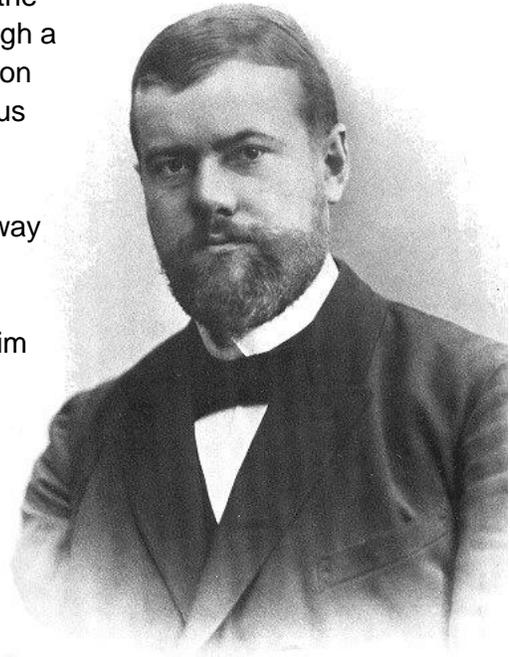


***Emma, Jane Eyre, Great Expectations,
or Tess of the d'Urbervilles***

Max Weber was a German social scientist who helped pioneer the modern discipline of sociology (the study of populations). Through a series of influential texts, he crafted a theory of social stratification that helps explain why some people have higher and lower status within a given society.

For Weber, the exercise of power is the ability to get your own way with others, regardless of their ability to resist you. This results from “unequal access to material resources,” so, if someone possesses something that you want or need, then this makes him or her potentially more powerful than you. Social stratification, then, results from the unequal distribution of resources within a society. Weber identifies three mechanisms by which this happens:

1. Economic Situation (Class)
2. Status Situation (Prestige)
3. Political Situation (Political Power)



Max Weber
1864-1920

The last of these, political situation, will not concern us, since this is largely beyond the scope of *Emma, Jane Eyre, Great Expectations, or Tess of the d'Urbervilles*.

Economic Situation

I have divided this into categories (material and social resources) for the sake of clarity. Weber would have considered both a social resource.

- a. *material resources* (something tangible that is possessed-- such as money, land, or property)
- b. *social resources* (an intangible advantage that occurs as a result of or in tandem with material resources-- such as education, opportunities, or knowledge)

Status (discussed below) is also a social resource in the Weberian sense.

Status Situation

We can subdivide this into:

- a. *restricted pattern of social intercourse* (with whom one associates and the benefits derived thereof)
- b. *sharing of food and other benefits within groups* (with whom one dines, but also things such as the clubs one joins or the parties one attends)
- c. *status conventions or traditions* (manners, customs, affectations, etc.)
- d. *acquisition or avoidance of certain opportunities* (some things are desirable, some things undesirable dependent on one's status within a society)

Social status often overlaps with economic status, but this is not always true. Think, for example, of the difference between “old money” and “new money,” or, alternatively, characters in the novels you have read that have little capital, but upper-class backgrounds.

Implications

One's situation in society obviously affects one's outlook and behavior, and moving from one situation to another would also change one's perspective on one's environment.

DIRECTIONS: Using the above categories, fill in information from either *Emma* (for EACH category, analyze either Emma Woodhouse, Harriet Smith, or Jane Fairfax), *Jane Eyre* (for EACH category, analyze either Jane Eyre before she becomes a governess, Jane Eyre after she becomes a governess, or Edward Rochester), *Great Expectations* (for EACH category, analyze either Pip before he moves to London, Pip after he moves to London, or Miss Havisham), or *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (for EACH category, analyze either Tess Durbeyfield, Alec d'Urberville, or Angel Clare).

You may switch back and forth between your three choices. Were it me, for each category I would choose the character who would either generate the most documentation or the character who would generate the most interesting analysis for the Summary and Implications paragraph.

The more thorough your evidence, the more credit you will receive. If the evidence requires brief explanation to demonstrate its applicability, provide this as well. Cite examples with chapter numbers (this is important to me-- do not forget to do it).

After you have listed your examples, briefly discuss the implications for characterization, attitude, and/or behavior for each of the six categories in a loosely organized paragraph.

You will have class time in class to complete this assignment, and you may do it on your own or with a partner who is reading the same novel.

Partial Example (using Elena from *My Brilliant Friend*):

Economic Situation -- Material resources: not modelled in this example

Economic Situation -- Social resources: not modelled in this example

Status Situation -- Restricted pattern of social intercourse: not modelled in this example

Status Situation -- Sharing of food and other benefits within groups:

- Elena pretends to like the bitter and astringent sorb apples (a low status, peasant food-- normally processed to make cider or jam, not eaten off the tree) that Enzo offers to Lila, hoping that Lila would offer them to her as a marker of their friendship. Normally, though, she would reject them, as her economic situation does not compel her to eat foods she dislikes in order to assuage her hunger (though her social situation is not so high that her lie lacks all plausibility) (l.12).
- Cookies and soft drinks (offered by her teacher while Elena is preparing for the admissions test) are a great treat for Elena, demonstrating their rarity (l.15).
- Elena is jealous of the Sarratore family, who casually picnic at the beach. By contrast, Elena's father not only does not earn the type of salary to afford this level of leisure, but he also lacks the desire to go (since their relatively low social situation does not demand that he engage in bourgeois family outings) (l.16).

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- Large social gatherings to which Elena is invited are celebrated on holidays and special events. In other words, there has to be a specific, important purpose to justify the trouble and expense. At these gatherings, she associates with people just above or just below her status and situation as (more or less) an equal-- though males always take the more active roles in making the arrangements and making decisions. The standards for behavior at such events are always informal. Like other poorer people in the neighborhood, she must defer to more high status members of society (like the Solara brothers), even if this means tolerating rude or boorish behavior (II.1, II.16, II.55).
- Once she reaches adolescence, Elena helps to prepare food for herself and others to eat (as opposed to being served)-- even when not dining in her own home (I.9, II.27). Part of the way that Elena earns her keep for her vacation in Ischia is to help Nella Incardo with the cooking, demonstrating her limited means (II.30).
- As she grows older, Elena eats cheap, informal meals at the pizzeria, pastry shop, or ice cream shop with close friends of roughly the same social and economic situation. In such settings, she has to watch her behavior and not draw too much attention to herself-- especially outside the neighborhood, where Elena is more conscious of her lower social and economic status compared to those who live in the city proper (II.16).
- Elena is nervous about eating in an actual restaurant for the first time, an experience that she has to wait until adolescence to enjoy. Preparing for the event she is anxious about what to wear or how to behave, and she shows little awareness of the distinction between types of restaurants (e.g., casual versus fine dining). Even though she is not paying, Elena is frightened by the potential cost of the food that Stefano orders (II.44).
- By the end of the novel, Elena rejects the drunken behavior at Lila's wedding, seeing the overconsumption of alcohol as vulgar and low class. She no longer feels comfortable in that setting (II.67).

Summary and Implications: Elena's economic status is such that she is not worried about going hungry, but neither is there enough disposable income in the house to justify extravagances like restaurants or frequent social gatherings without a clearly defined purpose. Elena is often depicted in the novel as being involved in the food preparation, as opposed to being served, a marker of her relatively low status. When she is a part of social gatherings, she socializes with those of roughly the same social and economic situation-- except when she participates as a dependent (such as a guest of the wealthier Stefano Carracci). Such social gatherings are all informal (in terms of behavior and expectations), even when in celebration of a big event (which justifies more elaborate preparations). Alcohol consumption at these gatherings often leads to raucous or violent behavior, and Elena's (internal) rejection of this is a marker of how her social situation is rising by the end of the novel (though not her economic situation). She is embarrassed by behaviors and attitudes that she increasingly sees as a marker of poverty, an awareness made possible by her education (at novel's end she has more schooling than virtually anyone else in the neighborhood). Thus, she feels alienated from her previous social circle (both family and friends), identifying more with Nino Sarratore (a character who represents, for her, a new world of possibility made possible by education).

Status Situation -- Status conventions or traditions: not modelled in this example

Status Situation -- Acquisition or avoidance of certain opportunities: not modelled in this example