

## **‘It Was Noticeable So I Changed’: Supergirls, Aspirations and Bourdieu**

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### **Abstract**

This chapter explores how Bourdieu’s concepts, used alongside an intersectional approach, assist in exploring how girls in secondary education negotiate a web of practices in order to achieve their aspirations. I found girls’ engagement with school can involve an adherence to symbolically violent requirements that necessitate an adaptation of the self in order to become the ‘supergirl’ that the dominant discourse purports them to be. Girls’ aspirations are tied to their understandings of the subjectivities that are seen to be available and this in part relies on their skill in playing the game. I demonstrate why Bourdieu’s concepts were relevant to my research, how I operationalized his concepts and intersectionality in relation to my empirical data, and how the concepts helped me to understand girls’ aspirations. The chapter concludes with a focus on one young woman, Zara, who adapted her accent and changed her friendship groups to become what she perceived as necessary to achieve her aspirations.

**Keywords:** Capital, social class, gender, secondary education, supergirl

### **Introduction**

In recent years girls have been positioned as winners in the educational game, often depicted as fulfilling their role as ‘good pupils’ who, through hard work, are able to achieve success in

the schooling system (see Mendick, Allen and Harvey 2015). Educational success is embodied by the ‘supergirl’ who is ‘popular, well adjusted, easy going, stress free, college [university] bound, and beyond oppression’ (Pomerantz, Raby and Stefanik 2013: 191). Allen reflects on how this discourse has crystallized the configuration of the ‘top girls’, who she argues are depicted as ‘central figures in propagating the neoliberal dream of upward social mobility’ (2016: 807). Upward social mobility also requires the so-called supergirl to have ‘high’ aspirations in line with a doxic expectation that she will invest in herself through her schoolwork and extracurricular activities to ensure that she remains a competitor in ‘the game’. The game is constituted by the social practices required to be successful within certain fields; these practices are not equally accessible to all competitors.

Studies which draw on intersectionality are concerned with identifying, discussing and addressing the ways that systems of inequity, including sexism, racism and class bias, intersect to produce complex relations of power and (dis)advantage (Crenshaw 1991; Cho, Crenshaw and McCall 2013). Race, class and gender do not operate as distinct categories of experience but are lived conjointly (Crenshaw 1991) and should be understood as complex, multiple and dynamic. To understand the formation of girls’ aspirations as gendered and classed across social and cultural contexts, I operationalize intersectionality. The supergirl status presents a misconception of girls as ‘evidence of meritocracy at work’ (Shain 2013), which marginalizes intersectional differences and stratified levels of attainment, so that ‘persistent gender (as well as class and race) inequalities’ are conveniently ignored (Allen 2016: 807). The problematic nature of the ‘successful girls’ discourse (see e.g. Harris and Dobson 2015; McRobbie 2009) compelled me to undertake research that explored how girls ‘do’ education and how they perceive their aspirations (Bowers-Brown 2015, 2016).

Bourdieu discusses how different fields operate as ‘games in themselves’, each with their own logic requiring players to operationalize different capitals. Therefore, the practices

required to be successful in a particular field are tied to the familiarity of the habitus in that field, in this instance the schooling system. The odds of successfully negotiating the field of formal schooling are stacked heavily in favour of those whose habitus has been structured by an accumulation of capitals within primary socialization (in the home). As Bourdieu asserts: ‘the earlier a player enters the game and the less he is aware of the associated learning ... the greater is his ignorance of all that is tacitly granted through his investment in the field’ (1990: 67). The misrecognition of what is tacitly granted allows the field of schooling to be seen as a ladder enabling upward social mobility, offering an equal opportunity of success to all those who work hard, when in fact it often does the opposite, ‘reproducing the condition of its own perpetuation’ (Bourdieu 1990: 67). This reproduction occurs because the inequalities that skew the game in favour of those with a practical sense for the game are not addressed by policy makers as a structural issue of inequality, rather as an individual deficit (Spohrer, Stahl and Bowers-Brown 2017).

In this chapter I explore how the expectations of the supergirl subject position are perpetuated by practices of formal schooling. I draw on data from discussions I had with girls in one state co-educational comprehensive secondary school, Greenlea, in the North of England (see also Bowers-Brown 2016). I did not wish to explore the differences between boys’ and girls’ aspirations; instead, I aimed to explore how girls ‘do’ education and how this relates to their aspirations. I drew upon Bourdieu’s theories along with an intersectional approach which enabled me to think beyond my immediate interpretation of the girls’ talk and to understand their expectations of reaching their aspirations in the context of broader societal issues. In the next section I demonstrate how I came to use Bourdieu despite his relative lack of engagement with issues of gender.

## **Thinking Gender and Aspiration Through Bourdieu's Theory**

Although there is little engagement with gender in the corpus of Bourdieu's scholarship he does argue that there is a 'double-edged privilege' awarded to men which endows on them the capability to play social games which largely involve 'some form of domination'. This capability relies on skills which are 'socially instituted and instructed', inculcated early on through the 'rites of institution' (Bourdieu 2002a: 75). Dillabough confirms that 'male domination can be traced to historical ideas that are embodied by social actors in the present' (2004: 494). Although Bourdieu's evaluation of masculine domination still holds resonance in contemporary society, as Lovell recognizes there is also 'female-female domination across the lines of class' (2004: 50) and this is where my interest lies. Analysis drawing on intersectionality avoids reductionist attempts to claim homogeneity merely for categorical expediency. Furthermore, combining intersectionality with Bourdieu's theory of practice enabled me to think about both the individual, conceptions of femininity, and society in tandem and to understand how the system is inherently skewed to perpetuate middle-class advantage (Reay 2017).

Specifically, Bourdieu's theory of practice helped me to understand how girls' choices are situated in a web of opportunities that are influenced by their habitus, field and the capitals to which they have access:  $[(\text{habitus}) (\text{capital})] + (\text{field}) = \text{practice}$  (Bourdieu 1984: 101). This formula helped me to identify inequality that is concealed within practices, enabling a mode of interrogation that looks beyond individual deficit. To this end, I drew on both Bourdieu and an intersectional approach to demonstrate how inequalities exist in ways that compound intersectional disadvantage and indeed purposefully ensure the avoidance of 'instantaneous mechanical equilibria between agents' (Bourdieu 1986: 15).

By using Bourdieu's approach to forms of capital I was able, through my analysis, to identify the unequal distribution of valued capitals as well as the intersectional differences in the experiences of my participants. Both theoretical approaches, I believe, enabled me to understand how some girls rejected aspirations which were privileged by the school but that they perceived to be unattainable in favour of the probable: 'to refuse what is anyway denied and to will the inevitable' (Bourdieu 1990: 54), whilst others understood that there was a game to play and took deliberate action to ensure they remained competitors, continuing to participate in what Bourdieu terms the *illusio* (see Threadgold, this volume).

Like Bourdieu, my area of research is political, situated in a commitment to challenge inequality in educational opportunity and outcomes. For me, as a researcher, Bourdieu's (2002b) contention that 'sociology is a martial art' holds great resonance and has become central to my positionality. The role of sociology in defending those who face the greatest societal inequalities is integral to my beliefs about the need to highlight and make explicit systemic injustices. In working with these principles, my recent research has attempted to both employ and extend Bourdieu's theoretical concepts in order to offer explanations for the inequity that is evident across formal education systems in relation to process and outcomes (see e.g. Reay 2017; Morrin 2016; Stahl 2015; James 2015; Bathmaker et al. 2016).

Considering critical analysis of aspiration and how we conceptualize aspiration, I was particularly drawn to the work of Allen and Hollingsworth, who highlight that there is a 'deficit construction of aspiration which holds young people responsible for their own (lack of) ambition and (im)mobility in education and work' (2013: 501) rather than considering the structural factors that mean that their aspirations become difficult to achieve. Bourdieu's theory of practice and the relationship between habitus, field and the forms of capital ensures that success or failure is not attributed to individual excellence or deficit. Rather, Bourdieu's

theories address the power dynamics of institutions and the legitimacy bestowed on different experiences. As McKenzie argues, ‘Bourdieu’s model of capital exchange can expose the mechanisms of how power works to advantage some groups whilst disadvantaging others’ (2016: 31). Bourdieu’s approach, therefore, seemed appropriate in ensuring that my analysis did not lead to a hierarchical evaluation that reinforced deficit labels and notions of ‘escape’ from a working-class background (Francis and Hey 2009). In the next section I reflect on how I operationalized the combination of intersectionality and Bourdieu’s concepts.

### **Operationalizing Habitus, Field and the Forms of Capital**

Bourdieu uses the concept of habitus to refer to the non-reflective human actions that each person undertakes because of their ‘habitual expectations and assumptions’ (Crossley 2005: 108). Habitus is not enacted; it is an embodiment of certain behaviours and actions that are then undertaken without thought. Bourdieu writes that the habitus does not lead to considered behaviours, rather ‘spontaneity without consciousness or will’ (1990: 73). In relation to aspiration, habitus, as a tool, compelled me to question whether certain decisions would be ruled out by my participants before they were even considered either because of a perceived misalignment of the field with their habitus or due to no prior experience or knowledge of that field. Young people’s future choices may be limited to what appears probable if the options that are considered are determined by their familiarity. For the young women I spoke to in the sixth form this was not the case, whereas conversations I had with younger pupils indicated that subject choices were made at an early stage that would limit their options later on.

Nevertheless, for Bourdieu the ‘habitus becomes active in relation to a field, the same habitus can lead to very different practices and stances depending on the state of the field’

(Reay 2004: 432). As ‘fields’ become more familiar to an individual, their habitus will begin to acclimatize. Therefore, according to a Bourdieusian logic, practices may have to be adapted or indeed ‘performed’ in certain situations to compensate for the unfamiliarity, and these performances are not part of the habitus at the point of origin but are understood as part of the acclimatizing process or behaving as is seen fit for the particular logic of the field. These performances may go against the habitual actions of an individual in order to meet the expectations of those in the field.

In order to fully operationalize Bourdieu’s theory of practice, the researcher needs to adeptly consider habitus and field along with the forms of capital. The difference in possession and volume of capitals, Bourdieu argues, is what distinguishes the ‘conditions of existence’ of the different social classes. As well as social, economic and cultural capital, Bourdieu also refers to the closely associated ‘academic capital’ or the ‘guaranteed product of the combined effects of cultural transmission by the family and cultural transmission by the school (the efficiency of which depends on the amount of cultural capital directly inherited from the family)’ (Bourdieu 1984: 23). Considering academic capital, I found, is important to the study of the supergirl phenomenon because supergirl status assumes high volumes of academic capital. The influences on aspirations for the girls in my study could not then be isolated to their schooling experience and I had to find different ways of asking them about life outside of school.

## **Methodology and the Study**

In *The Weight of the World* (1999), Bourdieu discusses how the writing up of method can often be misleading; it offers a précis of the research that was undertaken, formalizing the process which in reality may have been very different to the way it appears in the researcher’s

presentation. Bourdieu writes of the lack of usefulness of discussing the methodological principles of research, ‘often derived from the desire to imitate the external signs of the rigor of the most established scientific disciplines’ when in practice, as with my own research, this ‘does not do justice to what has been done’ (1999: 607).

Drawing on an interpretivist, qualitative approach in gathering my data I used a variety of methods to understand the formation of aspirations (see Bowers-Brown 2015, 2016). The research was undertaken in a comprehensive co-educational state-funded secondary school, which I have given the pseudonym ‘Greenlea’. The area where Greenlea Comprehensive School is situated is more affluent than its surrounding geographical areas; the school’s position in league tables is also higher than other schools within a five-mile radius. The sixth form, for pupils aged 16–18 who wish to pursue advanced level (A level) qualifications,<sup>1</sup> attracts pupils who have not previously attended the school. The school has high expectations of its pupils and a strong adherence to policies that support the school inspectorate’s expectations of outstanding academic achievement. The girls I observed and spoke with were aged 12–18, largely of white British ethnicity but of mixed socio-economic backgrounds; the sixth-form participants all self-identified as working class and spoke freely about the influence of their background on their aspirations.

In keeping with an intersectionality framework, my analysis recognizes the multidimensional disadvantage (and privilege) that was articulated according to the socio-political context of the time that the research was undertaken; my research findings are therefore partial, dynamic and situated in multiple, complex processes. As a researcher, I consider the perspectives that are drawn from my research participants, both in and outside the education system, as their representation of ‘truths’ as personally experienced. In interpreting these truths I valued Bourdieu’s call for a reflexive approach. I found it imperative to be reflexive in analysing the data on the aspirations of young women in order to

avoid preconceptions determining the outcome of the research. My research methodology, therefore, reflected an epistemological view that ‘truths’ are ‘experiential, personal, subjective and socially constructed’ (Wellington et al. 2005: 102). Bourdieu calls for researchers to strive ‘to make reflexive use of the findings of social science’ (1999: 608). I applied a reflexive approach to my research data, which involved my own independent decisions about the interpretation and representation of the data (Hammond and Wellington 2013: 59), but analysis also occurred through the collaborative practices of discussion situated beyond the moment of data collection, with research colleagues and the research participants. Verification and further discussion with participants ensured that interpretation was a collaborative process with reflexivity at its core.

### **Using Theory to Interrogate the Data**

After completing focus groups and interviews with pupils the discussions were transcribed and organized in order to identify patterns which were then labelled as belonging to a particular ‘theme’. As themes emerged from my data I found myself ‘cycling back and forth between theory and data to identify patterns and regularities’ (Barton and Hamilton 1998: 69). This process – although I did not realize it at the time – was Bourdieusian, ‘a spiral between theory, empirical work and back to reformulating theory again’ (Maher, Harker and Wilkes 1990: 3).

As an introduction to the focus group discussion, pupils were asked to think about anyone or anything that had influenced or influences their decision making and to situate them on a ‘target circle’ (see Figure 7.1). Those components who were closest to the centre and the word ‘ME’ were considered to be most influential (Spencer and Pahl 2006). This activity promoted discussion about how various factors/components influence girls’

aspirations. Below, we see an example from Hannah, a Year 12 pupil who was in the process of making decisions about her post-16 opportunities.

[Insert Figure 7.1 here]

**Figure 7.1. Map of important influences (Hannah, Year 12)**

Throughout my research, the young women discussed influences on their aspirations in relation to their access to different forms of capital: extracurricular activities, people that they knew and the experiences that they had. These discussions assisted in understanding the origins of their aspirations as well as their relationship with the social world. Bourdieu's forms of capital were therefore entirely relevant to understanding how these experiences had shaped their aspirations, with social and cultural capital in particular being evident in the types of influences that girls expressed as important in relation to their hopes for the future. For example, Chloe, who spent most of her time outside of school looking after horses, discussed how this motivated her to study: 'Like, I sort of want to do textiles in technology because I like horses and, like, I'd rather, like, make stuff for horses' (Chloe, Year 9). Her aspirations to work with horses had led her to see the value of her studies only through the lens of how they would assist her in reaching her goal. Although participation in activities influenced some pupils' aspirations, conversely a perceived lack of participation in 'noteworthy activities' was seen to close off certain fields (Bowers-Brown 2016).

Familiarity because of exposure to activities or people was a prominent theme; accepting the familiar, or making choices because of their familiarity, can be linked with Bourdieu's concept of habitus and field, but we also see the influence of familial networks or social capital on decision making. When considering how aspirations are formed, the habitus

– in constant negotiation with field and capitals – reproduces social positions: ‘it adjusts itself to a probable future which it anticipates and helps to bring about because it reads it directly in the present of the presumed world’ (Bourdieu 1990: 64). This often leads to choices that may incline ‘agents to cut their coats according to their cloth, and so to become the accomplices of the processes that tend to make the probable a reality’ (1990: 65). For example Casey, a Year 9 pupil, discussed her consideration of a career in administration in the police force: ‘I’ve got parents and friends and people that are either doing the job or have done the job. Well, my mum worked there and then it’s just people like her friends’.

Probable realities were evident also in the way that one girl accepted advice from her mother as a *fait accompli*. She believed that she could not undertake a course of study that she perceived to involve work and her mother’s confirmation of this meant she closed down the opportunity:

me and my mum decided for me not to do Business Studies because I know and my mum knows that I wouldn’t do the work and wouldn’t get the grades because I’m not like the sort of person who can do a lot of work. (Lucie, Year 10)

However, this was not always the case, and many of the young women I researched also discussed their desire to have different experiences to their parents, most notably in the discussions of first-generation applicants to university. It is important to note here that the discussions about going to university were not about moving away from a community, or ‘escaping’ a certain lifestyle (Reay 2001) but furthering employment opportunities and making their family proud. Indeed, several respondents discussed either wanting or needing to stay at home in order to continue their studies.

An important finding was how the perceived futures discussed in the focus groups differed significantly from the private disclosure of hopes they presented in the survey which offered more anonymity. Despite a number of the young women discussing their aspirations to go to university, the girls often identified having a family, marriage and happiness as aspirations in the survey responses, whereas these did not come up in the focus groups. This was perhaps because aspirations to have a family or, as one of the respondents stated, ‘be a happily married housewife’ did not align with the supergirl subjectivities that were expected of them. Nevertheless, family was clearly an important influence in almost all the target circles. The alignment of the data with theory is discussed further in the following section.

#### *Academic Capital, Supergirl Status and Aspiration to Higher Education*

At Greenlea Comprehensive School, situated in an affluent area, I observed institutional attempts to mould the habituses of its pupils to accept that the gold standard in terms of aspiration is to go to university. Similar to Ingram’s research, I found: ‘Pupils are shaped to conform to these dispositions’ (2009: 426). Indeed Greenlea propagates the value of individual success, which imbues in its learners an understanding of self-responsibility and self-monitoring through the use and ownership of individual target grades. Value was endowed on those pupils whose subject positions demonstrated a habitus that incorporated academic capital and therefore complied with the rules of the field. However, the ‘pressures to succeed are frequently transmuted into pressures not to fail’ (Jackson 2006: 49), and this led to anxieties that reinforced their need to ensure target grades were met.

Despite the anxieties that the expectation of high attainment placed upon them, the young women anticipated that the effort would enable them to pursue their intended aspirations for the future and therefore they continued to ‘play the game’. Where the girls in

my study had aspirations that aligned with those of the school, they were able to use the capitals available to them within the school to follow pathways that they believed would enable their aspirations to evolve. Therefore, operationalizing Bourdieusian concepts alongside intersectionality allowed me to situate the practices of the school and its pupils in a wider frame of reference and to understand how the school implicitly supported the aspirational supergirl status through its hierarchical values and emphasis on progression to higher education.

Bourdieu's theory and intersectionality can be operationalized to demonstrate how aspiration is constructed in a way that rewards and misrecognizes privilege. The young women's lives outside of school, and their accumulation of valued capitals, demonstrated that aspirations were not equally accessible. The data indicates that the girls from working-class backgrounds understood this inequity but also that there was a 'game' to be played and they attempted to participate in the hope that the long-term gains would effectively serve their aspirations. Similarly to Allen's research, the findings reveal how young people are expected to aspire but are subject to 'conditions that place (ever greater) limits on agentic practice' (2016: 817).

### **Zara's Aspirations**

Bourdieu argues that when the habitus feels unease in unfamiliar fields it can become 'expressed in behaviours such as avoidance or unconscious adjustments such as the correction of one's accent' (2000: 184). For the purposes of this chapter I draw on one particular participant, Zara. Although not the only one to discuss the difficulties of transition, she articulated very clearly the processes of reflection and adaptation that she underwent in

order to achieve her 'supergirl' status and indeed how this enabled her to aspire to study at university.

Yang (2014: 1530) argues that 'change in a field rarely happens suddenly' and therefore the relationship between habitus and field, returns to one of 'adjustment' rather than 'revolt,' or what Bourdieu calls hysteresis when there is severe disjuncture between habitus and field. In theorizing the relational nature of social class, Sayer highlights how 'accent, language, taste and bearing' (2005:70) form part of the judgement of a person's social standing. This was evident in Zara's narrative, in which she highlighted class pathologization and discussed the need to change in order to aspire to her goals of a successful career: 'my accent and stuff was just really awful. I don't know, I sounded really common, if that sounds really cocky. I sounded really common and then I came to Greenlea and then like it was noticeable, so I changed.'

Reay discusses this adjustment process as a 'refashioning of the working-class self into a middle-class persona' (2003: 62). Kulz too discusses how the pupils in her research study were expected to "'adjust" themselves to accrue value' (2014: 685) in line with institutional habitus. Zara's stance demonstrates how she actively understood the game and took action to 'refashion' herself in order to fit in with her peer group and meet the institutional expectation of the 'supergirl'. Her comments reflect that there is an expectation or perception that there is a particular way of being that aligns with what it is to be a successful girl in the field of education. Zara needed to adapt if, according to her, she was to achieve success:

I came from like being really streetwise and being really mouthy, to being really quiet and really like hardworking, not that I wasn't anyway, but you know, and I wanted to like have a future for myself and I didn't like looking at other people in the area and stuff. (Zara, Year 13)

As other research on working-class women confirms (Skeggs 2004), social class pathologization contributes to how aspirations are formed. Zara also highlighted how negative preconceptions about the council estate where she lived culminated in a ‘general attitude’ or prejudice: ‘Oh you come from this estate so you’re not really going to get a good job. You’re not going to get a good career’.

In order to gain a place at university the doxic representation of the supergirl stretched beyond the acquisition of a scholarly habitus (Watkins and Noble 2013) and the girls understood that they would need to present themselves as accruing capital beyond their educational qualifications in order to pursue higher education. For some young women this was more difficult to access than for others; Skeggs (2004: 91) refers to this as a process whereby self-production and the resources required to achieve it are ‘class making’. The girls in my study, including Zara, understood the rules of the game and could also see that their access to capitals was unequal. The expectation by the system of participation in often expensive forms of ‘dominant symbolic’ culture demonstrates how symbolic violence works to misrecognize middle-class privilege, judging it rather as evidence of motivation or engagement rather than wealth (Skeggs 2004: 88). Zara, like other working-class girls aspiring to university, was arguably placed in a position of negotiating her perceived lack of value as the institutional logic is not concerned with disparity of access to the forms of capital. Nonetheless, Bourdieu claims that investment in the game, or ‘the *illusio*’, requires the conviction that the game is worth playing or as Bourdieu states ‘is worth the candle’ (1998: 76). Zara, after all, still believed that the game was worth playing. Despite recognizing the systemic inequity and how they would have to disassociate themselves from facets of working-class culture, the girls in my study were complicit in accepting the rules of the game

because exclusion from the game was seen to be worse than adhering and accepting the symbolic violence of the system.

## **Discussion**

This chapter shows how Bourdieu's theory, used alongside intersectionality, opens up new spaces to explore how aspirations are gendered and shaped in and by schooling practices. In critically thinking about aspiration, the Bourdieusian notion that certain opportunities are 'probable' even though others are 'possible' was helpful, but I also saw how girls maintained their aspirations by adapting themselves through the cultivation of the capitals that the field requires in order to achieve 'supergirl' status. In so far as habitus inclines 'agents to cut their coats according to their cloth' which in due turn makes the 'probable a reality'; the girls in my study demonstrated that some would reject the inevitable (Bourdieu 1990: 64–5).

However, for those young women who had succeeded academically, attempting to embody the supergirl subjectivity and rejecting the inevitable came with a requirement for self-adaptation. The data indicates that, particularly for the girls in the sixth form who had entered a field that was unfamiliar, there was a requirement to acclimatize but the academic disposition embodied in their habitus had offered them familiarity in an unfamiliar field (see Reay, Crozier and Clayton 2009). Zara discussed how she had actively pursued supergirl status in order to live a life that would not see her in the poverty she had experienced in her early years. Nonetheless, the process of self-adaptation left me as the researcher with a feeling of unease and anger. The process of avoiding social reproduction relied heavily on habitus transformation – often in line with the status of the field of higher education and its doxic expectations of the supergirl. The research left me with questions about the symbolically violent nature of the higher education application process which requires

evidence of adherence to dominant symbolic. While employing Bourdieu shows how social class is powerful, drawing on an intersectional approach, Omi and Winant argue that ‘race, class, and gender are not fixed and discrete categories ... They overlap, intersect, and infuse with others in countless ways’ (1994: 68) especially when they rub up against institutional logics.

## **Conclusion**

The expectation that all girls will embody supergirl aspirations misrecognizes the differences in privilege that create an uneven platform to achieve this subjectivity and for many this may involve self-adaptation. Using Bourdieu’s concepts allowed me to understand how young people negotiate the dominant discourses of deficit when aspiring. Combining these with intersectionality enabled me to interrogate the more complex relationships often hidden in discussions of high-achieving girls. Although Bourdieu has been criticized for a lack of engagement with gender, academics interested in intersectionality have engaged with his work (Fowler 2003) and his tools can be easily combined with other frameworks (see Ayling and Adewumi, this volume). In my research discussions of aspiration could not be properly understood without recognizing the structural intersectional inequalities faced by different sectors of society. Therefore, in the study of working-class young women’s aspirations, the combination of intersectionality and Bourdieusian theory offers us the opportunity to highlight certain opportunities, how aspirational discourses work, as well as what may get sacrificed along the way.

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<sup>1</sup> In the UK, at age 16, pupils can choose where they intend to study/pursue further training. Not all schools have their own sixth-form centre.