



The causes of social stratification in Kiley Reid's *Such a Fun Age*

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Abstract. This thesis examined the representation of social stratification in Kiley Reid's *Such a Fun Age*. It was based on the phenomenon of social inequality that continues to be relevant in contemporary society, which triggered the researcher's interest in how social stratification is manifested and perpetuated. The selection of this novel was based on its detailed depiction of complex power relations and disparities in access to resources between social classes. This study used Max Weber's multidimensional social stratification theory as the main framework, which involved the analysis of class, status, and power dimensions. The thesis researcher adopted a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical design and close reading techniques. Textual data from the novel was collected and analyzed to identify the forms, causes, and impacts of social stratification experienced by the characters Emira from the lower class, Kelley from the middle class, and Alix from the upper class. The findings of the analysis showed that social stratification in this novel was manifested through significant differences in economic conditions, social prestige, and control over resources, which led to inequality of opportunity and discrimination. The main causes included inherited wealth, differences in access to education and employment, and the use of power by the dominant strata. The impact was seen in Emira's vulnerability to discrimination and limited access, in contrast to Alix's extensive privilege and control. This study concluded that the novel *Such a Fun Age* effectively reflected the complex structure of social stratification and emphasized the role of literature as a reflection of social reality.

Keyword: inequality of opportunity, lower class, middle class, social stratification, upper class

INTRODUCTION

Social stratification remains a persistent and deeply rooted feature of modern societies, characterized by the unequal distribution of resources, opportunities, and privileges across different layers or classes. At its core, social stratification reflects the structured hierarchy in which individuals or groups are ranked based on various socio-economic indicators such as wealth, income, occupation, education, race, and power. As Heena (2022:175) asserts, social stratification refers to the classification of society into different hierarchical layers based on economic status, social identity, and power relations. This stratification is not a random occurrence; rather, it is systematically maintained through economic, political, and institutional mechanisms that perpetuate inequality. According to Zajacova and Lawrence (2018:275), stratification influences individuals' life chances

by determining access to healthcare, education, income, and mobility. The entrenched nature of social stratification means that individuals from lower social strata often encounter systemic barriers that inhibit upward mobility, while those in the upper classes benefit from accumulated advantages passed down through generations. This study focuses on the causes of social stratification as reflected in the novel *Such a Fun Age* by Kiley Reid, a contemporary literary work that offers a compelling representation of class division in a modern capitalist society. One key cause of persistent stratification is the unequal distribution of wealth and assets, a point emphasized by Bourquin et al. (2023:120), who argue that economic resources are often inherited and concentrated within elite families, securing their dominance over time. Individuals born into wealthy households tend to have better access to high-quality education, influential social networks, and profitable investments, thereby reinforcing their privileged status. In contrast, those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds often struggle to accumulate wealth due to low wages, unstable employment, and limited access to financial capital (Adermon et al., 2018:483). This intergenerational transfer of advantage contributes significantly to the enduring nature of stratification.

Educational institutions and labor markets also play critical roles in reinforcing class divisions. According to Bol et al. (2019:278), these systems often privilege individuals from upper-class backgrounds, providing them with more opportunities to succeed while marginalizing those from the lower classes. The novel *Such a Fun Age* vividly portrays this dynamic through its characters, particularly Emira Tucker, a young Black woman navigating precarious employment as a babysitter, and Alix Chamberlain, a wealthy white woman who enjoys social and economic privilege. Their interactions reveal how systemic inequalities manifest in everyday life, from access to professional networks to perceptions of competence and authority. The narrative underscores how wealth and social capital serve as mechanisms of control and dominance, allowing the upper class to influence not only economic outcomes but also cultural narratives. Additionally, Wingen et al. (2021:1948) highlight that the upper class possesses greater influence over policymaking and institutional structures, enabling them to maintain their power and marginalize subordinate groups.

Despite shifts in economic structures and evolving cultural identities, the underlying mechanisms of stratification remain stable. Jarman et al. (2021:3) observe that while some theorists argue for the fragmentation of traditional class identities in postmodern societies, economic inequality continues to shape political behavior, educational access, and occupational outcomes. Marrero et al. (2021:6) further note that stratification is increasingly intertwined with gender and racial disparities, reflecting complex intersections of privilege and disadvantage. These insights are especially relevant in *Such a Fun Age*, which not only critiques class-based inequality but also exposes how racial dynamics exacerbate the vulnerability of those at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Thus, the novel offers a nuanced perspective on the root causes of stratification, emphasizing the interplay of race, class, and economic power in sustaining inequality.

Given this context, the present study aims to explore the causes of social stratification as depicted in *Such a Fun Age* by analyzing how wealth disparity, institutional bias, and intergenerational privilege are portrayed in the novel. By applying Max Weber's theory of social stratification, the research provides a sociological lens to examine power relations and systemic inequality within the narrative (Christian, 2021:4). The study contributes to the ongoing discourse in literary and sociological scholarship by bridging fictional representation with real-world socio-economic structures. Through this approach, it highlights how literature can serve as a powerful medium for understanding and critiquing the underlying causes of social inequality that persist in contemporary society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Stratification

Social stratification refers to the hierarchical ranking of individuals in society based on factors like wealth, income, education, race, gender, and power (Heena, 2022:175). This system creates unequal access to opportunities and resources, reinforcing discrimination and limiting social mobility. It affects economic stability, education, healthcare, and social relationships, dividing society into privileged and disadvantaged groups (Spiliopoulou et al., 2018:21). Economic structures and elite institutions sustain stratification by ensuring wealth and power remain concentrated among certain groups. The upper class benefits from inherited wealth and better opportunities, while the lower class struggles to escape poverty (Goudeau et al., 2024:384). Institutions like education and labor markets further deepen inequality by favoring the privileged. Stratification typically divides society into three groups: the wealthy upper class, the resource-limited middle class, and the disadvantaged lower class (Ayla Oğuz, 2022:5). These divisions determine access to education, healthcare, and career success, often trapping lower-class individuals in cycles of poverty. Ultimately, stratification is not just a ranking system but a mechanism that perpetuates structural injustice (Shamsie, 2021:51).

The upper class is the wealthiest group, controlling key resources and elite networks (Shamsie, 2021:52). Their status stems from inherited wealth, high-paying careers, or business ownership (Bourquin et al., 2023:104). They enjoy luxury, influence, and exclusive education but may face social isolation. The middle class, characterized by economic stability but not wealth, includes professionals and skilled workers (Jimenez, 2020:3). They have financial security but remain vulnerable to economic fluctuations. Education and employment determine their status. Finally, the lower class struggles with poverty, low-paying jobs, and limited opportunities. Their lack of education and assets traps them in a cycle of disadvantage (Oğuz, 2022:215). Community solidarity is a key strength. In short, stratification perpetuates inequality through economic, educational, and institutional biases.

Factors Involving Social Stratification

According to Spiliopoulou et al. (2018:25), social stratification is formed and maintained by various interrelated factors that shape a hierarchical system persisting to this day. Understanding these factors is crucial for analyzing manifestations of inequality within literary works, such as novels. As Kumar (2024:9) argues, the determinants of social stratification are not limited to economic aspects but also encompass other dimensions such as social status and power. This perspective highlights the role of education in credentialism, wherein academic qualifications function as symbols of status and authority, thereby reinforcing inequality through cultural and social capital. Thus, social stratification is a multidimensional phenomenon that reflects the complexity of relationships among individuals and groups within society. A thorough analysis of these factors can reveal how inequality is reproduced and sustained through existing social structures.

1. Economic Status

Economic status plays a major role in social stratification by determining an individual's position in society (Gil-Hernández et al., 2025:1). Wealth and income influence access to resources, opportunities, and quality of life (World Bank, 2018, cited in Adjasi et al., 2023:3). Those from wealthy families often start with advantages like property and investments, while high income allows greater social and economic participation. Economic status is also tied to perceptions of success and social worth, sometimes leading to stigma against the poor (Gil-Hernández et al., 2024:4). Capitalist systems reinforce this hierarchy by valuing economic power as a measure of status, making wealth not just about money but also identity and acceptance (Kaestner & Lubotsky, 2016:55).

2. Education as a Social Attribute

Education plays a key role in social stratification by shaping life opportunities and reinforcing hierarchies (Malczewski, 2015:538). While often seen as a path to upward mobility, it functions as "symbolic capital" that benefits the privileged, as access to quality education remains unequal (Kumar, 2024:8; Christian, 2021:3). This creates a credential-based system that favors dominant groups, aligning with Weber's concept of "social closure" (Chan, 2016:6). Despite its idealization as a social equalizer, education often reproduces inequality through disparities in resources and hidden biases (Shabbir & Hina, 2018:88).

3. Occupation

Occupation plays a crucial role in social stratification, reflecting both economic status and social power (Bland & Tan Chen, 2021:1). According to Weberian theory, an individual's job indicates their social position through three main factors: required education level, degree of work autonomy, and societal influence (Azarkievic, 2015:3).

High-status professions like doctors and lawyers enjoy greater prestige due to their specialized training, high earnings, and professional independence, demonstrating Weber's concept of "social closure" where entry is restricted (Christian, 2021:3). In contrast, low-skill manual jobs typically have lower social standing. Modern societies view occupations not just as income sources but as status symbols that shape social interactions and recognition (Whimster, 2023:10). This perspective has been further developed by neo-Weberian theorists.

4. Power

Power is a key element of social stratification, defined as the ability to influence or control others (Dr. Butt, 2023:84). Weber argues that power comes from one's position in society, not just wealth or status, granting control over resources and decisions (Oğuz, 2022:213). The upper class typically holds more power through institutions like media, law, and education, allowing them to shape society in their favor (Bland & Chen, 2021:3). Meanwhile, the lower class has little influence over policies that impact their lives, reinforcing social inequality.

5. Social Identity

Social identity shaped by factors like race, gender, religion, and culture - plays a key role in maintaining class divisions (Dubois et al., 2015:2). It influences both self-perception and societal treatment, determining one's position in the social hierarchy. Dominant groups typically enjoy greater access to resources and power, while marginalized identities face discrimination and limited opportunities (Castillo-Lavergne & Destin, 2019:1117). As Breyer (2025:812) notes, these identities carry "social honor" that can either privilege or exclude, becoming tools to reinforce class boundaries and limit upward mobility.

Impact of Social Stratification

Social stratification has profound and lasting impacts on individuals and societies, reinforcing cycles of inequality that are difficult to break (Daepp & Counts, 2025:443). One of the most significant impacts is inequality of opportunity, where individuals from lower social strata face significant barriers to accessing essential resources such as quality education, healthcare, and stable employment. Children from poor families often attend underfunded schools, receive limited academic support, and struggle to pursue higher education or high-paying jobs. Similarly, people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often hold low-paying jobs with little security or opportunities for advancement (Siegrist et al., 2010:3-4). This inequality extends to healthcare, as many individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds lack insurance or access to quality medical care, leading to poorer health outcomes. These conditions severely limit upward social mobility and reproduce structural disadvantages across generations. Furthermore, limited access to

economic, cultural, and social capital further limits their life chances. They lack wealth and financial resources like economic capital, have limited exposure to valuable knowledge and education like cultural capital, and are often marginalized from influential networks like social capital that can provide important opportunities (Belmi et al., 2020:255). Thus, stratification is not just about differences in wealth; it also shapes how individuals interact with society, how they perceive themselves, and what they expect from their future (Dubois et al., 2015:3).

Another major consequence of social stratification is discrimination, which leads to unequal treatment based on class and social status. This form of bias is not accidental but embedded in social institutions such as education, the labor market, and the media, where stereotypes and class divisions are actively reinforced. As Azarkievič (2015:4) explains, discrimination is closely linked to Weber's notions of status and power, with high-status groups using their position to deny others access, an act known as status-group closure. Lower-class individuals are often unfairly judged as less capable or ethical, regardless of their actual actions or abilities (Dubois et al., 2015:4). These prejudices help dominant groups maintain control and reinforce existing hierarchies. This leads to social conflict, as marginalized groups resist their exclusion and demand equality. Such tensions arise from imbalances in class, status, and power, fueling protests or frustration when access to education, employment, or political participation is denied (Heena, 2022:177; Bland & Chen, 2021:5). However, rather than addressing inequalities, dominant groups often respond by reinforcing barriers and controlling the narrative, thus maintaining their superiority (Daepf & Counts, 2025:443). Thus, conflict becomes both a symptom and a mechanism of stratification. Overall, the impacts of stratification, such as discrimination, limited access, conflict, and unequal opportunities, interact and maintain a social structure in which inequality is reproduced and deeply embedded in everyday life.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with a sociological approach to literary works to examine social stratification as depicted in Kiley Reid's novel, *Such a Fun Age*. A sociological lens was chosen to explore how the text reflects and constructs social reality, particularly class structures and power dynamics, positioning the novel as a cultural artifact reflecting real-world inequality (Reuber et al., 2022:2148). Based on Max Weber's theory of social stratification, which emphasizes the dimensions of class, status, and power (Weber, 1978; Azarkievič, 2015:3–5; Hurst, 1998), this approach allows the researcher to analyze how privilege, inequality, and discrimination are embedded in the interactions between characters and the storyline. The primary data source is the novel *Such a Fun Age*, which consists of 28 chapters and 233 pages, chosen for its rich thematic depiction of race, class, and privilege. The data collection process involved several in-depth readings to identify, classify, and tabulate relevant phrases, sentences, and dialogues related to social stratification. The researcher, acting as the key instrument, engaged directly with the text to explore textual evidence through three stages: comprehension,

identification, and classification of data. The data analysis procedure also followed three steps, first, reading the novel thoroughly to understand the narrative and its context, second, identifying relevant quotations that support the research focus, and finally, interpreting and drawing conclusions by connecting textual findings with applied sociological theory. Characterization, dialogue, and narrative structure were analyzed to reveal how different social classes, represented by the characters from Lower Class, Middle Class, and Upper Class, embody the causes and consequences of social stratification. The study was conducted over a two-month period with consistent researcher involvement to ensure accuracy, and the validity of the results was maintained through systematic cross-referencing between theory and textual evidence. This integrated methodological framework allows for an in-depth and contextual understanding of how literature can reflect and critique social inequality.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Causes of Emira's Social Stratification.

Emira Tucker represents how structural inequality and identity-based discrimination can limit a person's chances for upward mobility in modern society. Unlike Alix Chamberlain, Emira faces many barriers that keep her in a lower-class position, such as unstable work, limited social connections, and her identity as a young Black woman. Even though she has a college degree, these challenges show that social stratification is not just about personal effort but is shaped by systemic obstacles. This reflects Max Weber's idea that class, status, and power all influence a person's place in society. This section discusses the causes of Emira's disadvantaged position using evidence from the novel and sociological theory.

The causes are categorized into five major factors:

1. Economic Status

First, economic status precarious employment and financial instability. One of the most evident causes of Emira's social position is her unstable economic condition. She works as a part-time babysitter for the Chamberlain family without access to health insurance or job security. Her lack of a formal contract or benefits reflects the broader condition of underemployment common among young adults from working-class backgrounds. *"By the end of 2015, Emira would be forced off her parents' health coverage. She was almost twenty-six years old."* (Reid, 2019:29); *"This wouldn't have happened if you had a real job..."* (Reid, 2019:29). According to Gil-Hernández et al. (2025:1) and Shamsie (2021:51), access to economic capital is a primary factor in social stratification. Without a stable income or institutional protection, individuals like Emira are vulnerable to economic uncertainty and social exclusion.

2. Education as a Social Attribute

Second, education as a social attribute limited familiarity with elite norms and institutions. Although Emira has a college degree, she lacks the cultural exposure and symbolic knowledge that would allow her to integrate into upper-class social and professional environments. Her unfamiliarity with organizations like LetHer Speak and with upper-class codes of behaviour marks her as an outsider. “*Most importantly, Emira Tucker had never heard of LetHer Speak.*” (Reid, 2019:23); “*Emira smiled. ‘A what?’*” (Reid, 2019:36). As Bourquin et al. (2023:104) and Chakrabarti (2022:3) explain, cultural capital includes knowledge, taste, and credentials that signal belonging to elite circles. Emira’s limited access to such forms of capital contributes to her inability to advance socially, despite her formal education.

3. Occupation

Third, Occupation lack of institutional and professional networks. Emira does not possess strong professional contacts or institutional support systems. She does not have mentors or career connections to guide her path, and she depends on people like Alix or Kelley for temporary support. “*Emira knew she had to find a new job.*” (Reid, 2019:30); “*Kelley purchased Emira’s fourth drink.*” (Reid, 2019:49). Dubois et al. (2015:2) argue that social capital, defined as access to useful networks, is a critical resource for social advancement. Gil-Hernández et al. (2025:1) also note that institutional affiliation often helps individuals move up the class ladder. Emira’s isolation from such structures keeps her at the social margins.

4. Power

Fourth, power lack of narrative control and institutional agency. Emira is frequently left out of decisions that affect her own life. Her experiences are used for Alix’s professional gain, and her voice is sidelined in discussions of legal action or public image. “*Laney had delivered the grocery store video... ‘Everybody wins with this.’*” (Reid, 2019:155); “*Alix had developed an awful and invasive habit... looking at Emira’s phone.*” (Reid, 2019:54). This aligns with Max Weber (as cited in Oğuz, 2022:213) defines power as the ability to shape outcomes in one’s favour. Emira lacks the institutional power to define her own narrative. According to Christian (2021:3), this exclusion from decision-making spaces reflects a deeper structural silencing that keeps marginalized individuals from accessing agency and visibility.

5. Social Identity

Fifth, social identity intersection of race, gender, and age. Emira’s identity as a young Black woman adds an additional layer to her disadvantaged position. She is racially profiled, underestimated, and treated with condescension by others in power. Her experiences reflect how race and gender intersect with class to intensify stratification.

“The security guard didn’t believe she was the babysitter.” (Reid, 2019:10); *“Emira had dated one white guy before... quotes from Martin Luther King Jr.”* (Reid, 2019:66). According to Breyer (2025:812) and Dubois et al. (2015:2), social stratification is often shaped by intersecting identities. Individuals like Emira face systemic discrimination and cultural devaluation that compound their economic disadvantage.

Even though Emira possesses education and a strong moral compass, the narrative reveals how systemic forces restrict her from translating those assets into upward mobility. Her position reflects how stratification is not merely about income but about access to symbolic recognition, professional pathways, and personal autonomy. Drawing from Max Weber’s multidimensional theory of class, status, and power, Emira’s story illustrates the lived experience of structural inequality. Her limited economic resources, lack of cultural fluency in elite spaces, social isolation, and identity-based marginalization all interact to keep her in a lower social position. Emira functions as a literary representation of how modern inequality is reproduced not only through systems but also through quiet acts of exclusion, omission, and powerlessness in everyday life.

Causes of Kelley’s Social Stratification.

Kelley Copeland portrays a privileged figure among the upper-middle-class white-collar workers, whose position reflects the shifts in education, occupation, lifestyle, and racial identity in reproducing social stratification. While less central than Alix, Kelley’s character provides insight into how class operates more subtly through emotional ease, institutional alignment, and access to resources. Although Kelley displays moments of critical awareness, her behaviour and worldview often reflect unexamined opinions about class mobility and privilege. The novel, Kelley argues, suggests that it is not just visible wealth that determines social stratification, but also the mobility, self-confidence, and space afforded by systemic advantage. This section examines Max Weber’s theories of class like economic position, status social respect, and power the ability to act freely. It explores the reasons why Kelley’s position is stratified.

These causal factors can be divided into five main components:

1. Economic Status

First, economic status included income, lifestyle, and material security. Kelley’s ability to consistently pay for drinks, offer Emira an Uber, send flowers, and host guests in a comfortable apartment shows that he possesses disposable income and financial independence. These gestures, while framed as kindness, also signal his economic position. *“Kelley purchased Emira’s fourth drink of the evening...”* (Reid, 2019:46); *“May I please have an Uber and a snack?”* (Reid, 2019:51); *“Kelley who’d sent flowers to her apartment that morning...”* (Reid, 2019:172). Such access to resources reflects what Gil-Hernández et al. (2025:1) describe as the foundational role of financial capital

in securing higher social standing. Kelley's financial fluidity allows him not only comfort but also control over how others perceive and depend on him.

2. Education as a Social Attribute

Second, education, worldview, and social expectations. Kelley frequently assumes others like Emira have the same access to opportunities or cultural references that he does. His suggestion that Emira should write an op-ed, or his casual jokes about insurance, show a lack of awareness of the gap between his social norms and hers. "*The night I met you, you were like, 'You should write an op-ed.'*" (Reid, 2019:49); "*'Should we get you a helmet for while you're uninsured?'*" (Reid, 2019:173). According to Bourquin et al. (2023:104), cultural capital includes education, communication style, and lifestyle assumptions that subtly gatekeep access to privilege. Kelley's comments reveal his positioning within a class that views higher education and institutional access as standard expectations.

3. Occupation

Third, Occupation included employment, professional networks, and public confidence. Kelley works in a modern, well-equipped office with amenities and upward mobility hallmarks of white-collar employment. He is also comfortable navigating elite public spaces and engaging socially with confidence and authority. "*Kelley worked at one of those fancy offices... unlimited cereal and La Croix.*" (Reid, 2019:62); "*'Hey, this round is on me,' Kelley announced to the group.*" (Reid, 2019:174). Dubois et al. (2015:2) describe social capital as the access to networks and environments that sustain one's class. Kelley's job environment, social presence, and mobility reflect his integration into a professional class that has both symbolic and material power.

4. Power

Fourth, power social influence, agency, and emotional control. Kelley often exerts subtle control in his relationships suggesting where Emira should go, what she should do, or inviting her to stay with him instead of her friends. These behaviours, though framed as intimacy, stem from a position of confidence and unchallenged personal agency. "*'Hey, don't go home with your girls tonight. Stay with me.'*" (Reid, 2019:174); "*Kelley inched through a crowd... 'Hey, pretty.'*" (Reid, 2019:172). As Weber explains (Oğuz, 2022:213), power includes not only authority but the ability to act freely within society without structural restraint. Kelley's physical comfort, emotional ease, and ability to direct situations reflect his high status and freedom from social limitations.

5. Social Identity

Fifth, social identity whiteness and gender as unspoken privileges. While the novel does not reduce Kelley to a stereotype, his whiteness and masculinity grant him cultural legitimacy and public safety that Emira does not share. His ability to navigate police

interactions, sports events, or upscale bars without fear reflects invisible advantages. “*At the basketball game... Kelley did a very cute half salute...*” (Reid, 2019:64); “*Kelley looked amused as Zara and Shaunie shouted ‘Champagne!’*” (Reid, 2019:174). Breyer (2025:812) and Dubois et al. (2015:2) emphasize how identity-based privilege, especially whiteness and maleness, functions as a silent form of social capital that facilitates access, authority, and reduced scrutiny. Kelley’s confidence is not only personal, but structurally supported by who he is in society.

Despite the fact that Kelley displays important points of self-awareness, her position in the social hierarchy is largely due to structural privilege and inherited capital. Her elevated position is due to her access to disposable income, elite work environments, cultural fluency, and collective identity-based advantages. Through Weber’s multidimensional lens, Kelley’s class, status, and power are representations of the systemic supports that allow her to live her life with confidence and control, not just individual achievement. Her character demonstrates that even well-off people benefit from patterns of privilege embedded in social stratification and often replicate them unconsciously.

Causes of Alix’s Social Stratification.

Alix Chamberlain serves as a central representation of how social stratification operates and is maintained within contemporary society. Although the novel does not provide a comprehensive account of Alix’s financial background or family history, her actions, lifestyle, and relationships reflect the various mechanisms through which privilege is preserved. Alix’s elevated social position is not solely the result of wealth but also stems from her access to cultural capital, social networks, institutional influence, and symbolic power. Through Alix, the novel illustrates that the causes of social stratification are multidimensional, aligning with Max Weber’s theory that social hierarchy is shaped by class economic position, status social honor, and power control over others. This subsection explores the underlying causes of Alix’s stratified position, drawing on both textual evidence and sociological theory to reveal how her privilege is constructed and sustained.

The causes can be categorized into five major factors:

1. Economic Status

First, economic status including wealth and property ownership. One of the clearest causes of Alix’s stratified social position is her accumulation of economic capital, which grants her access to housing, comfort, and professional autonomy. Alix owns a spacious three-story brownstone in New York’s Upper West Side, an exclusive and high-cost area signifying her elevated class position; “*And she lived in a three-story brownstone.*” (Reid, 2019:19). Her ability to employ a team, including an editorial assistant and two interns, further reflects her financial independence and managerial authority: “*Alix had a team*

consisting of one editorial assistant, two interns, and an 'office space' that overflowed into the kitchen in their Upper West Side apartment.” (Reid, 2019:16). According to Gil-Hernández et al. (2025:1) and Shamsie (2021:52), ownership of property and stable income are central to one's placement in the upper class. Economic capital directly determines a person's access to security, influence, and high-quality living conditions, thereby reinforcing social stratification.

2. Education as a Social Attribute

Second, cultural capital: taste, lifestyle, and education. Alix consistently performs class identity through her lifestyle, such as engaging in regular grooming, hosting curated events, and maintaining a public image through social media. These actions signal the cultural capital that distinguishes her from others. *“Alix had squeezed in a trim and blowout that morning in Manhattan.”* (Reid, 2019:155); *“She now had enough content to pretend that she still lived there.”* (Reid, 2019:155). Her participation in elite political events and social causes also reinforces her symbolic alignment with the upper-middle class: *“She ate ice cream... attended event for the Clinton campaign.”* (Reid, 2019:155). Bourquin et al. (2023:104) argue that upper-class individuals use cultural capital such as taste, refined knowledge, and symbolic alignment with causes to maintain exclusivity. As Chakrabarti (2022:3) states, status is not just inherited but actively performed through lifestyle.

3. Occupation

Third, occupation including institutional and professional networks. Alix's access to elite social and academic networks allows her to receive career opportunities and maintain professional relevance. She corresponds with professors from prestigious institutions and is later offered a position at the New School. *“She had an email from a professor in communications at the New School...”* (Reid, 2019:155); *“Alix had accepted the position at the New School...”* (Reid, 2019:203). According to Dubois et al. (2015:2), social capital refers to access to advantageous relationships and networks, which often remain closed to those from lower social backgrounds. Gil-Hernández et al. (2025:1) also highlight how institutional affiliations help individuals sustain class dominance and gain additional influence.

4. Power

Fourth, power: ability to control narratives and influence others. Alix exercises symbolic power by appropriating and repackaging Emira's traumatic experience for her own brand and benefit. She receives a video of the grocery store incident and uses it to shape her public persona, claiming it creates a win-win situation: *“Laney had delivered the grocery store video... 'Everybody wins with this.'”* (Reid, 2019:155). Furthermore, Alix is comfortable invading Emira's privacy: *“Alix had developed an awful and invasive habit of returning home... looking at Emira's phone.”* (Reid, 2019:54). Max Weber (as cited in

Oğuz, 2022:213) defines power as the ability to assert control over others. Bland & Chen (2021:3) note that power is often exercised subtly through surveillance, narrative control, or emotional dominance all of which are present in Alix's interactions with Emira.

5. Social Identity

The last is social identity and symbolic inclusion. Alix also benefits from racial and cultural identity, which afford her societal trust, credibility, and the symbolic ability to include or exclude others. Her gesture of touching Emira's shoulder after touching her daughter suggests an attempt to symbolically "*adopt*" Emira into her social space though it still reinforces a power imbalance: "*Alix transferred her hand from her daughter's back to Emira's shoulder.*" (Reid, 2019:208). Alix's perception of Emira as someone who could "*represent*" her publicly also reflects symbolic inclusion, where marginalized individuals are used to enhance elite identity without disrupting social hierarchy: "*Alix felt prepared not only to represent Philadelphia, but to let Emira represent her too.*" (Reid, 2019:203). According to Breyer (2025:812) and Dubois et al. (2015:2), social identity, such as race, gender, and lifestyle, plays a significant role in social stratification. Dominant groups often use symbolic inclusion to reinforce their moral authority without actually redistributing power.

Even though there are limited explicit details about Alix's full socioeconomic background or the origins of her wealth, the narrative provides enough indirect evidence to analyse the causes of her social stratification through her lifestyle, behaviour, and access to resources. Her character reflects how social position is not solely defined by visible wealth, but also by cultural capital, professional networks, symbolic power, and identity-based privilege. Drawing from Max Weber's multidimensional theory of stratification; class, status, and power. Alix's story illustrates how social advantages are maintained through everyday practices such as curated appearances, institutional affiliations, and performative inclusiveness. These advantages are reinforced not only through economic capital, but also through symbolic gestures and control over narratives. Despite the lack of detailed biographical data, Alix functions as a literary representation of upper-class dominance, revealing how privilege is reproduced and normalized within a stratified society.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that social stratification in *Such a Fun Age* is rooted in interconnected systemic factors of economic inequality, unequal access to education and professional networks, institutional power imbalances, and identity-based privilege that collectively reinforce class hierarchies. Using Weber's framework, this analysis demonstrates how characters like Emira, who experiences constraints such as precarity and marginalization, Kelley, who benefits from under-examined privilege, and Alix, who utilizes cultural and economic capital, embody the mechanisms of modern inequality. The novel critiques

these structures by revealing how stratification persists not through overt exclusion but through the subtle and everyday reproduction of advantage. Future research could expand this analysis by examining intersectional dynamics in other contemporary literary works or investigating how fictional narratives influence real-world perceptions of class. Practical interventions must address structural barriers in education, the labor market, and social policy to break the cycle of inequality. Ultimately, Reid's work serves as both a mirror and a catalyst for deeper social reflection on entrenched stratification.

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