

## Cultural Identity And Symbolic Interactionism In Karma Brown's Novel "Recipe For A Perfect Wife": Anthropology Of Literature Study

Divya Widyastuti<sup>1</sup>, Juliansyah<sup>2</sup>, Alia Afiyati<sup>3</sup>

<sup>123</sup>Universitas Darma Persada

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### ABSTRACT

In a literary work, two characters can be narrated as the attention center that contains the cultural identity from certain generation. Meanwhile, a symbol actually can cause an interaction within characters. This research discusses about cultural identity and symbolic interactionism reflected in a novel. There is a novel entitled "Recipe for a Perfect Wife" by Karma Brown that tells about two female characters that are represented as a housewife from different generation. This research uses descriptive qualitative as the research methodology and content analysis as the method in analyzing the object of the research, a novel entitled "Recipe for a Perfect Wife". This research also uses the intrinsic approach to analyze the characterization, plot, and setting. This research reveals two kinds of a housewife. They are a housewife and working woman, and a full-housewife. This research finds five cultural identities in the past and present time that is related with a housewife reflected by two female characters in the novel by using cultural identity theory by Stuart Hall. This research also reveals the symbol and memory even three concepts of symbolic interactionism that is mind, self, and society based on symbolic interactionism theory by George Herbert Mead.

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### Abstrak

*Dalam sebuah karya sastra, dua karakter dapat dinarasikan sebagai pusat atensi yang menyimpan identitas budaya dari generasi tertentu. Sementara itu, sebuah simbol ternyata dapat menyebabkan terjadinya sebuah interaksi antar karakter. Penelitian ini menganalisis tentang identitas budaya dan interaksionisme simbolik dalam novel. Ada sebuah novel yang berjudul "Recipe for a Perfect Wife" karya dari Karma Brown yang menceritakan tentang dua karakter wanita yang direpresentasikan sebagai seorang ibu rumah tangga dari generasi yang berbeda. Penelitian ini menggunakan metodologi penelitian deskriptif kualitatif dan analisis konten sebagai metodenya dalam menganalisis objek penelitian yakni novel "Recipe for a Perfect Wife". Penelitian ini juga menggunakan pendekatan intrinsik untuk mengungkap karakterisasi, plot, dan setting yang ada di dalam novel. Penelitian ini mengungkap ada dua jenis ibu rumah tangga yakni ibu rumah tangga sekaligus wanita karir dan ibu rumah tangga sepenuhnya. Penelitian ini menemukan lima identitas budaya pada masa lampau dan masa sekarang yang berkaitan dengan ibu rumah tangga yang dicerminkan oleh kedua karakter wanita di dalam novel dengan menggunakan teori identitas budaya dari Stuart Hall. Penelitian ini juga mengungkap simbol dan memori serta tiga konsep interaksionisme simbolik yakni mind, self, dan society dengan berdasar pada teori interaksionisme simbolik dari George Herbert Mead..*

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### Corresponding Author:

Juliansyah

Universitas Darma Persada

Email: [juliansyah@fs.unsada.ac.id](mailto:juliansyah@fs.unsada.ac.id)

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## 1. BACKGROUND

A novel has many kinds of values that people can learn. One of the values is cultural value. Culture is a whole system of ideas, actions, and the work of human beings in order to become a society that human beings belong to learn (Koentjaraningrat, 2000, p. 181). The cultural value constitutes cultural identity. Cultural identity is an identity of individual, community, or society for living their real life. Not only in reality but also in literary work, cultural identity happens (Hall, 1990, p. 713). In the novel, there is also an interaction within the characters. According to Brown (as cited in Astuti, 2011, p. 12), interaction is the exchange of thoughts, feelings, or ideas

collaborated between two or more people that has a reciprocal effect on each other as a result. People interact with other people as a matter of socialization.

A novel called “Recipe for a Perfect Wife” is a literary work of the author, Karma Brown. This novel tells about Alice Hale and Nellie Murdoch who are housewives from two different eras. Brown brings the life of a housewife in 1950s and 2018. Alice lives in the modern lifestyle and decides to become a housewife while Nellie is a housewife herself like a woman used to be in the past decades. What interesting here is a housewife representation in two different generations.

Literature and culture can be combined in a study. This kind of study can be named as anthropology of literature. This study requires literature-based with its instrument, namely anthropology. Nyoman Kutha Ratna (2011), in her book entitled “*Antropologi Sastra: Peranan Unsur-unsur Kebudayaan dalam Proses Kreatif*”, states that anthropology of literature study is a study that combines sociology of literature and psychology of literature. Sociology of literature requires a relationship with society while psychology of literature is a relationship within self. The anthropology of literature requires a figure of person in society and deal with self that shows the cultural values.

Based on the description above, I am interested in analyzing the cultural identity that exists in 2018 and 1950s and symbolic interactionism that is reflected in the novel. The source of the problem found in the characters of two females in the novel tells about issue in generation, cultural identity, and interaction. The research is intended to answer the questions as follows: (1) What kind of a housewife representation in the portrait of two female characters from different generation is?, (2) What are the cultural identities in 2018 and 1950s reflected by two female characters?, and (3) What is the symbolic interactionism illustrated in Alice and Nellie’s point of view?

## 2. METHOD OF THE RESEARCH

There are three research approaches, namely (a) qualitative, (b) quantitative, (c) mixed-methods research (John W. Creswell, 2014, p. 3). I use a qualitative method to conduct this research. Based on the problems that are analyzed, this research uses the descriptive qualitative method. Endraswara says this method is described by words or figures if necessary, and it does not describe the numerical analysis (Endraswara, 2004, p. 16). The primary data that I use in this research are facts and information related to cultural identity and symbolic interactionism taken from the novel entitled “Recipe for a Perfect Wife” by Karma Brown. Meanwhile, the secondary data of this research as the supporting data are facts and information that are relevant with cultural identity and symbolic interactionism gathered from related books, thesis, journals, and articles in the internet.

In analyzing the object of the research, the method of content analysis is used in this research. According to Hseih and Shannon, content analysis can be defined as a flexible research method for analyzing texts and describing and interpreting the written artifacts of a society (Hseih and Shannon in R. Beach et al., 2009, p. 129). This method requires the researchers’ interpretation on the whole content in the novel. This research also uses documentation-based, so that the data are taken by using library research technique. I also add intrinsic elements consisting of character and characterization, plot, and setting as an approach in analyzing the data.

## 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Representation of a Housewife Reflected in Two Female Characters in Karma Brown’s Novel “Recipe for a Perfect Wife”

#### A. Alice as A Hard-working woman

Alice’s life exists in 2018. Alice marries to Nathan Hale or also known as Nate Hale. They live in an apartment in Manhattan before they move to Greenville. Alice is not a housewife back then. She is a hard-working woman. Before marrying Nate, Alice works in public relation

company called Wittington Group. She is still working even though she is married. Nate seems fine with his wife's job. Otherwise, he supports Alice's career.

*Nate was appropriately concerned, encouraging her to file a complaint with human resources. Alice resisted, said she wanted to move on, and declared she was finished with the dishonesty of public relations. At that Nate reminded her, as good husbands do, that she was too talented for such a lack of appreciation. (Brown, 2018, p. 107)*

From the quotation above, Nate, as a husband, supports what Alice does for her life. When Alice is in trouble, he tries to defend his wife. He suggests Alice to complain with human resources in her company. When Alice wants it that way, Nate still supports her. Nate even compliments her wife that she is talented. It shows that Nate does not mind that his wife is working like him. Nate is an actuary while Alice is a publicist. That Alice works hard shows that she helps Nate in financial aspect. They together support their marriage life.

*"You bought me a house."*

*"We bought this house." Nate nuzzled his chin, which with a shadow of a beard was like fine sandpaper, into Alice's neck and planted a soft kiss. She didn't correct him, didn't remind him it had been mostly his savings that had gone into the down payment. (Brown, 2018, p. 28)*

The quotation above shows that Alice and Nate buy the house in Greenville. It is not only Nate's money but also Alice's money to buy the house. Both of them takes a big role in money. Even though the author states that Alice knows that the house is bought mostly by Nate's savings. Indeed, Nate has a big role in buying the house. However, Alice still takes a part in supporting the money. Still, Alice supports the financial. In other hand, Nate also supports Alice in working on her writing about novel.

*..., she'd told Nate she was going into the city to meet an editor friend to get a few novel-writing tips.*

*"That's a great idea," Nate had said. He'd asked then the writing was going, and she'd kept things vague, offering, "It's coming along." (Brown, 2018, p. 87 – 88)*

From the quotation above, Nate is taking care of his wife's career. He supports Alice's new job after working in public relations. He also asks about the progress of Alice's writing. While he works in the city, Alice works on her novel at home. It shows that Nate, as a husband, supports Alice's writing. Alice admits that her writing novel is her part-time job. It can be said that Alice represents a housewife that works along with her husband supporting the financial aspect. The author, Brown, narrates that Alice has raised and lives in the urban city, Manhattan, for her whole life. She, in the story, is narrated as a woman from 2018. It can be said that Alice lives in the modern era. Indeed, she maintains the values in which most American have, namely are freedom of speech and independent values. Even though she is married to Nate Hale, Alice shows that she is not weak and obedient with her husband's rules like any other wives back then. In fact, it is believed that a wife should obey her husband's order in the past days. However, Alice proves that she has the right to speak her opinions about something to her husband, Nate.

*"Is. This. About. Drew. Baxter?"*

*"What the hell is that supposed to mean?"*

*"Are you sleeping with her?"*

*"Have you gone insane, Ali? You actually think I'm having an affair? With Drew?"*

*"I know she called you that day, when you told me it was Rob. So don't be so fucking righteous. You lied to me about her." (Brown, 2018, p. 296)*

From the quotation above, Alice assumes that Nate has an affair with his studying partner at his work, Drew. She accuses Nate for having affair and lying to her about Drew. She feels jealous because of Drew. She brings the topic about Drew because she wants to know about what has happened between Nate and Drew. It shows that Alice is not afraid in speaking of her uncomfortableness about Drew. She tells Nate directly that she assumes there is something going on between her husband and that partner of him. It can be concluded that Alice speaks her opinions about anything she wants to voice up.

Meanwhile Alice seems to be independent as the housewife. She reflects the independent value as it is narrated by Brown in the story. She can live with herself alone even though Nate is not there with her.

*She stepped back from him but kept her voice calm, her tone serene and matter of-fact. "If you decide to go to L.A., you are going alone. I will stay here and finish my book, take care of this house, raise our child. You're welcome to be a part of that, or not. Your choice."* (Brown, 2018, p. 308)

Alice decides that she can live in the house in Greenville alone if Nate is still eager to move to Los Angeles. Nate gets promoted in the office in Los Angeles and he tries to convince Alice to move in the city. However, Alice does not want to move from the house to the city. She wants to stay in the house even though she has to be alone. When she says that she stays in the house, her voice is calm. It shows that Alice does not fear to live alone in the house and tries to show that she states her choice with confidence; she believes herself that she can live alone. The fact that Alice is pregnant but she decides to live alone proves that she is independent. When she gives Nate her option about staying alone in the house, she is brave to decide raising her children alone in the house without the help of her own husband, Nate. It can be concluded that Alice is independent.

#### **B. Alice as a Part-time Housewife**

Alice is also a part-time housewife. Alice and Nate move to Greenville, the sub-urban city, to start a new life as a marriage couple. Alice decides to become a housewife there after the boss fired her as the publicist at Wittington Group. They leave the urban city, Manhattan, and buy a gargantuan house in Greenville. In Greenville, Alice starts her life as a housewife while Nate is supposed to work in the office in Manhattan. As Alice lives with a new role as the housewife, she learns how to cook and garden.

*Alice set the cookbook on the kitchen countertop, then took the butter, milk, eggs, and cheese from the fridge. After checking, and confirming, that she did not have paprika, she added extra black pepper as a compromise and a sprinkle replace the herb mix she couldn't find an ingredients list for.* (Brown, 2018, p. 77 – 78)

As a woman, especially as a wife, who is not expert in cooking, Alice seems to learn how to cook. Alice uses the cookbook to guide her how to cook. The cookbook is the old book that she finds at the basement of her house in Greenville. The cookbook belongs to Elsie Swann, Nellie Murdoch's mother. Alice makes the cookbook as her guidance in cooking the food for her and her husband. She does whatever the written recipe in the cookbook says. However, there are some ingredients that she cannot find in her kitchen so she replaces them with the same flavor but different ingredient. It is common to happen when Alice lives in the modern era.

*Because cooking for oneself was not a necessary life skill in the city (and having been raised by a mother who could barely make eggs edible), Alice was generally useless in the kitchen. But she wanted to be better, so it was time she figured a few things out. Not the least of which was how to cook a decent meal.* (Brown, 2018, p. 78)

As it is narrated above, Alice admits that they know nothing about cooking. Alice lives in the city for her whole life. When it comes to cooking, she can see that she is useless. In addition, her mother, Jaclyn, is not the kind of mother who is good at cooking. That is why Alice has no idea about cookbook. Using the cookbook she finds, she learns how to cook a good food. It can be said that even though she is not familiar with cooking, she wants to learn how to cook in her new house in Greenville. She tries to make a good food for her husband.

*He leaned back in the chair, stretched out his legs. "So how's the garden? Where are we at?"*

...

*"Turns out gardening is actually weeding. Endless weeding." She sighed, placed the elastic back around the remaining letters.*

...

“What’s next?”

“Honestly, **I’m still not sure what’s a plant and what’s a weed**. So maybe let’s pull the stuff that looks like it doesn’t belong? Like these.” **She crouched in front of a small patch of dandelion**. (Brown, 2018, p. 206 – 207)

From the quotation above, Alice shows that she does not know a thing about the term of gardening. However, she chooses to learn how to garden. As it is said before, Alice obviously not only learns how to cook but also learns how to garden. When her husband asks about her new activity in gardening, she admits that she tries to get used to her life change in Greenville – learn how to garden. She also admits that she even does not know the difference between a plant and a weed. Alice tells Nate that she chooses to guess whether it is a plant or a weed in the garden. In her opinion, a thing that does not belong in the garden is supposed to be removed. It can be said that Alice tries to learn how to garden.

From the explanation above, it can be said that even though Alice knows nothing about cooking and gardening, she wants to learn how to do both of them. She learns how to cook with the recipe that she finds in the basement of her new house in Greenville, the sub-urban city. She also learns how to garden by independent learning; she admits that she does a guessing aspect. It can be concluded that although she is still in adaptation mode when it comes to her new role of a housewife, she has an effort to learn how to cook and how to garden.

### C. Nellie as a Full Housewife

In Nellie’s perspective, she lives in the 1950s. She is married to Richard Murdoch. The novel narrates that Nellie is described as a full-housewife. From the beginning of her marriage life, she is a housewife. She does the household – cooking, washing, and gardening. Nellie does not work at her marriage life. Richard is the one who supports family’s financial. Nellie’s job is doing the household, and she is forbidden to work outside – paid-job.

*Despite **Richard’s family’s money**—which was **now their money**, since his mother Grace’s death only four weeks after their wedding—**Nellie still liked a deal***. (Brown, 2018, p. 19)

The quotation above shows that Nellie has no role in supporting the family’s financial. The financial aspect is supported by her husband’s side. Indeed, the money is from the legacy of Richard’s family. It shows that Richard takes a big role in supporting family financial. In fact, Richard is the only one that works.

***Harry Stewart was one of Richard’s salesmen and had died riding the train to work the previous Friday morning***. (Brown, 2018, p. 36)

From the quotation above, Harry Stewart is one of Richard’s salesmen. Indeed, Richard works in the same company as Harry. It seems that Harry is his employee at the company. Harry uses the train to go to work and the train mostly associates with the route to the city. It can be said that Richard works in the city. However, Nellie is at home doing the household’s task and waiting for her husband to go home.

*Setting the cookbook aside, she finished her glass of lemonade and decided it was time to **get to the garden** before the day got away from her entirely*.

...

*Back in the kitchen **Nellie washed and chopped the parsley** and added it to the meat mixture, along with a sprinkle of the dried herbs she cultivated in her garden and kept in a cheese shaker in the cupboard*.

...

*She hummed to the radio as **she trimmed a few mint leaves**, hoping Richard wouldn’t be late for dinner again tonight*. (Brown, 2018, 20 – 22)

The quotation above shows that Nellie spends her time by gardening. She treats her garden like it is her duty. It seems that she always looks for her garden regularly. In other hand, she takes the advantage from her garden and makes it as an herb. She makes her own herb with the help of her beneficial garden. Nellie maintains her garden to make it useful for her and Richard’s life. Nellie not only does the gardening, but also waits Richard to go home from

work for dinner. It can be said that these are the job of Nellie as a housewife. It is true that Nellie is a fully housewife and does not work. The duty of work is done by Richard Murdoch, Nellie's husband. Indeed, she represents a housewife who does not work.

Nellie Murdoch lives in 1950s. In 1950s, a wife should not work and dedicates her life to the husband as a housewife. The housewife itself has some characteristics that show about the standard of housewife back then. In this context, Nellie represents four characteristics regarding the housewife's aspect as it is narrated in the story; those are quiet and good listener; good at cooking, well-appearance, and the husband is the boss.

### **Cultural Identity Reflected in Two Female Characters in Karma Brown's Novel "Recipe for a Perfect Wife"**

Cultural identity deals with an identity of individual, community, or society for living one's real life. In the context of a novel, a character might reflect the cultural identity. This cultural identity in individual part can represent the cultural identity in community or society. Both Alice Hale and Nellie Murdoch is a housewife. These two female characters in the novel entitled "Recipe for a Perfect Wife" by Karma Brown reflect their own the cultural identity. Their cultural identity shows the housewife that exists in their generation. Alice and Nellie, as the individual, reflect the cultural identity of community and society. The community as the housewife and the society that lives in 2018 and 1950s exists in the novel. They can show the life in both eras as it is narrated in the story. They are the representative for their community and society by doing their activities every day. Alice reflects the cultural identity of housewife in 2018. Meanwhile, Nellie shows the cultural identity in 1950s.

#### **Cultural Identity in 2018 from Alice's Perspective**

There are five cultural identities that are found in Alice's perspective. Those five reflect the cultural identity in 2018.

##### a. Smoking is strange

Alice is the main character of the story. In the story, Alice is said to smoke. There is a reason behind Alice's smoking act. She smokes to release her stress.

*The pack of cigarettes was bulky inside the band of her tights, and the sharp edges dug into her skin. She had no intention of actually smoking a cigarette, yet knowing she had the option relaxed her.* (Brown, 2018, 71)

From the quotation above, it can be said that Alice is smoking. Alice smokes because of something; there is a reason behind it. As narrated above, Alice is said to relax herself with smoking. She feels so stressed until she decides to buy a cigarette to release the stress. Alice believes that the cigarette can calm her. However, she tries hard to not get caught smoking, especially her husband.

*"Shit, shit, shit," she mumbled, tugging the cigarette from the holder and plopping it into her glass of water. She used one of the old magazines to fan the smoke out the open window.*

...

*Her tense voice betrayed her nerves.*

...

*Nate stared at her, incredulous. "Are you smoking?"*

*"I had one. I never told you this, but I used to smoke, in college, for like, a second." She sounded a touch hysterical and so took a deep breath.* (Brown, 2018, p. 255)

From the quotation above, Alice does not want Nate knows about her action of smoking. She gets panicked when Nate comes home. She impulsively puts the cigarette inside the water and fans the smoke out. Alice seems so shocked when Nate found out about her smoking. The word 'hysterical' shows that the smoking is a big deal in that era for a woman, especially a wife. Alice tries to explain to Nate that she is used to smoke in college. That she tries to give an explanation to someone because of her action in smoking shows that smoking is strange for a woman, especially a wife for her husband. The fact that Nate asks about it in shocked proves the assumptions more valid. Alice also tries to explain when Sally, her neighbor, catches her smoking.

*“You’ll have to excuse my forwardness—at my age you simply say what you’re thinking—but are you trying to quit, Alice?”*

*“Oh, I don’t smoke. I mean, I used to. A while ago.” Alice shrugged, seeing the combination of kindness and **pity on Sally’s face**. “These are just **in case of emergency**.” (Brown, 2018, p. 74)*

From the quotation above, Alice tells Sally that smoking is not her habit every day. Alice convinces Sally that she smokes because she gets an emergency that needs herself smoking. That Sally asks Alice about her action of smoking shows that smoking in Alice’s era is strange for woman. If it is not strange, Sally does not ask about it. If smoking is a common thing in that era, there is no need explanation behind the act. It can be concluded that smoking for woman is not common in the era of 2018.

b. Private party

In Alice’s era, it is common to host a party to celebrate something. Alice has a farewell party with Bronwyn.

*The night before, their last in Manhattan, **Alice’s best friend, Bronwyn, had thrown them a moving-out party** to which she wore all black, including a lace-veiled funeral hat she’d picked up at a consignment shop.*

...  
*Around midnight they escaped Bronwyn’s crowded living room—their friends shoulder to shoulder in the cramped, humid space—and **shared the last of a bottle of tequila** on the fire escape, until **Alice’s words grew slurry and Bronwyn fell asleep**, head in her best friend’s lap. (Brown, 2018, 23 – 24)*

As it is narrated, Alice and Bronwyn host a party just two of them. This party can be counted as a farewell party in which Alice moves from Manhattan to Greenville with Nate. It can be seen in the narration that they live in the party until they get drunk. It can be said that it is common that a party can be held privately even just two people. In addition, in a party, it is also common to be partying until they get drunk. It shows the cultural identity in 2018 that someone hosts a private party.

c. Laptop and smartphone

In Alice’s era, the technology has been developed. Alice is easy to get in touch with her husband and her friends. She does not wait a few days or weeks to get to know about everyone’s life going. Everything in Alice’s life is instant.

*Her gestured to her **laptop**.*

...  
*Alice made one last attempt to take the **laptop** back from him, but he was taller than she was and held it over his head. And then she saw he’d managed to open the Word document titled “Novel” and, breathing heavily, she let her arms fall to her sides. (Brown, 2018, p. 301)*

From the narration above, it shows that Alice uses laptop in writing her novel. The laptop is one of the evidences that technology has been developed in Alice’s era. It proves that people can get easier than the past times when writing something important by using laptop. There is no paper that has to be wasted when people type incorrectly. Back then, people use a typewriter to write something, especially novel. It can be said that laptop is the cultural identity that has been found in Alice’s era, 2018.

*The **phone** call was a shock.*

...  
*She was tugging on her socks when her **phone** rang, and her throat parched at the name on the screen. Alice’s instincts told her to ignore it (she had nothing to say to her), yet suddenly her **phone** was to her ear. “Hello?” (Brown, 2018, p. 68 – 69)*

As it is narrated above, smartphone is also the evidence that technology exists in 2018. Alice gets a phone call from Georgia, her ex-boss. She has important thing to tell Alice. It shows that Georgia can talk with Alice just by using a smartphone. There is no need to meet up or even a letter that needs to be waited several days. Alice does not only get a phone call but also get a message.

*Her phone vibrated in her back pocket.*

I put the garbage out. Remember I'm home late—study session.

Alice tapped back a quick response. On it with the lawn. I'll wait up for you. Xo (Brown, 2018, p. 89)

Alice gets a text about the garbage of the house from her husband, Nate. It takes only a second to know the message that Nate tries to deliver. By using a phone, a message can be read quickly and the garbage can be done early. It can be said that people can choose whether they call or they type a message for someone to deliver a message. It can be seen from the narration that a smartphone is also the cultural identity.

d. Living together without marriage

In 2018, living together without marriage is common for American citizens. They can live in one place without a sacred vow named marriage. They are free to live together. It can be seen in Alice's life with Nate Hale. Alice lives together with Nate without marriage.

*Bronwyn had said, following Alice around when she came back to their apartment briefly to pack a few things to stay at Nate's.*

...

*"She's still here! You're overacting, Bron. Yes, I have a **boyfriend**. But I am still your best friend and will never abandon you. Don't worry."*

...

*A few months later Alice officially moved in with Nate, and six months after that, during an early-morning jog through the park, Nate proposed.* (Brown, 2018, p. 32 – 33)

As it is narrated above, it can be said that Alice moves in with Nate's apartment when his status is her boyfriend. It means that they are not marriage yet. Alice moves to Nate's place as his girlfriend. Then after six months of living together at Nate's place, he proposes Alice. It proves that they live together first and then they plan to get marriage after that. It can be said that living together without marriage is common in 2018. It can be seen from Bronwyn's reaction. She is not shocked with Alice's decision. Otherwise, she seems like nothing happen with Alice moving in to Nate's place. So, it can be said that living together without marriage in this context is the cultural identity.

e. There is no worker in the house

Alice lives in the house in Greenville alone with Nate. Alice does the household by herself. *Alice took the spade and dug around one of the dandelion's roots, lifting it out with a large chunk of dirt attached.*

...

*"Ali, gloves." Alice took off her gloves and handed them to Nate.*

...

*Nate ignored her questions, grunting as he dug in and around the base of the cut foxglove stem.* (Brown, 2018, p. 207 – 208)

From the narration above, it shows that Alice is helped by Nate, her husband. Nate helps her in gardening. It can be said that even though they do not hire a worker to take care of their garden, they can work together to take care of it. It can be said that in 2018, it is not common to hire a worker in the house. People can do the work in the house by themselves independently.

### **Cultural Identity in 1950s from Nellie's Perspective**

There are five cultural identities that are found in Nellie's perspective. Those five reflect the cultural identity in 1950s.



## i) Smoking is common

Nellie is said to be smoking in her era, 1950s. She smokes in her daily life and her husband seems fine seeing her smoking in the house.

*Sliding the slender cigarette into her mother-of-pearl holder and lighting it, she sat in one of her new chairs—robin’s-egg blue, like cloudless summer skies—at the kitchen table and smoked, flipping through the latest Ladies’ Home Journal. Richard kept telling to get her to switch to gum (he’d inherited a chewing gum business from his father, the original Richard Murdoch), or at least to a filtered cigarette, suggesting they were healthier.* (Brown, 2018, p. 18)

From the quotation above, Nellie is smoking, but her husband does not show that he is offended about the fact that Nellie is smoking. Otherwise, Richard, her husband, suggests Nellie to choose the filtered cigarette. He only suggests but not warns her. It shows that smoking for a woman, especially the wife, is common in such those days. It can be said that the fact about the woman is smoking shows the cultural identity.

## ii) Tupperware party

Nellie, in her era, attends Tupperware party. Tupperware party, based on Wordnik Online Dictionary (<https://www.wordnik.com/words/tupperware-party>), is defined as a social gathering at which the host (or more typically hostess) entertains the guests, and provides them with an opportunity to order Tupperware. According to Cambridge Online Dictionary (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/amp/english/tupperware>), Tupperware refers to a brand name for a type of plastic containers, usually for storing food, and usually having lids that fit tightly. Tupperware party is attended by the circle of friends around the neighborhood. It is like the usual event.

*“I’m headed to a Tupperware party over at Kitty Goldman’s place, but why don’t I come by a little later this afternoon and help you finish up?”* (Brown, 2018, p. 82)

From the narration above, it can be said that Nellie attends the Tupperware party in her neighbor’s house. In the story, Nellie mentions about Tupperware party that is held in Kitty’s house. It can be seen that Tupperware party is common in Nellie’s era, 1950s. This kind of party invites people to gather around in the society in selling the brand of Tupperware. It can be said that Tupperware party is the cultural identity existed in 1950s.

## iii) Letter

In Nellie’s life, the technology has not been developed in advance. Nellie does everything in her era in traditional way. There are no laptops or smartphones that can be used by Nellie in the house. Everything is done without the help of technology.

*Nellie nodded, finished her cigarette, and immediately lit one more. “I’d like to write my mother letter. Would you mind getting me my correspondence paper, over there in the top drawer of the desk? And my cookbook from the kitchen? I have a recipe I’d like to share with her.”* (Brown, 2018, p. 286)

From the quotation above, it shows that Nellie writes a letter to give a message to her mother. In fact, her mother lives separated from Nellie since she is married to Richard Murdoch. It can be seen that the letter is the cultural identity in 1950s. Nellie writes a letter to deliver the message that she has a recipe that she wants to share with her mother. There is no smartphone to help Nellie to get instant response. Nellie seems needing to wait her mother’s response to her letter several days by using the letter as a passenger. It proves that the letter is familiar for those who want to deliver a message in Nellie’s era.

## iv) Hiring a worker

Nellie is a full-housewife. She does the household in the house. However, she still has a worker that helps her in doing the household. Her husband, Richard, is the one who hires the worker.

*“Look, leave the dishes for the girl.” **Their girl, Helen** (though Richard never referred to her by name), **was scheduled for cleaning tomorrow**. Nellie usually took that time to weed her garden, or visit with her neighbor Miriam, or do her marketing in town, because she was uncomfortable being in her home while **Helen was there hard at work**. (Brown, 2018, p. 66)*

As it is narrated above, it can be said that Helen is the worker that helps Alice does the household. The term of ‘the girl’ refers to the worker. From the narration, it is assumed that Helen helps Nellie doing the dishes. Helen is paid to help Nellie in doing the household so that she can earn money. It can be seen from the narration that the Murdochs hire a worker to help Nellie in doing the household. It can be said that it is common in 1950s that people hire a worker in the house.

v) Young marriage

Nellie is married to Richard in such a young age. In her twenties, she has the commitment with Richard as a married couple. She is married in the age of twenty one.

*“**How old** are you again, Mrs. Murray?”*

...

*But being childless at her age, **two plus years into her marriage**, Nellie understood the prying; she was an enigma in her sewing circle and church groups, at the Tupperware parties full of women in various stages of pregnancy, **young children hanging off their mothers’ skirts**.*

*“**Twenty three**.” (Brown, 2018, p. 63)*

From the narration above, it shows that Nellie commits with Richard in marriage in a young age. Twenty one can be counted as young age. It can be said that young marriage is common in Nellie’s era, 1950s. It is also narrated in the story that many women are married in a young age. From Nellie’s perspective, it also mentions that many women in the same age as Nellie are married in young age, gets pregnant, and have children. It proves that young marriage is one of the cultural identities that exists in 1950s.

### **Symbolic Interactionism Reflected in Two Female Characters in Karma Brown’s Novel “Recipe for a Perfect Wife”**

Symbolic interactionism, in this context, has two aspects. First is about the symbol itself that can cause an interaction bringing a memory reflected in Alice’s perspective. Second is about the concept of mind, self, and society reflected in Nellie’s perspective.

#### **Symbol and Memory in Alice’s Perspective**

Symbol is believed that it is not the matter of words, but the matter of memory towards objects or words that represents something. A symbol can cause interaction within the character. This symbol of the story is about a cookie. This cookie is baked by Alice following the recipe that she finds in her basement of the house.

*“**There’s something I can’t place. Not cinnamon, I don’t think**,” Sally said, taking another nibble of **cookie**. “It actually reminds me of my mom’s chocolate chip cookies. I haven’t had one in too many years to count.”*

*Alice smiled. “You’re tasting the cloves. It’s a recipe from that old cookbook, the one I found in our basement? It has Elsie’s Swann name in it, whoever she was.” (Brown, 2018, p. 128)*

From the narration above, it shows that there is an interaction within two characters, Alice and Sally. Sally eats the cookie that is baked by Alice. While eating the cookie, Sally tells Alice that the cookie tastes the same as what her mother, Miriam, always bakes for her. Miriam is the neighbor of Nellie Murdoch. In other hand, Alice responses to Sally’s statement that the cookie is baked based on the recipe that she finds in the basement of her house in Greenville. The Greenville house is the house of Nellie Murdoch herself back then. The recipe itself has a written name of Elsie Swann.

As it is narrated in the story, the cookie is the object that brings the conversation between Alice and Sally. It can be said that the cookie is seen as a symbol, a symbol that causes an interaction. The symbol of the interaction is cookie. The cookie itself makes Sally memorize about her mother's cookie.

*“Nothing beats homemade, Mom always said.” Sally popped the last bite of cookie in her mouth and murmured how delicious it was, adding, “I wonder if Elsie Swann might have been Nellie’s mother. The name does sound familiar, and cookbooks used to be passed down from one generation to another, often a wedding gifts to help the new wives. I’m sure there were many who married completely unprepared.”* (Brown, 2018, p. 128)

From the quotation above, it can be said Sally memorizes her mother's statement that homemade cuisine always wins. She also assumes about the cookbook that belongs to Nellie. The cookbook is like a legacy that has to be maintained from one generation to generation. It is assumed that the cookbook is given by Elsie to Nellie.

The cookie is the symbol of the interaction within Alice and Sally. First, the cookie brings Sally's memory to her mother's cookie. Second, the cookie brings the topic of the cookbook up. Because of the cookie they have a conversation about the cookbook that Alice finds in the basement. The cookie makes Sally memorize about the name of Elsie Swann. She believes that Elsie is Nellie's mother. The assumption about Elsie also brings them to the topic of the cookbook that is as a legacy that has to be delivered to the next generation. It also brings the fact that the new wives in the era of 1950s are still unprepared to a marriage. From the explanation above, it can be concluded that a symbol can be the reason that the character has an interaction one another. Alice and Sally do the communication.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

It reveals that there are the different cultures between two eras that constitute the cultural identity. Alice and Nellie have their own cultural identity that reflects the year of 2018 and 1950s. In 2018, through the character of Alice, there are five cultural identities. First, smoking is strange for the wife or woman. Second, there is a private party in which there are only friends and family. Third, there are laptop and smartphone. Fourth, living together without having marriage is common. Fifth, there is no worker in the house. In other hand, Nellie also reflects the cultural identity in 1950s such as smoking is common for the wife or woman, there is a Tupperware party where the society gathers to look for the tools for kitchen set, there is a letter to communicate with significant others, young marriage is common thing, and a worker is hired in the house to help the household back then.

It is found that there is a relation between symbol and memory. This relation is found in Alice's perspective. The symbol itself is cookie. The cookie makes Sally, Alice's neighbor, remembering about her mother's homemade cookie. The cookie also brings a story about the cookbook that Alice finds in the basement of her house that belongs to Elsie Swann, Nellie's mother. It brings Sally's assumption that cookbook is like legacy to new wife to know the recipe of cuisine in starting marriage life. This legacy is common to be delivered by the mother to her daughter. It is also found about three concepts in symbolic interactionism – mind, self, and society – in the portrait of Nellie's character. It is about Richard who abuses her wife, Nellie. The concept of mind is Nellie should leave Richard. The concept of self is Nellie survives because it is her duty as a wife for Richard. The concept of society is when Miriam, Nellie's neighbor, suggests Nellie to leave Richard because he is not a good man after all.

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