition processes, in particular (Ibid). It can be used to mark and sometimes even effect transitions. Each of the three transition stages of van Gennep (1960) can be actualized by the employment of clothing. Clothing can be both a confirmation and an initiation of change (McCracken, 1988b). Daniel for example uses his clothing to differentiate between working and private life. He separates the two lives by dressing up differently. In his work environment, he dresses rather formal:

"They have in Denmark a bit more respect for the boss. The boss is always dressed really posh you know. For me, it is a little bit less maybe, perhaps jeans and a sport jacket or a shirt. So....actually when I started doing my master thesis, I was like, OK, I actually asked myself what is the dress code. How should I present myself...it is always good, you know, to dress up, but the thing is, you know, you don't feel really comfortable, walking around in a suit... I started wearing a lot of shirts, leather shoes." (Daniel)

In his free time he prefers jeans and what he describes as "funny" T-shirts, often with "sort of sarcastic jokes". Asked if he could wear these T-shirts to work as well, he laughs and says that this kind of clothes might be not really appropriate for work. This can be related to the fact that people behave differently towards others depending on the clothing the others are wearing (Bickman, 1971). A business environment often makes it necessary to wear formal clothes, as people might otherwise not be taken seriously by others. Tim also states that during work he follows a very formal dress code, often with a tie. Before he started working, he went on a big shopping trip to purchase the clothes his new job, or better his new life, required. He does not mind the formal dressing code; he even mentions how it makes the choice what to wear easier. Tim accepts the formal clothing as part of the

role he plays during his working life and does not really seem to care about which formal clothes he picks in the morning. On the other hand in his private life, he assigns more importance and attention to clothes. Tim admits that he goes to different shops now that he works and can afford pricier clothing labels. He connects the clothes he wears in the private life, but also the shopping for them, to pleasure, while shopping for business clothes is seen as only a necessity:

"I always divide it between things that are necessary and things that I need for going to work and like fun stuff. So, things that I buy just for pleasure, for example electronic devices, CD-s, clothes that are not business like." (Tim)

Clothing offers a plurality of interpretive positions, helping individuals juxtapose opposing values and beliefs (Thompson and Haytko, 1997). Individuals use these countervailing meanings of clothing to address the tensions and paradoxes existing between their sense of autonomy and their recognition of the need to conform to the social prescription in daily life. Tim assigns different meanings to clothing: his work environment requires a formal clothing style, to which he adjusts. Although he accepts this social prescription and claims to be rather indifferent towards it, he also does not explicitly enjoy these clothes or the shopping for them. On the other hand, shopping for clothes of the private part of life is a fun activity for him, directly connected to positive feelings such as pleasure.

In addition to clothing, there are also other ways interviewees use to distance themselves from their working life once the working day is over. Often different social environments are sought in private life than the work environment. For example, respondents often indicate that they rather avoid meeting up with colleagues in the free time, like Daniel:

"It is a little different when you start working. The guys from work, they are from Copenhagen, it is like, you don't hang out. You hang out at work, but yeah." (Daniel)

People from the work environment are often automatically excluded from the pool of new people one could get to know. As already discussed before, Sara complains about how difficult it has become to get to know new people since she works and she describes the work environment as less social than her study environment was. One's social environment is very

important, especially friends, who are seen as an extension of the self (Belk, 1988), are essential for all interviewees. All of the respondents note a change in their social environment, mainly due to friends and former course mates moving away. This explains why they express the desire to get to know new people and make new friends. It is striking though that usually the working place is not considered as a potential environment for this since a fair amount of one's life is spent at work. Instead, normally alternative ways for meeting new people are chosen, for example seeking friends within the friends of one's friends, like Elin does:

"Yes, my social environment changed a lot. But still, you have less time in the week to do something. You can still do things in the weekend and you do that with the ones that are still here. And I think you meet more friends of friends that you might not have hung out with that much before, so it is more like 'Ah, we are going there, do you also wanna come?'" (Elin)

Elin uses her hobby of playing volleyball to get into a different social environment after work. She clearly shows a desire to get away from work, to separate herself from work in the private, free time. This is reflected in her answer to the question what role volleyball plays for her now that she works:

"Distraction. It is something to get away from work. You come here, you meet people and you think about other things. It is different ages and different lives here. You talk about different things. You do not keep nagging about work." (Elin)

Summing up, it can be said that in the transition from student to young professional, life transforms from being a wholesome single unit into two separate lives. These lives are the working and the private life and differ significantly. Interviewees want to distance themselves clearly from the working life to protect their private life. They do so by using consumption as a marking-off tool which separates private from working life.

Creating a home

The home is a very important place for all individuals. Corrigan (1997: 96) describes home as a "haven in a heartless world". On the external side, home is often connected to status (Ulver-Sneistrup, 2008). McCracken (2005) sees the home as a transformational opportunity: investments in the home are also investments in the self, people make homes to make

themselves. The creation of home, for example through the consumption of home aesthetics, is thus very important for the majority of people. As the home enables individuals to shape their identity, which particularly transitional persons are involved in, it can be assumed that the home has the potential to play a big role for individuals moving from student to work life as well. Therefore it is not surprising that the notion of creating a home recurred constantly throughout the interviews. Respondents expressed the desire for a "nice home", a safe place to be themselves and to live their second, their private life. They showed in general a clearly increased consumption of home aesthetics since entering working life. Elin for example definitely buys more things for her apartment today than back when she was a student.

"I like buying clothes, but I think I like more interior decoration, furniture and lamps and so on, the more expensive things. I really like more home decoration things than clothes. But I guess that is also because I moved into a new place this summer and I am still decorating it..." (Elin)

Simultaneous to her entrance to working life, she also moved into a new apartment with her boyfriend. She is very engaged in the process of decorating the apartment and creating a new home for herself and her boyfriend. Although she lives in the new apartment now already for half a year, she is still dedicated to decorating it. The fact that she takes her time with this reflects the importance which this new home holds for her.

Sara is also in the process of creating a new home for herself. She will not move into a new apartment, but instead plans to modify her old one in order to make it her own. The first step she wants to undertake is to buy the apartment which she currently rents. Contrary to Elin, Sara will not abandon her student apartment and trade it in for a new one. Therefore she has no possibility to physically separate herself from her student home. Still, she differentiates clearly between her apartment back during studying time and her apartment now that she is working:

"Well, when I was a student I always saw my home as temporary, I didn't see it actually as a home. And you were also...you were studying, you were hanging out with your friends, so it did actually...weren't at home actually that much. And now I feel,

because of working, that I might be here for longer time and I feel like I need to make the place more home. I need to make it more me or...where I'm comfortable living." (Sara)

The same apartment seems to hold different meanings for Sara, meanings which are closely connected to her life situation. When she was a student, she saw the apartment more like a means of living, a place for sleeping, eating and keeping her things. Now that she is working, she feels an increased need to have, to create a home. Therefore she wants to make the apartment nicer and more comfortable by renovating and decorating it.

"It is a renting apartment, but I'm actually...hopefully I'm gonna be able to buy that apartment and when I've bought it I can do whatever I want with it and then I will paint the walls and that kind of stuff." (Sara)

Purchasing the apartment is the first step for Sara to create a home with her formerly not-home apartment. Renovating and decorating also help Sara change the meaning of her apartment from not-home to home. In addition, these activities allow individuals to claim possessions, here the apartment in particular, their own (McCracken, 1988b). Especially the renovation of furniture and respectively the personalization of them can be regarded as an attempt to transfer meaning from the individual's world to the furniture in questions (Ibid). Sara mentions that since she works, she needs to buy a lot of new things and in addition has to renovate a number of furniture so that she can "use them". Although the furniture were usable before in functional terms, Sara thinks it is necessary to personalize them and thereby transfer meanings from her new life to them. As she had these furniture before, during her studies, it is important for her to take away the old meanings they hold as they reflect her student life and do not fit with her new life, which is influenced by work entry.

When Sara describes her plans for the apartment in detail, it also becomes clear that she is less willing to make compromises now when it comes to her home:

"I'm more aware of my home. Like...lets say... furnishing, decoration... I bought a new bed, one of the first things that I bought when I started work. I...Today, I look much more on buying other furniture,, what do I like and like this stuff. I think I do spend more time...I don't spend more money, but I spend more time looking at it and trying to really figure out what I want, what I like...the bigger purchases in the near future would be the

re-furnishing and decoration of my apartment then and like buying a new TV, a new living-room table and that kind of stuff.” (Sara)

The renovation and decoration activities she plans are an exact implementation of her desires, ideas and wishes. Sara admits that she is “more aware” of her home. This implies that she is also more aware of the things she purchases for her home. Home aesthetics have become more important to her. This can be explained by the fact that things found in the home reflect the particular details of personal lives (McCracken, 2005). The home helps distinguish its inhabitants from other people and helps defining their identity by emphasizing the individuality of the individual (Ibid). Or, using the words of Forty (1986), in today’s society the home is the only effective signifier left for personal authenticity. Sara thus uses the renovation and decoration of her apartment to support her new identity which was modified since starting work. She wants her apartment to look exactly the way she wants it to and thereby emphasizes her individuality, distinguishing her from “the others”.

As in the public working life one has to make a lot of compromises, the desire to design home only according to own wishes and ideas increases. Gustav is another good example for this. As already brought up earlier on, back in his student days he made a lot of compromises regarding the furnishing of his home. The most important thing was that the furniture fulfilled their purpose. But now that he works and he can afford buying nice furniture, he stresses that everything in his new apartment has to match: couch, couch table, carpet and TV are all chosen to fit each other. He even notes a change in his feelings towards his home:

“I’m happier. I am...hmmm...I guess I’m starting to feel more at home now when I do come home. Cause before it was just...you know...just walking along the path towards where I am now. It was just transportation.” (Gustav)

As mentioned before, this increased attention to the home in general and growing consumption of home-related products in particular is connected to the wish to individualize the home. This individualization helps distinguishing oneself from the outer world and supports the division of

working and private life as well. In addition to the obvious spatial division between work and private life, it seems that respondents want to additionally separate themselves from work life by highly personalizing their homes. They seek for a home that reflects exclusively their ideas without having to make any compromises like in their other life, the working life. This can also be related to the idea of home as a safe place to hide from the outside world: McCracken (2005) sees hominess as a tool for individuals to free themselves of the burdens created by status and society.

Contrary to the other interviewees, Tim does not show any special interest in his home. He has not bought anything special for the new home he moved in when starting working except of some IKEA furniture which he took over from the previous tenant. He focuses explicitly on the practical advantages that led to this purchase:

"The new apartment's furniture are still from IKEA, but just took over it from the guy, who left my room. So I just bought it from him, so I didn't have to move all my stuff from Dortmund to Frankfurt." (Tim)

As mentioned earlier on, Tim is a special case since he moved through a part of the transition from student to work life, but then decided to go back to studying. He is thus now in a reverse transition phase from work life to student. Earlier on the examples of Elin, Sara and Gustav demonstrated how the focus of the decoration of home shifted from purely functional purposes to more individualization and personalization related ones. Tim however, although he is still working right now, is mentally already back on the road heading towards study life once more. This is reflected in his choice of home and home decoration. He wants something practical that fulfils its purpose, and does not long for creating a "real home" yet.

All in all it is apparent that in the transition from student to working life, the meaning and importance of home changes significantly. While during study time the home was seen as a functional means to fulfill practical purposes, it is after work entry used as a tool for individualization. Moreover, the home supports the division of working and private life as well.

Me, myself and all the things I want

It is not only in the increased purchase and consumption of home aesthetics that the desire to express and to realize one's own ideas came up during the interviews. Many of these desires and ideas, also referred to as passions, arose during student time, but had to be suppressed due to a lack of monetary resources. Gustav for example states that his shopping behavior has definitely changed since he started working. Now that he has a fixed income in form of his monthly salary, he buys what he likes and lives his passions:

"I have all these passions in my life I've been thinking about, but well...now when I have the money, there is nothing else really stopping me. And then I will just...yeah, I mean I am an impulsive buyer. I'm not gonna lie, but if those two factors are for me important, like its exactly what I wanted and its something that I'm interested in and I have the money plus... so I can still enjoy the normal life and yeah probably buy." (Gustav)

According to Belk et al. (2003), desire is the motivating force behind much of contemporary consumption. They see desire not only as an emotion directed towards one specific object, but also as a process during which emotions can change. This process is referred to as the "cycle of desire". The initial course of the cycle involves what they call self-seductive imagination and active cultivation of desire. The desiring individual cultivates desire and maintains it until the desired object is acquired or until desire is given up due to recognition of the fact that it is impossible to fulfill this specific desire (Ibid). Especially the idea of cultivating desire is very interesting. Desire is cultivated and maintained by the process of enhancing emotions through imaginative elaboration. Individuals imagine what it would be like to possess the object of desire.

Gustav is a good example when it comes to desires and the fulfillment of them. One of his desires which he satisfied after work entry is the previously mentioned purchase of an espresso machine. Although he already became interested in coffee and related merchandise when he was a student, it was until entering working life when he "lived" this passion by

purchasing a very expensive espresso machine. This espresso machine was a desired object throughout Gustav's whole study time. He desired the espresso machine for almost four years. Although he could not buy the machine when he was a student, he cultivated the desire for the machine by already browsing through shops and websites, checking out the different models available. This helped maintaining the desire for the espresso machine. Once the desired object is obtained, there are two possible reactions of the individual: either the object loses its desirability or the desire is recycled. Belk et al. (2003) mention smoking cigarettes, going out to a favorite restaurant, making love to a beloved one and going skiing as examples for recyclable desires. It is notable that all these recyclable desires are more focused on the activity in which the object of desire is involved rather than only the object itself. Gustav's espresso machine is an example of a recyclable desire:

"I mean it's to wake up and the first thing you go to do is to put on your fresh coffee beans and you grind them and you make an espresso... Its priceless to me, I'm not... I can't put a price tag on that. It's something that keeps with me all the day. Same when I come home, I make an espresso again..." (Gustav)

Every morning and every evening, he recycles his desire for the espresso machine by making coffee with it. Thereby he keeps the desire for his machine alive although the main object of desire, the machine itself, has been acquired already. In addition, he visits workshops about coffee-making and buys add-ons for the machine. It is more the process of the espresso-making which he desires now than the actual tool, the machine. Still, as the espresso machine is inevitably connected to any improvement to be made in the espresso-making process, it remains desirable as it is an essential component.

Sara also has one recyclable desire - a bike. The purchase of this bike was the realization of a long-planned purchase, dating back to student life. The bike is connected to Sara's wish to participate in a competition called Swedish Classic. When she was a student, she lacked the equipment to participate. But when receiving her first salaries, she could finally realize this dream:

"We have this thing here in Sweden, called Swedish Classic. And...it's a....to get a Swedish Classic, you need to do four different races. It's a running race, it's a swim race, it's a cross-country skiing race and a bicycle race. I always wanted to do this Swedish Classic, but when I was a student, because you have to have skis, you have to have a bike, so you have to have all this. I can't afford...I could do it, but it would be really-really hard completing it, because I really couldn't afford all this equipment. So, of course I actually began this when I was a student, but completing it...this is the last race now, so...I'm completing it now. And of course I feel like it's much easier completing it now when I'm working so that I can actually buy the bike. Instead of buying a used one or try to borrow one or something like that." (Sara)

This desire is recyclable as every time she rides the bike, she feels satisfaction and fulfillment.

Tim shows patterns of the other possible reaction to the fulfillment of a desire, being the loss of desirability of the object and the search for a new desire:

"Before I didn't have an mp3 player, then I bought one. (...) Later I bought an iPod in order to replace it...So it's a certain level of satisfying your needs and it's going higher and higher. So you are just replacing existing levels in order to exceed the old level." (Tim)

The object of desire, an mp3 player, was purchased and in the following lost its appeal for Tim. He found a new player he wanted instead, an iPod. In the specific case of transition from student to work life, the increasing economic resources enable individuals to identify new objects of desire which are on a higher level than the previous ones. This replacement of objects by higher-level versions can also be related to the Diderot effect. The Diderot effect refers to a force that encourages individuals to maintain a cultural consistency in the complement of consumer goods (McCracken, 1988b), or simply put: it is about the idea that some goods go together and match and some do not. The effect operates in three ways: it prevents goods that do not match with the existing set of possessions of a person from entering, can be used in the contrary way to supply individuals with goods that include disruptive meanings and thirdly can force the creation of an entirely new set of possessions (Ibid). The latter is especially interesting for the analysis of transitional individuals. When the Diderot effect operates in such a way that it leads to the purchase of new matching sets of goods, this is usually started by what McCracken (1988b) calls a departure purchase. This refers to the first good purchased that does not fit into the

existing usual pattern of consumption. In Tim's case, this departure purchase was a MacBook which was among the purchases from his first salaries and was definitely on a "higher level" than his other possessions.

According to McCracken (1988b) an individual can be moved to making this departure purchase by new circumstances. Things like movement from job to job and progress in the life cycle can be new contexts favoring the purchase of a good which does not fit into the usual consumption pattern. The Diderot effect is often connected to an upward movement of individuals in terms of status and economic wealth (Ibid). The departure purchase is of higher monetary value and can force the goods around it to conform to the higher standards it sets. A gravitational pull is created which results in the following purchases being matched with the departure purchase. Piece by piece all goods are replaced with ones that are conform to the departure purchase (Ibid). This is also evident in Tim's case: He moved from student to working life and purchased the MacBook that did not fit into his usual student consumption pattern. Supported by the increase in monetary resources, the MacBook inspired the slow replacement of Tim's other possessions, such as the iPod which replaced an ordinary mp3 player.

Peter seems to be affected by the Diderot effect as well. Similar to Tim and Gustav, he recognizes a change in his consumption since entering working life, especially in his shopping behavior for groceries. When he was a student, he was very price-sensitive and opted for food discounters although he did not like them. Now that he has more money due to working, he considers new shops and new products:

"As a student I was really aware of prices in food and clothes and now I buy food that I like and clothes that I like. I don't really like to go to LIDL, because I don't like how they handle their fruit and vegetables. Now I go to stores that I prefer, not to LIDL, Willys, Netto, those kinds of stores. It is not because of price but because I don't support how they handle their products. (...) I know that I can buy more things now, so I have opened a new door, now I have more options and I can buy things that I couldn't before, more money, a wider choice." (Peter)

When he was a student, he could only buy a very limited amount of groceries at the supermarkets he liked, the rest he had to purchase at for him unfavorable stores like LIDL. Now that he has more money, he replaces the groceries from discounters with products from higher-end stores like ICA.

In general, the first period in working life seems to also be a time for realizing the self and long-suppressed desires. This time stands in a way for being selfish and focusing on one's individuality before own wants and needs are sacrificed in the process of starting a family. Elin refers to this by stating that right now, it is not the time to think about children and family, but rather enjoy life by doing whatever one wants:

"(...) I do not think of marriage or children. Right now it is more like the period in life when you can buy these flowers on the way home. And when you can, you know, go and have coffee." (Elin)

Discussion

In line with the hermeneutical approach which this study takes, it was not sufficient to identify and analyze the above introduced six different themes individually in order to fulfill the purpose of this study. Instead it became apparent that it is also necessary to look for reasons lying behind these consumption patterns and linkages between the themes. By doing this, a number of tendencies, more specifically identity movements, were discovered which will be discussed in detail in this chapter. In addition to these identity movements, new important insights into the structure of the transition process itself were also gained which are presented in the following.

The Transition Process

With regards to the different transition stages, Bridges (2004) has acknowledged that beginning and ending, as well as the order can vary depending on the individual. This can also be observed in this study where for example Peter is still in the ending and Gustav already in the beginning phase of transition despite the fact that external factors such as length of work life have been similar for both. Regarding the trigger for transition, CCT studies have mainly considered it as being external, usually a life-changing event. However, in the course of this study it became clear that the specific transition from student to work life is mostly internally initiated and that the internal triggering of transition can happen a lot earlier than the external event. Participants such as Gustav and Sara are the most striking examples where the inner reorientation and the inner "ending process", which mark the beginning of the transition as Bridges (2004) phrases it, start already way before the actual event of graduation from university.

Gustav for example started his transition process already in the beginning of his study life. When becoming a student, he had in mind that studying

was only a tool to achieve his real goal, entering work life and earning money. He accepted his rather limited lifestyle during student time, knowing that it would only be the "transport time" to bring him where he wants to be, namely in working life. Gustav had already built up his desires, while he was a student, only waiting for the moment he would be able to "follow through". In the case of Sara, transition was triggered not as early as in Gustav's case, but still a significant period of time before the external event of graduation. During the final year of her studies Sara changed significantly. She was thinking about her future job and went through the anxieties of how she could fit in and contribute to work environment. Back then, she already changed her habits and lifestyle towards a daily working life structure, which consisted of studies and some workout as opposed to partying and hanging out with friends. The fact that she was looking for jobs - and also got a job - already during her last year at university supported her awareness of the end of study life and reflected a slow shift from a student to a young professional mentality.

The specific characteristics of the study-work transition or the already mentioned fact that in today's society everyone is expected to work after graduation, might explain that this transition phase is not bound to the actual external trigger of graduation, but often starts a long time before that. More generally, the transition stages seem quite independent from the actual occurrences of external events like graduation and job entry and should rather be regarded as initiated internally. Thus the transition phase should not be considered as embracing the time after the key event but instead needs to include a substantial period of time before and after this event as well.

The second main finding regarding the transition process itself is that a "reverse transition" seems to be possible in this specific transition under the condition that the individual has not advanced too far in the process yet. The example of Tim shows this well: he consciously decided to go back to study, even though he has been working since one year and has already

closed the ending phase of his study to work transition. However, he does not seem to fully commit to the new working situation. Although he claims to feel more comfortable in his job now, he is not satisfied with his situation and still goes away every weekend to visit old friends and family. With his decision to study again, he stops the transition process. Two possible scenarios could be imagined. The first possibility is that he will either remain in some kind of neutral state until he starts studying again. Supporting this is the fact that he is not planning to upgrade or invest in his apartment because he knows he will leave again and mentally already prepares to return to a student budget. The other scenario possible is for Tim to find himself in some reverse state of the transition, thus more and more separating from everything that is related to working life and his role in that, ultimately reaching an "old new beginning": his student identity. The discussion on reverse transition is especially of interest, considering that in today's society the border between education and work is not that distinct anymore and the way back to studies after some time spent working is quite common.

Consumption Changes and Identity Movements

The six themes which emerged from the collected interview data present several aspects of changing consumption. Some of these findings support previous studies and others provide new insights. The latter is mainly achieved because of the specific characteristics of the transition from student to work-life which has not been studied before. Six different "identity movements" are detected which arise from the analysis across the previously discussed themes.

From restricted to unrestricted

When describing their consumption practices, respondents notified an evident upgrading in everyday consumption. They regarded this upgrading

as something natural that they expected from their new life situation. While during study time consumption was often restricted by missing financial resources, the advent of a fixed salary upon work entry signals the beginning of a rather unrestricted consumption. The changed lifestyle is mainly characterized by quality food preferences or more expensive labels. Treating themselves with better products allows them to enjoy daily life, in this time without feeling any guilt of increased spending. The meanings which products carry are used by consumers to define themselves (McCracken, 1988b): for example buying organic food or changing from frozen packaged food to fresh products is seen by respondents to be more aligned with the new role of young professionals.

These findings support Andreasen's (1984) study, which state that transitional people are more open to changes in their consumption and brand preferences. Besides changes in their smaller everyday consumption activities, such as doing groceries or eating out, adjustments are also made in other areas such as buying new clothes, furniture or technology, which, according to respondents, needed changing because of their new role in life. It becomes evident in this study that transitional people use consumption activities and lean on social meanings of products in order to cope with the novel role of young professional and support their new identity (Solomon, 1983; Schouten, 1991). As a participant in work life, financial resources are no longer restricted as it was the case during study time. Together with the changes in role and social environment this leads to the adaptation of a new consumption style, an unrestricted consumption style.

From functional to aesthetic

In alignment with changing product preferences and taste adaptation, the Diderot effect (McCracken, 1988b) can be discovered, which in this study is especially evident when buying one product sets off another row of

purchases. The purchase of the first product, named the departure product, is often identified to accompany new situations, especially when it brings along upward movements in status and economic wealth (Ibid). It is interesting to notice Gustav's discussion in which he brings out that there were things which were acceptable for him when he was a student, such as non-matching furniture or cutlery. But now that he started working, he feels that it is necessary that everything matches and therefore gradually replaces things according to his taste. An interesting shift from the appreciation of practical value towards valuing more aesthetic value can be noted not only with Gustav, but also with other respondents. According to Featherstone (2007), aestheticization is one of the major processes in late capitalist societies. He even talks about it as the aestheticization of everyday life, in which aesthetics have become an informal duty to follow. The increased attention to aesthetics is especially evident in respondents' description of their homes. All of them have been engaged in a number of decoration and renovation efforts since working life was entered, aiming to upgrade from their rather functional student housing to an aesthetically more appealing and accepted home. This is in line with Corrigan's (1997) statement that aesthetics are among the key values in nowadays homes and one's choice of furnishing and home decoration can display the core values of the person. The shift from practical to aesthetic function of furniture is directly affected by the change of one's role in the society: the meaning of furniture to people tends to depend on one's position in the life cycle (Ibid). As the transition from student to work life brings with it a new social position, the one of young professional, expectations from society also shift. By the aestheticization of both their homes and their everyday life, these young people try to satisfy the changing expectations and strive to perform well in their new social role.

From "financed me" to "earning me"

Especially in the theme of "more money, more problems" it becomes apparent that money plays a central role for people in transit from student to work life. Obviously the increase in monetary resources and the ability to consume more, new and different things excite individuals. In addition, with the increased money available to young professionals, also the (perceived) responsibilities grow. New expenses like insurance and tax arise which were previously either paid by someone else or non-existent. These aspects influence the changed appreciation of money that is shown by new entrants to work life: money is appreciated a lot and is perceived to be "earned". This modified relationship towards money can also be seen in the light of Belk's theory of the extended self (1988) and McCracken's (1988b) theory that individuals personalize things to make them their own. During study time, the money which was used to pay for everything was mainly "financed money", coming from the state, parents or similar sources. This money could have been regarded as "foreign money" as students were only passively involved in it. They did not take part in the "production" of money, but only received and spent it. Upon entry of working life, for the first time a proper salary is received that enables the individual to finance life entirely on his or her own. The relationship to money has changed; it can now be characterized as closer and is filled with more emotions and meanings. The earned money is now seen as "own money" as the individual has actively taken part in its production. Through this involvement, money is personalized and thereby claimed one's own (McCracken, 1988b). It is regarded as a possession now. The "financed me" has been transformed into the "earning me" through obtaining a salary and economic wealth.

From commodification to decommodification

The above discussed intensified relationship to money can also be linked to a shift in attitude towards possessions in general: During study time possessions seem to play only a secondary role for people. This is for example expressed by the indifference interviewees demonstrated towards the furniture in their student homes. In line with the "foreign money" logic mentioned above, one could assume that this furniture were not regarded as one's own possessions as they were either received as gifts or bought from other people's money. It is hard to relate to things obtained like this as own possessions and therefore the relation to most objects from the student time remains quite neutral. This is supported by the fact that interviewees were not explicitly keen on keeping goods from their student time. Study time possessions are often replaced without any sentimental feelings once working life is entered and the increased economic resources allow for their replacement. This finding contrasts with a number of transition studies which notified that transitional people are attached to objects representing their previous life situation. These objects are assumed to ease the transition period. For example adolescents leaving home to go to college often brought along teddy bears or other symbols representing their childhood (Noble and Walker, 1997) or Indian immigrants in the USA relied on possessions for representing their roots (Mehta and Belk, 1991). In this study however, the young people tended to only keep their experiences from student life as memories and did not show significant emotional attachment to objects representing their student life worth. Instead they seemed more interested in changing them to fit better to the new life instead.

In addition, the theme "me, myself and all the things I want" also offers an explanation for the stronger relationship to possessions in work life which contrasts with the rather neutral attitude towards them in study times. As mentioned earlier on, the first period upon entrance of working life seems to be a time to focus on the self, on being individual. This time is used by

people to define themselves, to find their individuality and, if necessary, reinvent themselves. It seems that work entry coupled with the fact that money, responsibility and independence reach a level that has never been reached before, enables persons to, reinvent themselves completely for the first time in their lives. This does not mean that an entire reinvention necessarily takes place. It is more the possibility that is of importance. Although in this period of time the focus is clearly on the individuality, the external environment still influences all developments. People still compare themselves to others and react to cues from the external environment. However, at the same time they show higher levels of self reflection and focus on their own desires, resulting in high levels of involvement in consumption decisions. Through this high involvement level, the obtained objects are perceived as closely connected to the self. Thereby the relationship to possessions grows stronger than it was during study life. Summing up, it can be assumed that possessions back in the study time were mainly regarded as commodities, things which merely had use- and exchange-values. This changes once working life is entered and things are obtained with own financial means and high personal involvement. Purchased commodities are decommodified and receive a biography, a new meaning that sets them apart and makes them unique (Corrigan, 1997). The view of possessions as commodities held during study time is replaced by the decommodification of objects upon work entry.

From detached to attached

The assumption that the student to work transition is the first big transition in people's life that allows for a complete personal reinvention is also supported by the notion of "creating a home". As discussed earlier on, during the study time home was often looked at only as a functional means. It can be argued that both social environment and the parents' home were perceived as "home" instead. This also helps explaining the neutral relationship to possessions during study time. When starting studying,

for the first time the young people left their homes and were able to explore the world on their own. Although a room or apartment was rented for eating and sleeping, the parents' home managed to keep its meaning as the "real home". The new home was seen as a tool on the way to work life and regarded as temporary. This could also explain why interviewees seemed to not really connect to or care about their home back in the student days: due to the temporary nature of it, they simply did not feel any desire or need to attach or commit to something.

Instead, they enjoyed being (at least partly) detached for the first time from what had been their environment for almost two decades. This period of detachment lasts throughout the whole study time, but is likely to start fading in the final part of studies giving room to the next period of life which starts roughly around work entry. In this time individuals feel an increased desire to attach to something, for example to their homes. This is reflected in the purchase of apartments and extensive redecoration activities of flats. By buying and decorating their domicile, individuals do not only create a home that expresses and supports their new identity, but they also commit to this home. Purchase and renovation are costly processes, both regarding time and money, and do therefore require a certain level of commitment. Once they have entered working life, the formerly detached young people start attaching themselves again through the means of consumption.

From one life to two lives

Another central finding of this study which proved to indirectly influence all consumption changes appearing in the transition phase is the increased division of life which is closely connected to the phenomenon of stress and no stress. Usually one can assume that the level of stress increases upon entry of working life due to increased levels responsibility and work load. Not surprisingly, this increase in stress was also noted by some of the

interviewees. However, interestingly a contrasting development was also detected among the remaining respondents. These persons stated to have experienced a decrease in stress since they started working.

This decrease in stress can be regarded as closely related to the structuring of time. While studying, the young people were in charge of structuring all their time. Their life was perceived as a wholesome unit, merging social and study environment together. As there was no clear division between study and social time, they felt increased levels of pressure and guilt as they always had the feeling that they could study a little bit more, even on weekends. Now as they are working, a fair share of their time is structured by someone else, the companies they work for. As they are job starters, many of their tasks have an operative character rather than a strategic one and they might not be responsible for other people just now. Therefore these persons are concerned about work only during working hours and when they are finished, they feel free. The time "after work" should be time just for them and they have drawn a strong line between work and leisure time. Consumption is used to separate these lives from each other and allows people to step from one world to another, e.g. by wearing different clothes.

The division of one life into two contrasts with postmodern theory which sees the boundary between work and private life as increasingly blurry nowadays (e.g. Thompson and Tambyah, 1999). Largely influenced by the introduction of advanced information and communication systems, work can be carried out in a variety of places, including the home. Through the inclusion of work activities in the home setting, the private life sphere is seen as being mixed with the one of working life. This study shows the direct opposite: the young people in this research actively separate their work from their private life and make sure these lives do not mingle. This separation shows certain similarities with the work-leisure division following the capitalist industrialization. Back then, many production activities were shifted from home to factories with the home becoming the site of

domesticity (Corrigan, 1997). As “one was only oneself outside work”, the home “became a central component in the creation and upholding of one’s ‘real’ self” (Ibid: 97). It was very important that there was no hint of the working environment to be found within the home. Although the separation process of work and private life in the industrialization case seems similar to that of the here studied young work entrants, this does not necessarily mean that the motives for this separation are the same as well. It is for example possible that with increasing age and experience in work life, the strict division of work and private becomes weakened and the imposed boundaries start fading away. An explanation for this could be that in the first phase following work entry, these young people are still insecure in the new social role as professionals due to lack of experience. But, with time passing by, they feel more comfortable with their role as they grow more familiar with the changed norms and expectations of the social environment. Once anxiety and insecurity start to disappear, so could the need to separate work and private life as well. Still, the first period in working life is dedicated to a division of the former united life into two lives by using consumption as a separation tool.

In summary, the discussion above on consumption changes and identity movements has managed to discover, which reasons lay behind the consumption themes and in what way the transition affects the identity of the participants. The consumption changes, which are the obvious and the observable ones mostly influenced directly by the external factors of higher income and different social environment, “mirror” what happens during the transition internally: the identity movements. This logic of consumption themes and identity movements is shortly summarized in the table below.

Identity Movements	Consumption Themes
<p style="text-align: center;">from detached to attached</p> <p>(After a period of detachment, the individual</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ creating a home ▪ investing in the new me

increasingly feels the need to get attached to his/her new environment.)	
<p style="text-align: center;">from “financed me” to “earning me”</p> <p>(The advent of a fixed salary enables the individual to finance him/herself, resulting in a shift towards a more responsible, but also more independent self.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ more money more problems ▪ a little bit extra ▪ investing in the new me ▪ me, myself and all the
<p style="text-align: center;">from one life to two lives</p> <p>(Upon work entry, life is split up into a working and a private part. Although the individual strives to adapt to the new social role in work life, the private life is still protected from external influences.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ consuming for the private ▪ creating a home
<p style="text-align: center;">from commodification to decommodification</p> <p>(The individual stops viewing objects as commodities and develops a sense of belonging for new purchases as the self is now stronger reflected and present in possessions.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ me, myself and all the things I want
<p style="text-align: center;">from functional to aesthetical</p> <p>(Influences of the social environment and the changing norms, values and expectations become apparent as the individual tries to live up to those new standards by an aestheticization of life. The changing taste is part of the recreation of identity, shifting from student identity to the one of young professional.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ investing in the new me ▪ creating a home ▪ me, myself and all the things I want
<p style="text-align: center;">from restricted to unrestricted</p> <p>(For the first time, the individual has the possibility for a complete identity re-creation. The identity created is a strong and self-centered one which aims to fulfill all previously suppressed desires.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ a little bit extra ▪ me, myself and all the things I want

Table 1: Identity Movements

Source: own table

Conclusion

This study contributes to the previous body of research about transition by focusing on the specific transition from student to work life. Thereby, this research responds to Hogg et al.'s (2004) call for further research to seek understanding of consumption and identity of transitional people in their first job. Justified by the notion that people in transition periods are more likely to change their product preferences (Andreasean, 1984) and use consumption as a tool to support the new role, as well as to construct a stable and harmonious identity (Schouten, 1991; Solomon, 1983), this study confirms these findings and contributes with new insights derived from the specific characteristics of the student-work transition.

The findings of this study contribute to Consumer Culture Theory by enriching two of its domains: identity projects and sociohistoric patterning of consumption. In the first domain which analyzes how the individual creates a sense of him/herself through marketplace interactions, this study can enrich Belk's (1988) notion of the individual that defines him/herself by possessions. The relationship to possessions, which has been identified to influence most of the consumption themes, changes in the transition from student to work life. The idea that possessions become more valuable, the more the individual extends his/herself into it has been observed in two ways. Firstly, people who earn own money for the first time start considering it more as a possession, since it is more personalized by own efforts. Secondly, this earned money is gained in times of first real independency from former commitments to parents as well as from future ones to possible families, which creates a strong platform for identity reinvention. Thus, the new possessions are more important in presenting the identity than the ones in the former life situation. This stronger relationship to possessions is not only the reason for certain identified consumption changes, but also highlights several identity movements. The individual in transition becomes

more independent, but also more responsible through these “earned possessions”. He/she develops a stronger sense of belonging to his/her possessions and thus decommodifies them. Moreover the individual moves from a time of detachment into one of new attachment and adapts to a more aesthetic taste in order to create a more “professional” identity.

The above mentioned professional identity also stands for a new role in society. The participants’ attempt to take on this new professional role in society reflects Schouten’s (1991) idea that consumption in transition times is used to adapt to new roles. This notion can be extended by the finding that the individual consciously consumes differently to separate the private and professional life roles, becoming apparent in both, daily consumption and major investments in their homes. By modifying consumption the individual creates two life structures which were formerly united as one during study time.

The second domain this study contributes to, the patterning of consumption, tries to find other ways than the traditional marketing segmentation criteria to understand common consumption behavior within certain groups in the marketplace. The idea is that consumption is influenced by social structures such as class, community, ethnicity and gender. However, these categories can still be considered as rather static. This study shows that people in transition can also present a group embracing common consumption behavior. Thus, it contributes by highlighting the value of the non-stable process of transition as a means to understand common consumption patterns within a certain group of people.

With regards to the transition process, this study shows that transition can start in some cases even a considerable amount of time before the external event of graduation. This is a fairly new approach for a study within CCT, since so far research in this field has mainly focused on external life-changing events. Based on this finding, an analysis of transition processes and thus the framework for transition phases should consider both, the time

before and after the key event. Another insight which has been gained by reflecting the internal perspective into this CCT study is the existence of a “reverse transition”. This phenomenon has been discovered as the internal decision to stop the transition process, caused by the wish to go back to study again after entering the work life.

The relevance of the study-work transition for businesses, due to its importance in the development of identity and personality (Levinson, 1978; Blustein, 1997), has been confirmed by the finding that people in this transition are most influenceable in this time of selfishness and individuality, where they experience for the first time in their life the combination of increasing financial means, independence and responsibility. However, the desires which are realized with the help of their first salaries have often been formed already early in the transition process, thus mostly before the actual external event of graduation occurs. Even without being in the new social environment yet, the individual already imagines how his/her life will look like after the transition and therewith already builds up desires. Consequently, the implication for businesses is to capture the attention of people in study-work transition already in the first phase of the transition process, thus before graduation, and to address them by focusing on their desires expressing individuality and selfishness.

The first limitation of this study is affected by the fact that transition can be a relatively long process, but since this research has been conducted during a rather short time span, respondents in this study were interviewed only once within their transition period. Another limitation caused by resource restrictions is the single source of interviews as empirical data. Although the style of the interviews allowed gaining more in-depth reflections of the individual, it mainly reflects how the interviewee wants to be presented. Finally, in order to prevent influences of cultural bias, the study has focused on the Western and Northern European culture, which might limit the generalizability with regard to other cultures.

The discussion above on limitations leads to several future research suggestions within the topic of study-work transitions. A longitudinal study, researching the people in transition at several times in the process could give more insight on the specific state of changes in each transition phase. In order to overcome the restriction of “filtered” information by the interviewee, other sources of empirical data such as observation and diaries or even interviews with people which have a close relation to the transitional individuals, family members or friends, could provide further insights. Another suggestion derived from the limitations is to conduct the same study in South Europe, where this specific transition might be of a different nature due to the reason that even after graduation it is quite common to still live at home with family. Another future research idea triggered by the study’s findings could be to look into the discussion whether transitional people are likely to dispose and replace possessions representing their student times rather than using them as means to go through transition. Finally, the discovered phenomenon of “reverse transition” presents a promising research opportunity, especially taking into consideration the fact that in nowadays society going back to studies is quite common.

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Appendix

Information on Participants

Name*	Gustav	Peter	Elin
Age	25	25	25
Education	4 ½ year degree in engineering at Karlskrona University	4 ½ year degree in engineering at Karlskrona & Lund University	4 ½ year degree in engineering at Lund University
Occupation	Consultant in mechanical engineering	Mechanical engineer	Biotechnological engineer
Time in job	1 ¼ years (February 2008)	1 year (April 2008)	5 months (November 2008)
Background	He comes from Värmland. After the studies in Karlskrona, he moved to Malmö and looked for a job there, because it is closer to Denmark and therefore the gate of Europe. Since then he lives with his girlfriend in Malmö.	He comes from Värmland. He changed from Karlskrona to Lund University to continue his studies, because of his girlfriend living in Malmö. He did his thesis at a small start up company and got a job offer from them. He went to Italy for a trainee period of 6 months and came back to live in his former apartment in Malmö working for the same company. He only recently finished his last exam to graduate officially. The 4th of May he is going to start a new job in Helsingborg.	She is from the middle of Sweden. She always thought of studying in Lund. Her parents are from Skane, her grandmother lives there and the brother studied there. She chose engineering because it is so broad, one has many possible directions. She plays volleyball for three years in the Lund team.
Transition phase	"the beginning"	"the ending"	"the beginning"

Name*	Steve	Sara	Daniel
Age	23	24	25
Education	4 year BA and MA in Economics in Sheffield England and in Entrepreneurship at Lund University	4 year BA and MA degree in business administration at Lund University	4 ½ year degree in engineering at Umeå university
Occupation	Commercial graduate program in the ship broking department (tankers). The trainee program takes 2 years is very flexible but foresees further employment.	Trainee program: Female Accelerate Program which includes working in 3 different companies, with a total duration of 18 months.	Technical support in the IT department of a call centre.
Time in job	7 months (September 2008)	8 months (August 2008)	3 months (February 2009)
Background	His mother was born in Gothenburg, he was born and raised in England, when he got 18 he thought to make an effort and go abroad. He went to Lund, liked it, met a girl and found the option of studying for free a master degree in Lund. Now thinking about buying an apartment in Malmö.	She comes from the middle of Sweden. Already chose the business branch in upper-secondary school. She won the female Accelerate Program Traineeship. She hopes to get a job in any of these three companies to keep on working and stay in the area of Lund. She started to train for the Swedish Classic and spends most of her money on sports gear.	He studied in Umeå, took a year off after the third year of studies to travel to Australia, Asia and New Zealand. He moved down to Malmö to write his master thesis for a company in Copenhagen, where he works until today.
Transition phase	"the beginning"	"the beginning"	"the neutral zone"

Name*	Tim
Age	24
Education	3 year BA degree in business communication at Business School in Dortmund
Occupation	Communication consultant
Time in job	1 year (May 2008)
Background	He was born in Poland, in the part which formerly belonged to Germany and his parents moved to Germany when he was 3 years old. He spent 19 years of his life in Duisburg and then moved to Dortmund for his university studies. When he started studying in Dortmund, the first couple of months he still lived at home with his parents, but then got tired of traveling every day and traffic jams. Couple of months after his graduation he moved to work in Frankfurt. His plan is to go back to studies to do his master.
Transition phase	"the neutral zone/ reverse transition"

* For all respondents in this study, pseudonyms are used.