

A Study of Social Class Representation in “Such a Fun Age” Novel by Kiley Reid

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Abstract: This study examines social stratification through Max Weber’s concepts of class, status, and party as represented in “Such a Fun Age” novel by Kiley Reid. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the research analyzes selected narrative events, character interactions, and dialogues to explore how social inequality operates in everyday life. The findings reveal that economic position, social prestige, and access to power intersect to shape characters’ treatment, life chances, and social relationships. The novel demonstrates how subtle social interactions, rather than overt conflict, reproduce inequality related to class and race in contemporary American society. By applying Weber’s multidimensional framework, this study highlights the relevance of sociological theory in literary analysis and offers insight into the persistence of social inequality in modern narratives.

Keywords: contemporary novel, Max Weber, social class, sociological approach

INTRODUCTION

Literature has long been understood as a medium that reflects and critiques social structures and inequality, (Wellek & Warren, 2011). From a sociological perspective, literary works often reveal social realities and expose problems embedded within society (Eagleton, 1996). Through narrative and characterization, novels communicate social, cultural, moral, and educational values that emerge from fictional events and human experiences. As an art form rooted in language, literature functions both as an individual expression of the author and as a collective product shaped by broader social and cultural contexts. In this sense, literary texts not only represent personal creativity but also reflect the values, conflicts, and power relations present in the society from which they emerge.

Building on literature's societal reflection, sociological theories like Max Weber's offer tools to analyze these elements in fiction. Within fiction books, we can analyze novels using approaches and theories. There is an approach called the sociological approach that analyses

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literary works, introduced by Weber (1978) and consisting of three terms such as economic (class), social (status), and political (party) powers, with a focus on social class and its competition. As stated by Jones (2021), social class is a fundamental concept in sociology, significantly influenced by the ideas of Max Weber. A social class refers to a group of people in a society who hold a similar socioeconomic position. It is made up of individuals who possess comparable social status and who typically see one another as equals within the social structure, (Giddens, 2006). Several studies have applied Weber's theory of social stratification to literary texts to examine the interaction between economic class and social status, (Goldthorpe, 2016). It is interesting to explore because it highlights how inequality operates within a society. People are often divided into different groups or levels based on their social standing, and these divisions can lead to unequal treatment or limited opportunities. Examining social class allows us to understand how these forms of social injustice develop and how they affect individuals in everyday life, (Puspita et al., 2023). According to Weber (1978) framework divides social stratification into class (economic opportunities), status (social prestige), and party (political influence), allowing for an analysis of power imbalances in society. We know that in our environment, many social class issues occur without us realizing how common they are.

As a result, this study chose "Such a Fun Age" novel by Kiley Reid as its core text since it depicts social disparity through ordinary encounters rather than outright confrontation. The plot revolves around Emira, a young Black babysitter whose experiences demonstrate how economic status, social recognition, and access to power shape treatment in both public and private settings. The story emphasizes subtle kinds of discrimination entrenched in everyday events, making it ideal for sociological examination of current socioeconomic class dynamics.

Max Weber's theory of social stratification is an appropriate analytical framework for this study because it conceptualizes inequality in terms of position and party, as well as economic class. Weber's concept of social stratification has been widely discussed by later sociologists, who emphasize its multidimensional nature beyond economic class alone, (Scott, 2014). The exchanges between Emira and the Chamberlain reveal disparities in material circumstances, social status, and network-based power. By applying Weber's concepts of class, status, and party, this study intends to analyze how these dimensions work simultaneously inside the story and how they contribute to the continuation of social inequality in everyday life. This technique emphasizes the importance of sociological theory in literary study and its contribution to comprehending socioeconomic class in current society.

1. Class

Class refers to individuals' economic position and access to material resources, which influence their life chances and opportunities, (Goldthorpe, 2010). In literary contexts, class can be observed through characters' occupations, income levels, and economic dependence, shaping how they navigate social interactions and power relations.

2. *Status*

Status relates to social prestige, honor, and recognition within a community. Xie (2023) explains that it ties into how society judges someone's worth, which can be positive or negative. Unlike class, status is not determined solely by economic wealth but by lifestyle, cultural capital, and social reputation. Status distinctions influence how characters are perceived, respected, or marginalized in social settings, often reinforcing social distance and unequal treatment even when overt economic differences are not immediately visible.

3. *Party*

Parties usually, but not always, represent classes or status groups. As Gane (2005) notes, they can form around debates over a leader's charisma or who gets recognized as the rightful head. It refers to organized forms of power that arise through social networks, institutional access, and collective influence. Party power enables individuals or groups to pursue shared interests and exert control over social outcomes. In contemporary contexts, party can extend beyond formal political organizations to include professional networks, media influence, and digital platforms that shape public opinion and access to resources, (Giddens, 2006). Those three variables work together to form a comprehensive framework for understanding social inequality in literary texts, allowing academics to investigate how economic conditions, social recognition, and network-based power all influence characters' experiences and interactions.

In examining “Such a Fun Age” novel, this study draws on various earlier studies that have looked at socioeconomic class in literature. Siahaan & Satria (2022) evaluated “The Notebook” by Nicholas Spark using Max Weber and Karl Marx ideas, concentrating on social class conflict within family connections. Their research focuses on how disparities in social status affect romantic relationships and social acceptance.

Nurman et al. (2021) used Marxist criticism to explore class exploitation in “Serena” by Ron Rash. Their study focuses on the bourgeoisie's economic dominance over the proletariat, demonstrating how resource ownership leads to exploitation. This study focuses on economic class as the primary cause of inequality. Pahlevi & Sagimin (2020) used Max Weber's theory to “Crazy Rich Asians”, discovering that social class inequalities influence lifestyle, mindset, and relationship selection. Their research demonstrates how inherited status and family origin influence social behavior and exclusion. Although these studies contribute to the understanding of social class in literature, most of them focus either on economic class or on class differences as isolated factors. Limited attention is given to the interaction between economic position, social prestige, and network-based power as an integrated system of stratification. Therefore, the multidimensional framework of Max Weber, particularly the relationship between class, status, and party, has not been fully explored in contemporary literary analysis.

This study addresses this gap by applying Weber's complete concept of social stratification to “Such a Fun Age” novel. Rather than examining social class as a single dimension, this research analyzes how class, status, and party operate simultaneously through everyday interactions in a contemporary novel. By doing so, this study extends

previous research and offers a more comprehensive sociological interpretation of social inequality in literary texts.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach, which focuses on interpreting meanings embedded in social and cultural phenomena (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The data source of this research is “Such a Fun Age” novel by Kiley Reid. The data consist of selected narrative events, character interactions, and dialogues that reflect social relations, power dynamics, and inequality within the novel. The unit of analysis in this study is individual scenes or dialogues that demonstrate social class relations among characters.

The analytical framework is based on Max Weber’s theory of social stratification, which conceptualizes social inequality through three interrelated dimensions: class, status, and party (Weber, 1978). Class refers to economic position and access to material resources, status relates to social prestige, recognition, and lifestyle, and party denotes access to power through social networks, institutions, or collective influence.

The data analysis was conducted through several systematic steps. First, the researcher performed a close reading of the novel to identify scenes and dialogues that depict social interactions involving inequality or power relations. Second, the selected data were categorized according to Weber’s concepts of class, status, and party. Third, each category was analyzed to examine how economic position, social recognition, and network-based power shape character behavior and relationships. Finally, the findings were interpreted to reveal how these dimensions operate simultaneously and reinforce social stratification in everyday life. This study applies an extrinsic literary analysis by situating the text within its broader social context, (Mariana, 2023). The findings are presented using a qualitative descriptive method, in which interpretations are explained through textual analysis rather than numerical data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach allows the research to connect literary representation with sociological theory, demonstrating how the novel reflects and critiques real-world social class dynamics.

RESULTS

This section dives into how Max Weber's ideas on social class broken down into class, status, and party play out in the novel. Weber saw class as tied to economic resources and life chances, status as about social prestige and reputation, and party as the ability to wield power through networks and influence. By looking at key scenes and characters, the researchers can see these concepts in action, showing how they shape relationships and social dynamics in the story. The researchers break it down step by step, pulling from specific examples to make it clearer. To really understand this, it is helpful to think about how these elements are not just abstract they are woven into everyday interactions, highlighting inequalities that affect how people are treated and what opportunities they get. The novel uses these to explore themes of class, status, and power, making Weber's framework a perfect lens for unpacking the tensions between characters like Emira and the Chamberlain family.

1. Class

Data 1: Market Depot

Guard: "It's very late for someone this small. Is this your child?"

Emira: "No. I'm her babysitter."

Guard: "Alright, well . . . with all due respect, you don't look like you've been babysitting tonight." (p. 6)

Guard: "Now wait a minute. I can't let you leave, because a child is involved."

Emira: "But she's my child right now." Emira laughed again. "I'm her sitter. I'm technically her nanny. . ."

Another woman: "Hi, sweetie. Do you know where your mommy is?"

Emira: "Her mom is at home." Emira tapped her collarbone twice as she said, "You can just talk to me."

Guard: "So you're saying, "that a random woman, three blocks away, asked you to watch her child this late at night?" (p. 7)

This scene exemplifies Max Weber's concept of class, which is inextricably linked to economic status and life opportunities. Emira's job as a babysitter puts her in a lower socioeconomic status, which limits her trustworthiness in public areas. Despite her calm answer, the security guard questions her authority because her occupation and look do not meet middle- or upper-class standards. In contrast, Briar's white and upper-class upbringing leads others to believe that Emira does not belong with her. This instance highlights how class inequality functions through everyday interactions, where individuals' economic status influences how they are evaluated and treated.

Data 2: Power Imbalance

Alix: "First of all, you do not have to be here today."

Emira: "Oh no. I'm here. It's cool." Emira turned to her backpack and took a ChapStick out of the front pocket. (p. 51)

This interaction illustrates class inequality through unequal economic dependence. As Emira relies on Alix for employment, Alix holds structural power over her, allowing subtle control over Emira's actions and presence. Although Alix's words appear polite, her authority reflects Weber's view that class shapes social relationships by determining who has control and decision-making power. Emira's restrained response shows how individuals from lower economic classes must manage their behavior carefully to maintain their position, highlighting how class inequality is normalized in everyday social situations.

2. Status

Data 1: The Chamberlain Family

“On thick, textured stationery and with dreamy cursive handwriting, Alix asked nicely for the things she wanted, and it became a rare occurrence when she didn’t receive them.” (p. 13)

This quotation exemplifies Weber's concept of status, which is related to social prestige and acknowledgment. Alix's capacity to simply achieve what she wants indicates her high social status. Her lifestyle, manners, and social reputation earn her respect and influence that extend beyond financial status. This class distinction creates a social divide between Alix and Emira, maintaining unequal treatment despite Alix's apparently progressive views. The tale depicts how status influences encounter quietly, through preconceptions of superiority and entitlement.

Data 2: Alix’s Reaction to Emira’s Vocabulary

“But I’m used to drinking like...boxed wine, so yeah, I’m no connoisseur.”

There were moments like this that Alix tried to breeze over, but they got stuck somewhere between her heart and ears. She knew Emira had gone to college. She knew Emira had majored in English. But sometimes, after seeing her paused songs with titles like “Dope Bitch” and “Y’all Already Know,” and then hearing her use words like connoisseur, Alix was filled with feelings that went from confused and highly impressed to low and guilty in response to the first reaction. There was no reason for Emira to be unfamiliar with this word.” (p. 71-72)

This moment reveals how status-based assumptions influence perception. Alix’s surprise at Emira’s vocabulary exposes an internalized belief that Emira, as a babysitter, belongs to a lower-status group with limited cultural capital. Although Alix knows Emira is educated, her reaction reflects how status stereotypes persist beneath conscious awareness. According to Weber, status distinctions shape social judgment, and this scene demonstrates how individuals in higher-status positions often unconsciously reinforce social hierarchies through everyday interactions.

3. Party

Data 1: Peter’s Media Influence

Misty: “This weekend, a video went viral which showed twenty-five-year-old Temple graduate Emira Tucker being accused of kidnapping by a security guard at Market Depot. Emira was not committing a crime—rather, she was babysitting. And Peter, I’ll pass it on to you because you know Emira and the child in question quite well.”

Peter: “That’s correct. I’ll let Emira speak for herself, as she can shed much more light on the situation than I can, but I would like to say this . . .” (p. 209)

This scene exemplifies Weber's definition of a party, which refers to organized authority and influence via social and institutional networks. Peter's position in the media allows him to mold public narratives and control how the occurrence is interpreted. Rather than depending on economic power, Peter utilizes his professional network to defend his family's reputation. This represents how party power operates by gaining access to institutions that shape public opinion, reinforcing existing socioeconomic structures.

Data 2: Alix’ Social Network and Influencer Role

“Between 2001 and 2004, Alix Chamberlain sent over one hundred letters and received over nine hundred dollars’ worth of merchandise. These free products included coffee beans, Luna Bars, makeup samples, scented candles, putty to hang posters on the walls in her dorm room, magazine subscriptions, sunscreens, and face masks—all of which Alix shared with her roommates and the other girls on her floor.” (p. 33)

Alix's influencer actions demonstrate party strength via social media. Her capacity to derive tangible benefits from brands demonstrates how organized connections provide access to resources and advantages. This is consistent with Weber's theory that party influence extends beyond formal politics to include informal networks that allow individuals to pursue common objectives. The novel focuses on how such networks gain power over time, contributing to continued inequality in society.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that Max Weber’s concepts of class, status, and party operate as an interconnected system of social stratification in “Such a Fun Age” novel. Rather than functioning as separate categories, these dimensions overlap and reinforce one another in shaping social interactions and life chances. This supports Weber’s argument that social inequality is multidimensional and embedded in everyday social relations, not merely determined by economic position, (Scott, 2014; Weber, 1978).

Economic class in the novel is reflected in Emira’s precarious position as a working-class babysitter, which limits her autonomy and credibility in public and private spaces. Her vulnerability during the Market Depot incident illustrates how economic dependence and lack of institutional power expose individuals to suspicion and control. This aligns with Weber’s view that class influences life chances by structuring access to resources and security, (Weber, 1978). The novel thus reveals how economic inequality operates subtly through routine encounters rather than overt conflict.

Status further intensifies class-based inequality by shaping how individuals are perceived and evaluated, (Lamont, 2002). The Chamberlain family’s social prestige grants them legitimacy and trust, while Emira is subjected to doubt and misrecognition. Status distinctions are reinforced through lifestyle markers, cultural capital, and assumptions about

intelligence and responsibility, echoing sociological discussions on how prestige and symbolic value sustain social hierarchies, (Scott, 2014).

Party power in the novel highlights the importance of networks and institutional access in maintaining social advantage. Characters such as Peter and Alix utilize professional connections, media visibility, and influencer culture to shape narratives and protect their interests. This reflects Weber's notion of party as a form of organized power that enables individuals to mobilize collective resources beyond economic wealth or social honor, (Weber, 1978).

Importantly, the novel depicts how class, status, and party intersect with race, resulting in multifaceted kinds of inequality, (Crenshaw, n.d.; Hill Collins, 2002). Emira's experiences as a Black woman demonstrate how racial stereotypes exacerbate economic vulnerability and social marginalization. These intersectional dynamic highlights the ongoing relevance of Weber's approach for assessing modern social concerns, when inequality is frequently replicated through normalized and everyday activities rather than outright discrimination.

CONCLUSION

This study suggests that “Such a Fun Age” novel effectively depicts social inequality through the intersection of class, status, and party, as Max Weber envisioned it. The analysis demonstrates that social stratification in the novel is perpetuated by social recognition, institutional access, and network-based power, rather than just economic inequality. These variables work together to influence characters' life opportunities and social relationships.

By applying Weber's theory to a contemporary novel, this study advances sociological literary studies by highlighting the importance of multidimensional stratification in comprehending modern forms of inequality. The findings demonstrate how ordinary interactions can repeat greater societal hierarchies based on class, status, and party. Weber's multidimensional approach to stratification has been further developed by later sociologists who emphasize the interaction between class, status, and power as a unified system (Ritzer, 2011).

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