Research Article

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Identity gaps and negotiations among layers of young farmers: Case study in Indonesia

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Abstract: One of the fundamental problems at the source of youthful reluctance to join the agricultural sector is the issue of identity. Unrealistic and negative views toward agriculture, increasing levels of education, and the existence stimulating opportunities in non-agricultural sectors have resulted in a situation that makes youths question previous assumptions about succession farming. This article discusses the identity gaps experienced by six young Indonesian farmers in developing and maintaining coherent identities within the framework of the communication theory of identity. This theoretical framework is used to explore the identity gaps among the identity layers of these young farmers in the situations they face and to understand the way they seek validation for their identity through self-verification. With the explanation approach, this article focuses on a discussion of how young farmers overcome the tensions they experience arising out of conflicts between expectations and reality. These conflicts show that there are identity gaps that must be negotiated by the youths while building their self-identity as farmers.

Keywords: communication theory of identity, identity gaps, self-verification, young farmers

1 Introduction

The reluctance of young generations to work in the agricultural sector is a significant problem in terms of maintaining an adequate agricultural workforce. Ensuring continuity and adequate staffing on farms – in other words, “farmer regeneration” – is a substantial concern for those looking at the future stability of the food production sector. The concerns surrounding the farmer regeneration are not specific to the people of Indonesia, but they are relevant to the whole world community. Stereotypical views of farmers and the farming profession are often fundamental to the problems of assuring agricultural regeneration and succession (Burton 2004, Brandth and Overrein 2013, Fischer and Burton 2014). Several studies have examined factors that contribute to the farmer regeneration crises. Some of these factors include a poor view of the farmer profession where farming is seen as synonymous with poverty, a lack of prestige, and no chance of future success (Ibitoye 2011; Paisley 2014; Supriyati 2016; Anwarudin et al. 2018). Agriculture is also perceived by many to be an unpopular career path with a lot of drawbacks – low financial rewards (Møller 2005), the work is physically tiring and dirty (Daulay 2006; Hendri and Wahyuni 2013), and the time spent outdoors may darken their skin, which in some culture is considered as less ideal feature (Metelerkamp et al. 2019). Young people prefer employment options with high mobility and more promising prospects (Daulay 2006). White et al. (1991) found that urban youths reject careers in agriculture; these youths are disinterested in jobs that require them to work outdoors and see such jobs as suitable only for those with agricultural backgrounds.

In Indonesia, the current trends show young farmers from various regions leaving the agricultural sector. The 2018 Inter-Censal Agricultural Survey examined the numbers of young farmers and found that 6,10,000 were less than 25 years old, and 31,31,907 were between the ages of 25 and 34 (BPS 2018). Over the past decade, many studies in Indonesia have explored in-depth the participation of youths in the agricultural sector. Studies

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have examined the factors that encourage youths to farm, their motivation and perceptions toward agriculture, and the problems and tensions they face when choosing agriculture as their profession and identity. Studies have even examined the tensions faced by aged farmers, unable to find successors, who feel they have been left behind by the next generation.

Several studies found that parents and close family members play an important role in influencing and encouraging young Indonesians to embrace work in the agricultural sector (Wiyono *et al.* 2015; Pujiriyani *et al.* 2016; Adinugraha *et al.* 2017). Several studies also determined that those familiar with the commercial value of agricultural products and income that could be derived therefrom had a positive perception of agricultural work (Sukayat and Supriyadi 2017; Widiyanti *et al.* 2018) and encouraged youths to stay in the agricultural sector (Pujiriyani *et al.* 2016; Widiyanti *et al.* 2019). On the other hand, White (2015) identified situations in most villages where inherited land ownership disrupted farmer regeneration – rather than continue the family legacy in agriculture, youths who inherited land from rich parents preferred to go to university or move to the city to find well-established jobs for their future success. Widiyanti *et al.* (2018) also found that despite positive perceptions of income levels, youths are also anxious about future guarantees. In further research, Widiyanti *et al.* (2019) found a variety of viewpoints among young people on farming as a profession; they ranged from positive to neutral to negative and were based on a variety of factors.

Rural youths are not a homogenous group. The existence of inheritable land, a family history of farming, increased knowledge of career alternatives, a wide variation in education levels, and increasing exposure to globalization are considerations that complicate the decision of young people in rural areas who must decide whether to embrace farming as their choice of livelihood and identity. This research discusses how young farmers process the tension between various influences and how they resolve these considerations.

An examination of farmers' identity construction was carried out by O'Callaghan and Warburton (2017) through a narrative study that examined the tensions older farmers in Australia faced, struggling to maintain their identity while physically aging and living in a changing cultural environment. O'Callaghan and Warburton (2017) provided insights on tensions, contradictions, and rapid changes experienced by aging farmers, including challenges brought on by climate change-related difficulties and the decreasing number of

young farmers. O'Callaghan and Warburton (2017) research also mapped older farmers' struggles to produce coherence in their identity stories. Building on O'Callaghan and Warburton (2017) research, this study attempted to examine the various tensions that arise as farmers struggle with challenges to their identity. While O'Callaghan and Warburton (2017) conducted a narrative study on older farmers, this study looked at the other end of the spectrum: young farmers. Using a different theoretical framework, the communication theory of identity (CTI), this research is a case study examining the identity issues related to young farmers and factors influencing the decision to embrace or reject the farming life.

Michael L. Hecht's CTI approaches identity through a communication lens. Under this theory, identity is built through interactions within social and cultural groups, and it is negotiated through various situations (Littlejohn and Foss 2011). CTI posits that social relations and roles are internalized by individuals as identities through external communication; individuals' identities are realized through communication as social behavior. Identity not only defines an individual, but it also reflects a shaping and assumption of social roles and relations through communication (Jung and Hecht 2004). The self-identity of young farmers is the result of interactions with their family and with the agricultural environments and rural cultures where the young farmers grew up. In addition, self-identity is influenced by experiences and situations involving a capitalist economy, commercialization, and globalization that must be understood, interpreted, and ultimately negotiated and resolved through communication. CTI offers a comprehensive view of identity construction through communication. Jung and Hecht (2004) explained that CTI embraces both the individual and social relations as the loci of identity. CTI acknowledges several loci of identity integrating individual (self), communication, interpersonal relations, and society. This multi-locus notion of identity is refined into four identity frameworks: personal, enacted, relational, and communal identity (Hecht 1993).

For a population to be successful, it is essential that it ensures the sustainability and future of agriculture as the food providing sector. Young farmers play an important role as successors to current food providers. Their failure to successfully negotiate and embrace the farmer identity will result in the abandonment of the agricultural sector by the younger generation. This study of young farmers' identity negotiations, identity gaps, and the negotiations they make to establish their identity

as young farmers through the application of CTI and its theoretical framework is an important exploration of the tensions and competing priorities experienced by young people contemplating an agricultural future.

2 CTI

This study dealt with farmers' identity gaps by applying CTI. CTI conceptualizes identity as self-perception, relationships, communication, and community that are individually and collectively formed, preserved, and transformed through communication and social relations (Hecht et al. 2005; Kam and Hecht 2009). CTI is developed on the premise that there are four layers of identity that are intertwined: personal layer, enacted layer, relational layer, and communal layer (Hecht 1993; Hecht et al. 1993). Hecht et al. (1993) explained that identity is essentially a communication process. CTI creates a framework for how an individual develops a sense of identity by working through various facets of the identity-building process – developing personal perceptions about self, cultivating social interactions in relationships, and finding a collective sense of self within the community (Shin and Hecht 2017).

The personal layer of identity can be understood as the way individuals think of themselves – their self-concept, self-image, or self-esteem (Hecht and Lu 2014; Shin and Hecht 2017); personal identity refers to one's sense of self, the answer to the perennial question, "Who am I?" This layer also describes how individuals define themselves in certain situations along with an individual's hopes and motivations (Hecht 1993). The personal layer is also where the young farmers describe their identity as village youths, their hopes and motivations.

The enacted layer is related to how individuals recognize and express their identity to themselves and how they express it to others (Hecht 1993). This layer is where you see the way young farmers express their identity as farmers to themselves and realize their farmer identity is recognized by others and subject to either external challenge or confirmation. At the enacted layer, presentation of the self is accomplished via messages crafted through both verbal and non-verbal behaviors (Wadsworth et al. 2008). The instant research differentiates between two young farmer identities: their personal identity – such as the way they dress or their choice of vehicle – and the symbolic young farmer identity – such as employing technology or innovations in their farming.

In the relational layer, identity is viewed as a shared construct, one that is negotiated and formed through

communication within relationships (Hecht 1993). Relational identities are generated by the individual's assumption of roles and through social interactions with others (Hecht and Lu 2014). To develop this layer, young farmers play their various roles – such as successor to an older farmer, leader of a young farmer group, pioneer of innovative farming methods, or recruiter of other village youths into the farming sector – and interact with others to strengthen their young farmer identity.

The communal layer is where identity is formed through group membership; community identity is elevated over individual identity (Hecht 1993). Within this layer, a youth no longer identifies as a young farmer or other individualistic identity; instead they begin to define themselves by a communal identity, for example *the millennial farmers of Ngablak*.

3 Identity gap

The four identity layers in the CTI framework – personal, relational, communal, and enacted – can be analyzed independently but not completely separated from one another. The layers overlap; interpenetration of perspectives as a whole – integrated identities – combine to form a more comprehensive and fluid identity image (Jung and Hecht 2004). Interpenetration refers to a comprehensive view of identity that takes into account the totality of layers. Occasionally, as the layers become integrated, conflicts arise between two or more layers and identity gaps emerge. Theoretically, there are 11 potential identity gaps: personal–enacted, personal–relational, personal–communal, enacted–relational, enacted–communal, relational–communal, personal–enacted–relational, personal–enacted–communal, personal–relational–communal, enacted–relational–communal, and personal–enacted–relational–communal (Hecht 1993; Hecht et al. 1993; Jung and Hecht 2004).

Research on identity gaps is typically centered on one or two specific gaps. One example of identity gaps is the personal–relational gap, which arises when there is a disparity between how individuals see themselves and how they present themselves to the people around them (Jung and Hecht 2004; Witteborn 2004). Identity gaps can cause feelings of depression and dissociation (Wadsworth et al. 2008). In this study, identity gaps are characterized by feelings of dissatisfaction coupled with pressure or tension caused by certain social situations that must be faced by the young people when developing their identity as farmers.

There are several psychological theories that discuss discrepancies between these layers in terms of personal and relational identity, among these, self-verification theory is of particular interest. Proposed by William B. Swann in 1987, this theory of personal and relational identity posits that when individuals, as social actors, interact with their partners, problems can arise, and identity negotiation is an effort to solve the problem (Jung and Hecht 2004). Swann et al. (2009) defined identity negotiation as the processes whereby relationship partners reach agreements regarding “who is who.” By enabling people to establish mutual expectations of one another, these negotiated identities transform disconnected individuals into collaborators who have mutual obligations, common goals, and commitment to one another.

Young farmers are social actors who carry out various social roles – child, family farm successor, students, and community members – as they interact with various parties. Interactions between the youths and the youths’ romantic partners have the potential to create or highlight conflict between the youths’ expectations and the expectations of their parents or their community. Differences in values or views may create relationship problems, and interpersonal tensions may arise when youths attempt to carry out certain social roles, especially if the youths’ perceived identity is out of step with their presentation of self to others.

In Swann et al.’s (2009) view, identity negotiation is a process for building shared expectations, and turning individuals into collaborators with shared goals, shared obligations, and shared commitments. Self-verification theory assumes that individuals play active roles in validating their expectations and verifying their views. To reduce or avoid identity gaps, individuals are strongly motivated to verify their perceptions of themselves, and they tend to seek out evidence for self-verification (Swann 1987). In this study, self-verification was used to map the negotiations carried out by the young farmers to overcome identity gaps and apply the CTI framework of personal layers, enacted layers, relational layers, and communal layers.

There are at least three strategies in Swann’s self-verification process: selective interaction, display of identity cues, and adoption of interaction strategies (Swann 1987; Swann et al. 2009). The first strategy, selective interaction, is reflected in a person’s tendency to seek out positive partners and look for and maintain social relationships where they receive self-affirming feedback (Swann 1987) and leave relationships where they fail to receive the looked-for affirmations (Talaifar

and Swann 2017; citing Swann et al. 1994). In addition to selective partnering, a person seeking self-verification may assert claims about themselves by displaying (signaling) identity cues, signs, and symbols that are highly visible with respect to who they are, such as wearing branded clothing and choosing certain types of vehicles that show their success from farming (Talaifar and Swann 2017). When someone fails to obtain self-verifying feedback through selective interaction and displaying identity cues, they may attempt to elicit the desired feedback through a third strategy of adopting an appropriate interaction strategy (Swann 1983, 1987). Such strategy can be seen in the way the young farmers join farmer groups or organizations that have the same passion where they can actualize themselves and feel more comfortable with their current identity.

4 Methods

To explore the gaps in identity and investigate how a young farmer acquires their identity, the constructivist–interpretivist approach was applied with a single-case study research approach where reality is socially understood from experience, characterized by local and specific interactions, and determined by which humans or groups of individuals participate in the construction (Denzin and Lincoln 2018). The formation of identity through positive and negative feelings, possessions, connectedness, and self-confidence levels that are constantly changing is a strong concept in qualitative research (Roger et al. 2018). Furthermore, understanding that identity is a negotiation process of socially constructed reality and truth, qualitative research is an investigation of the “who am I?” concept of identity (Roger et al. 2018; citing Dryden 2013).

5 Research design

This article is part of a broader study looking at the experiences of ten youths’ journeys to become young farmers. The ten young farmers between the ages of 25 and 40 who have managed their own farms (not farms owned by parents) were selected purposively. To obtain diverse viewpoints from a variety of experiences, the ten selected youths have diverse educational backgrounds and variances in land ownership. The ten young farmers come from the Central Java Province, Java Island – the

most populous island in Indonesia. The dynamics of Java development reveal a transformation of economic and demographic structures characterized by conversions of farming fields into massive non-agricultural uses. The existence of young farmers in Central Java is particularly interesting because these young people have chosen to keep working as farmers despite declining numbers of farm households and shrinking agricultural lands. The majority of farming households in Central Java – 33,12,235 or 77.7% – are dominated by smallholder households – i.e., farms that control less than (<) 5,000 m² of agricultural land (Pujiriyani et al. 2019).

This study examined the way youths experienced, negotiated, and overcame tensions while establishing their situation and building their farmer identity. To do this, three main points were examined. First, the construction of young farmers' identities at different stages – before becoming a farmer, during the initial phase of becoming a farmer, and the identity at present – was assessed with the four-layer identity framework – personal, the enacted, relational, and communal layers. Second, the gaps among layers of identity were explored; the young farmers' problems, tensions, discomfort, and/or dissatisfaction within their identities were explored. Third, there was an assessment of the young farmers' efforts to validate their expectations, build shared expectations, achieve common goals, and examine their joint commitments using the three self-verification strategies – selective interaction, display of identity cues, and interaction strategies.

This article presents two of the three parts of the study: how the young farmers experienced tensions between the several layers of identity and how they resolved those tensions through a self-verification strategy.

The data were collected through semi-structured interviews based on interview guidelines designed to focus the research on the concepts relevant to this study. The interviews were conducted between July 2019 and February 2020. Each informant was interviewed two to three times, and each interview took 60 min. The interviews were conducted at the farms and homes of the participating farmers.

The first interviews explored the layers of identity of young farmers in the early phases of becoming farmers and at present. Exploration of the personal layer included inquiries as to expectations, motivation, and views on the agricultural sector and the current farming situation. To look at the enacted layer, the interview discussed the ways young farmers show or express their farmer identities through both personal identity – e.g., clothing, vehicles, homes, and other personal attributes – and

the identity of their farming – e.g., technology, innovation, and agricultural entrepreneurship. The interview examined the relational layer by focusing on different roles and social interactions the farmers engaged in as well as the way the farmers gave meaning to their identity during interrelations such as with family, neighbors, farmer groups, etc. Finally, the communal layer was assessed by inquiring into new identities that arose out of participation in a group or network. The second and third interviews focused on the tensions experienced by the young farmers during their journey to become farmers and how they overcame those tensions.

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, passive observation was also carried out to enrich the data, especially in the enacted layer. Observations included direct observation of personal symbols used by farmers such as clothing, communication tools, and transportation equipment as well as visits to farm locations to obtain data related to farm symbols that include technology or innovation applied by the young farmers.

6 Participants

This article focuses on the identity gap experienced by six young farmers out of the ten young farmer participants. The six young farmers are Zuhri (ZR), Agung Harmanto (AH), Dedy Tri Kusumo (DTK), Agus Wibowo (AW), Eka Mandiri (EM), and Joko Santoso (JS). These six young farmers have different educational and family backgrounds and diverse journeys to become farmers. ZR, EM, and JS are farmers' children with high school educations. These three young men inherited small plots of agricultural land – less than 0.3 hectares – so they had to find ways to eke out a sufficient income from their small farms. Although he is a farmer's son, ZR initially did not want to become a horticultural and livestock farmer, but he wanted to open a culinary business in the city after graduating from vocational school. With farmer parents who live in the village, EM and JS were aware that they would be the successors to their families' horticultural farms from the beginning and have managed their small plots – less than 0.25 hectares – accordingly.

The other three young farmers – AH, DTK, and AW – are village youths who have successfully completed their higher education. AH and AW are bachelors of agriculture who are currently involved in producing horticultural crops. AH developed a hydroponic vegetable crop business, while AW developed certified potato

seeds and established a potato agroindustry in his village. Growing up, AW saw his father's success as a potato farmer in his village; and from the beginning, AW had an interest in farming; he pursued his education at the Faculty of Agriculture because he wanted to establish a potato agroindustry to increase farmers' income in his village. In contrast, AH was not interested in pursuing his education in agriculture because for him, majoring in agriculture is less prestigious than other majors.

DTK is the only young farmer who does not come from a farmer family. Before deciding to become a farmer, DTK was a bank employee. He decided to resign from the bank because he wanted to become an entrepreneur, and he chose to develop a career in agriculture because he saw opportunities in this sector. With capital from leasing and a partnership, he succeeded in developing horticultural agrotourism. DTK's decision to become a farmer was met with opposition from his family that doubted farming could provide sufficient income for his family.

This article presents the tensions faced by the six participants and how they deal with these tensions.

7 Data analysis

This research is a case study using the explanation building technique – analyzing the cases in question by reviewing study data and building explanations based on the data. In an explanation building analysis, a phenomenon is explained by establishing a series of interrelationships regarding the phenomenon. The explanations were made in a narrative form. To produce statements compiled in explanatory research, a series of staged analysis processes were carried out. Yin (2015) divided the stages of data analysis in qualitative research into five stages of analysis: (1) data compiling, (2) data collecting, (3) data reassembling, (4) interpreting, and (5) concluding.

At the compiling stage, data obtained from the in-depth interviews and group interviews were recorded in the form of interview transcripts. Analysis was carried out by coding each layer of identity and providing reflective notes to develop further interview guides that focused on the problem and the solution being studied. In the data disassembling stage, the data were broken down into four main fragments based on the CTI identity layers. After the data were arranged in the four main categories, data reassembling was conducted to review whether there were any conflicting problems between layers and to examine the cause and effect of clashes

between the different layers. Because the identity framework does not structurally isolate different layers, two to four frames were examined at once. After the gaps between layers were found, identification was carried out to determine the efforts made as a form of negotiation. After identity gap patterns and negotiation strategies were identified, data interpretation was carried out. The type of interpretation conducted was explanatory interpretation – interpretation which is designed to explain how or why something happens. The final step in the analysis was to draw conclusions based on the results of the four-stage interpretation.

8 Result

Based on the gaps among young farmers' layers of identity, notable identity disconnects, starting with their personal layer, which incorporate their hopes, motivations, and views on the agricultural sector. This study found two different departure points among the young farmers' journeys: the stories of ZR and AH began with village youths not interested in agriculture but had to take over their parents' farms, and the stories of DTK, AW, EM, and JS, where village youths who dreamt of developing agriculture in their villages and farming success, faced opposition from those around them and problems created by the unrealistic scale they needed to achieve their farming dreams.

By examining their identity-building journeys through the four layers of identity and conducting simultaneous examination of those layers, this study found two major conflicts experienced by the young farmers: First, there was a clash between expectations and reality, reflecting a gap between personal identity and enacted identity; the second clash was between personal views and the authority of significant others, denoting a gap between personal identity and relational identity.

9 The clash between expectation and reality

Farmers' children do not always aspire to become farmers like their parents, and they do not always enjoy farming activities. Such children often engage in farming simply due to a desire to help their parents, to avoid arguing with their parents, or to make their parents happy, but they also maintain hopes, ideals, and desires

to actualize themselves in other fields. While they may do it, farming is not something they want to pursue.

ZR's situation shows the discrepancy between what he hoped for and what actually happened. As ZR was a child of a farmer, he appropriately fulfilled his obligation to assist his parents' farming activities in the fields. ZR explained how he experienced tension or denial when he was first forced by his parents to participate in vegetable farming while sitting in high school. When he found he had to become a farmer, he described:

Every afternoon, I had to help my parents at the farm. I had to help weeding the grass in the farm, taking the grass and bringing it home to feed the livestock, even though I didn't like working in the farm because when I got home I would be dirty. All I want was to be like the other friends who have extracurricular activities, such as volleyball at school in the afternoon. (ZR, July 20, 2019)

Participant ZR explained his discomfort with helping on the farm and sacrificing his desire to be like other young men who were still in school and able to participate in extracurricular activities. ZR's parents' expectations were that he would inherit the family's farm and social environment demands because he grew up in a rural environment where the majority of the population is farming.

ZR's reluctance to engage in agriculture can be explained; ZR's secondary environment was not only the rural environment where he was raised but also the suburban areas where he pursued his vocational high school education. This secondary environment naturally built a social reality that differed from the rural life and agriculture. In this school environment, ZR was introduced to a social environment with youths who were not farmers' children and who had the opportunity to develop themselves more broadly because they were not obliged – as ZR was – to help their parents on a family farm. ZR expressed his desire to actualize himself like his peers: "I wanted to be like the other friends who have extracurricular activities." This situation created tension in ZR because his hopes were not in accord with the reality that he inhabited.

AH had a similar experience when he had to pursue an agriculture major because his parents wanted him to become a farmer to continue the family tradition. The choice was not a happy one; at that time, he felt that studying agriculture was less cool and he would be unable to compete with other majors.

The most difficult thing for me was when I had to study agriculture, when at that time I wanted to study economics or

engineering, but my parents reminded me to remember the origins of my being who was raised from agriculture. Early in college, I could not accept and felt that studying in the department of agriculture was not cool; when compared to other majors, agriculture was always placed at the bottom until finally, I made myself busy with student organizations to spend my time during college. (AH, February 5, 2020)

In contrast to participant ZR, who struggled on the farm, participant AH's issues arose with studying agriculture because it conflicted with his wishes to be like other youths majoring in areas that were considered more prestigious. AH made peace with his situation by completing his studies in agriculture and carrying out activities that could meet his needs for self-actualization.

The clash between ZR and AH's desire to actualize themselves outside the agricultural sector and the different reality that they endured is a form of identity gap. Expectations of self-actualization as part of their personal identity conflicted with their enacted identity of farmers contributing family labor or as students of agriculture. This juncture is where the personal–enacted gap occurs.

JS and EM experience a different clash between expectations and reality. JS and EM found their ambitions for success in agriculture were hampered by the reality of the scale of their farming area; within the dimensions of the land they possessed, their dreams of efficient production and decent income from farming were simply unrealistic. The following is a description of the reality they had to face:

Most of us here only have a narrow land, an average of only 1,000 m². The agricultural land in Kenteng hamlet is indeed the smallest because of the topography, and, historically, our grandfathers here used to have large tracts of land, but many were sold. So most of the land here belongs to others now with this small land, when prices fall, we can't do anything. It's hard to even just return the capital. (EM, July 20, 2019)

I continued my parents' tobacco field it's less than 2,000 m² wide with a few stems of coffee plants, which may have not been able to produce for decades. Even though the conditions are like that, I still want to continue the struggle of my parents who raised me from the past until now from farming. Frankly, my motivation to become a farmer is because farmers are not prohibited from being rich, and farmer is a noble job. If no one becomes farmers, what about the majority of Indonesian people who love rice? (JS, July 13, 2019)

JS and EM's hopes and motivation to develop their family farms were checked by the reality of the small scale of the farms bequeathed to them. As expressed by EM, the small land in his village was caused by land

fragmentation and the transfer of land ownership by selling it outside of the family. Small land yields lower productivity and efficiency. This frustration of ambition experienced by JS and EM also illustrates a personal–enacted gap; the personal layer concerning their hopes and motivations to continue their family farms and the enacted layer in the form of their farm performance that was hampered.

10 Having different views from close family

In imposing their identity as farmers, the young farmers also felt tension when they had to deal with the harsh reality such as the limited resources and other conditions. DTK experienced tension when his identity as a farmer and his hopes for a future in agriculture clashed with other's views toward the sector. He decided to join the agricultural sector because he saw it as a route to autonomy, while his family thought that there was no future in agriculture. DTK felt the tension while he worked at a bank because he felt restricted and did not have authority over his time. He saw the agricultural sector as a way to address this tension. However, when he quit his job as an employee to take up farming, and his actions contradicted the views of his parents-in-law who viewed income from agriculture as uncertain. This also created a new source of tension.

The following is DTK's view of his previous work and the agricultural sector.

I felt restricted; being an employee had no investment of time. If I become an entrepreneur, my business will grow bigger [...] I see that becoming a farmer is like being an artist. We have free will; we can also be researchers. Besides, being a farmer actually has a social side because we participate in food provision. (DTK, February 21, 2020)

DTK's decision to resign from his bank job and choose to farm was not well received by his parents-in-law, causing tension in the form of an uncomfortable atmosphere within the house:

Initially, I decided to resign from my old job and went to the farm. My family disagreed; my parents-in-law also complained; and the atmosphere of the house became uncomfortable because they thought my income was uncertain. But, because basically I am a person who likes challenges, I still managed to go through by showing my seriousness in developing my farm. Then, I recruited one professional employee; he is experienced [...] so I also learned from my

employee and showed that my business was a serious one. (DTK, February 21, 2020)

DTK was not the only one to have views that differed from those held by important elders. From the beginning, participant AW had aspirations to improve the welfare of potato farmers in their village, who often suffer losses due to the poor quality of potato seedlings. He viewed the potential of processed potato agroindustry as an employment opportunity for local rural youth. However, his views were not shared by some of the youths' parents in his village. AW tried to invite the young people into the millennial farmers community engaged in promoting horticultural crops. Tension arose when he was seen as a provocateur who was preventing youths from going to the city in search of jobs the local parents approved of. Participant AW remembered the tension as follows:

When I first had the idea to form a millennial farming community here, I got a cynical view from some of their parents [...] some didn't even want to greet me [...] yes, because I was thought to provoke their children to stay in the village. Some parents even felt proud that their children were already working in the city [...] even though in my opinion, it is better for young people to stay in the village and build their villages [...] [I]f all the youths went to the city, and there were only old people in the village, who would take care of them [...]? (AW, July 27, 2019)

Here participant AW argued that the presence of youth in the village was not only to advance agriculture and the village but also to care for the future of the parents and previous generations; however, AW's view was different from the views of some parents who tied identity to job prestige.

Holding different views from the in-law as experienced by DTK and different views from the parents of other youths as experienced by AW can both create identity gaps. Those who view the agricultural sector as their route to personal autonomy may experience tension evoked by those who have authority over others. This sort of tension was experienced by DTK when carrying out his roles – as a subordinate son-in-law and the head of the household determined to do meaningful work in agriculture. Likewise, the tension felt by AW when acting as a recruiter and interacting with other youths in his village as a result of conflict with their parents was similar to a personal–relational identity gap.

Personal–relational identity gaps arise when others perceive individuals differently from the way the individual sees himself (Wadsworth *et al.* 2008). Holding

different views from close family members who have authority is a form of personal–relational identity gap. This personal–relational gap is felt by young farmers when their self-concept contrasts with the roles they play in their close relationships.

11 Choosing the right environment

Having to do an undesirable job did not make ZR give up and keep quiet. ZR tried to accept his enacted identity as a farmers' child and family laborer by making peace with his situation and looking for the right environment. ZR began to forget about his desire to participate in extracurricular activities and look for a place where he could still actualize himself within the reality of his environment. ZR found a place of self-actualization (playing volleyball did not interfere with his other responsibilities) without rejecting his identity as a farmer and a rancher. Participant ZR eventually joined a young farmers group in his village to overcome the tension he felt:

I tried to make peace with the situation and found friends in the village who were in accordance with my condition at that time. I finally found a group of farmers consisting of young people in the neighboring village, and they actively played volleyball every afternoon. The volleyball court was in front of their communal livestock cage. Starting from playing volleyball, I finally joined them, and now I have two cows there. (ZR, July 20, 2019)

What ZR did to overcome the gap between personal identity and enacted identity is a form of self-verification, namely, selective interaction. This strategy seeks out preferences and positive partners and looks for social relationships where individuals tend to receive feedback in the form of self-verification (Swann 1987) and leave relationships where they fail to receive self-verification. ZR left the social relations that he initially wanted – extracurricular activities at school – and moved toward social relations that were in accordance with his enacted identity to build his motivation and affirm his personal identity in agriculture; he created an accord between his dreams and his reality.

Similar to ZR who carried out a selective interaction strategy, AW also did the same thing during his studies as an agriculture major in order to remain comfortable; he learned to accept the situation by looking for friends or partners where he had room for self-actualization and verification. Participant ZR worked to overcome the

discomfort and tension that he considered a form of insanity (loss of common sense) by starting to learn to understand the world of agriculture through joining a group of young agricultural entrepreneurs:

Joining friends in agricultural entrepreneurship and in the Islamic study social activity forum in the agriculture faculty were the ones that could raise my spirits and kept me sane to date. (AH, February 5, 2020)

From the results of the interviews above, it appears that the validity of the participant farmers' identities is shaped by social expectations and situational contexts. These identities were shaped by parental expectations and reinforced by where they were raised – rural environments where farming is the primary livelihood. Selective interaction is mostly done by young people choosing the right environment to build or affirm their connection to agriculture while simultaneously validating their personal identity. The most helpful form of selective interaction seems to be associated with other young farmers who have been successful in the profession and are included in social groups engaged in agriculture.

12 Collaborating to overcome problems

The identity gap between the expectations and the reality of farming faced by participants JS and EM did not make them give up. To reduce the risk of crop failures and low income due to low productivity and reduced business efficiency, they began to think of the benefits of managing farms together in groups. For farmers, profits can be extracted if the area of farmed land is at least 0.5 hectares. Because large tracts of land can reduce fixed costs compared to small, non-contiguous patches of land, collaborating with other farmers is the best way to reduce production costs and maximize profits. In addition, as a group, they started to do joint marketing and product downstreaming to add value to their efforts.

EM realized that 1,000 m² of land would not fulfill his hopes to succeed in agriculture. Likewise, with limited land, JS wondered whether he could meet the needs of his family. Recognizing the benefits of cooperation, EM, along with other young farmers, found ways to unite their farms in a group. They began to switch to organic farming because organic products have

their own market segments, and he saw potential in penetrating the modern organic vegetable market. Meanwhile, participant JS improved the performance of his farms by collaborating with other youthful farmers producing coffee for joint processing and marketing.

Finally, we, young people who are under 40 years old and who happen to farm organically, started to agree and get together to talk about the potential that is around us in the agricultural sector, how to change farming patterns so that they have more added value because, when seen in terms of natural resources, we generally have an average of narrow land, an average of only 1,000 m², so we were thinking [of the benefits] of farming in groups. (EM, July 21, 2019)

Improving farm income by collaborating also has a positive impact on the role of young farmers as household heads. Increased business efficiency and income from farming will improve their families' welfare, which in turn strengthens the social role of the farmers and their relational identities.

Collaboration is a form of farmers' self-verification. In their groups, young farmers strengthen and motivate one another. As described by JS, as a group leader he tries to build the motivation of his members when they face problems in their farming, and that helps him with his own problems.

[...]When I have a problem, I feel down, but then I think again that we, as young people, must ignite the passion for myself and for my friends, that when we succeed, don't be too proud, and when we fail, don't be too sad. (JS, July 15, 2019)

Collaborating to overcome farming problems is one form of interaction strategy. EM and JS implemented a problem-sharing strategy in their interactions with other farmers and ultimately built a shared commitment and support network. Motivating and empowering each other is another interaction strategy that they developed. Swann *et al.* (2009) found that self-verification in groups makes people more comfortable with each other, and this creates a foundation for superior performance. Not only does it support young farmers' farming success, it also helps improve and support their self-verification and reduce identity gaps.

13 To be a farmer: when dreams come true

The desire to continue family farming, building agro-industry in the village, contributing to the provision of

food as a basic human need, and achieving independence and success in agriculture are the dreams built by the young farmers, although in doing so, they have to face situations that challenge their self-identities.

The main problem that they face is doubt; the skepticism about whether farming can provide for the welfare of young people is difficult to overcome. The existing social reality has shaped the perception that farming is synonymous with poverty, lack of education, and dirty work that relies on physical ability rather than intellect. Young farmers want to build a positive perception of the agricultural sector, so that they can overcome these existing stereotypes that encourage identity gaps.

Many young farmers see Agriculture 4.0 as one solution to this problem. Agriculture 4.0 is a farming method that promotes three concepts: using new techniques, using new technology to bring food production to consumers, thus increasing efficiency in the food chain, and incorporating cross-industry technology and applications (De Clercq *et al.* 2018). In addition, farming methods that most attract youthful farmers are efficient, profitable, and can be obtained through the application of technology, innovation, and entrepreneurship (Silva 2017).

I am trying to find partners to build a screenhouse for potato seedlings, install smart irrigation that I got from college friends (while showing smart irrigation in the screen house), partner with companies to try to implement drones [...] solely to show that my farming method is different from the others [...]. We are educated, and I believe that farming will be great by applying technology. (AW, July 6, 2019)

With digital marketing, marketing can be extensive; it is in our grasp; farmers will no longer need to worry about not having income, this is something that everyone needs [...] and I have proved it now, I already have four employees. (DTK, February 21, 2020)

The forms of Agriculture 4.0 adopted by the six participants in this study include: (1) integrated farming and livestock waste treatment by ZR, (2) hydroponic technology and online marketing by AH, (3) smart irrigation, drones, committed farmers, and potato seed tissue culture by AW, (4) zero waste integrated farming, farm founding, and organic vegetable marketing by DTK, (5) organic agriculture and post-harvest ozonation technology by EM, and (6) online marketing of Robusta coffee by JS.

By adopting Agriculture 4.0 technology, young farmers are attempting to strengthen their enacted layers

and their role in social relations. Their embrace of Agriculture 4.0 reflects several trends, including the following:

- They are intellectual and/or educated farmers
- They are not conventional farmers, but modern, youthful farmers
- They have cultivating access to a wide, globalized network
- They are incorporating entrepreneurship in agriculture and creating jobs

In addition to showing different farmer identities, participants also showed different personal identities that were reflected in their physical appearance through such factors as clothes, vehicles, communication tools, and other attributes that suggest their income levels. Some wore branded clothes, used private vehicles, and carried Android mobile phones to show that they can afford to buy all such products using their farming income. Based on the passive observation that took place simultaneously with the interview process, participants DTK and AW wore attractive branded clothes, watches, hats, and even displayed different vehicles on various occasions.

I often wear the t-shirt that I get from agricultural trainings. What I actually want is to motivate other farmers to join, as well as to show our existence [...] we are indeed farmers [...] but our mobility is high. (AW, July 6, 2019)

By showing their farm and personal identities, these young farmers want to negotiate their relationships with others and change views about the young farmer identity by showing that young farmers are able to survive and even thrive in agriculture. The trappings of success are the young farmers' way of showing who they are and validating their belief that farming can be relied upon for their future happiness. This display of identity cues in the form of signs and symbols is a form of self-verification. Swann (1983) explained that physical appearance is a type of identity cue that is very important and easily shown to change other people's views on them. Adopting Agriculture 4.0 and showing the appearance of today's farmers is a way to show that by becoming farmers, they have achieved their dreams.

14 Discussion

This study sought to describe and explore the tensions faced by young farmers facing challenges related to their

identities such as being a successor to a family farm with inherent limitations on productivity, having negative views of farming while being obliged to pursue it as a livelihood, and having a desire to actualize themselves according to their education and interests through a career outside of agriculture. This study found similar methods of self-verification used by the young farmers to identify themselves as farmers even though they addressed different tensions and identity gaps.

By using the CTI approach, this study found interpenetration among three layers of identity – at the personal layer, the enacted layer, and the relational layer – in the presence of tensions and identity gaps. When conflicts between expectations and reality occur – e.g., when the young farmers did not want to become farmers but nevertheless had to enforce their farmer identity – a gap was created between their personal identity and their enacted identity. To reconcile their identity and close the gap, they attempted to manipulate their environments through selective interactions like cultivating partners and social relationships with successful farmers. This enabled young farmers to change their own views and reconcile their enacted layer with their personal layer.

Likewise when there are differences of views between the young farmers who actively sought to build their futures through agriculture with the negative views held by their close family, a gap occurred between their personal layer and relational layer. The negative view was eventually internalized by young farmers as a part of their personal layer in the form of a powerful motivation to show that agriculture is a viable means of realizing their dreams of success. This shows the gap existing between the personal and relational layers. Closing this gap was achieved by strengthening their enacted layer to reflect their personal and farming appearances and reconcile their different identities.

To overcome identity gaps, the young farmers developed several new skills. One of the most important was learning to identify and choose the right environment for strengthening their enacted layer specifically for their farm's identity by associating with other farmers, joining groups, and collaborating to improve farm performance.

This study identified several points on identity and negotiation gaps among young Indonesian farmers. First, while agriculture has been a part of family social identity from generation to generation, there are limitations on family farming heritage that make it more complicated and less attractive to potential successors to family farms. This was the experience of older farmers in

O'Callaghan and Warburton's study (2017) who faced a dilemma when they had to let go land that provided the basis for their social identity as a result of the absence of willing successors in among younger generations.

Second, the distinct lack of succession planning for the next generation in agriculture can be seen from the planning of land distribution to the future generations and the postponement of agricultural socialization for children as well as increasing fragmentation of agricultural land owned by a family but transferred to other parties, thereby reducing its agricultural utility. There is also the problem of a cultural shift encouraging families to school their children in the city. Nugraha and Herawati (2015) found a phenomenon where farmers who prioritized education for their children delayed farming socialization for their children; this resulted in a failure to cultivate personal and enacted identities consistent with fulfilling the farming succession. This result is different from what occurred with the farmers in Australia observed in O'Callaghan and Warburton's study (2017) where they found that, although older farmers were aware of the absence of an upcoming next generation in agriculture, they still had hope for the future of their family farming by preparing lands for their children and maintaining agricultural machinery for their children in case they want to return to the village or return to the world of agriculture.

Third, there has been a fundamental shift in the farmer identity. To improve the negative view of the farming profession, young farmers want to present themselves as modern farmers applying modern methods and digital technology to farming to bolster their self-esteem as farmers, while older farmers focused on their physical strength and physical fitness as display of masculinity upon which to base their self-esteem. This shift shows that farming no longer relies on physical strength for its respectability. Young farmers take pride in their use of technology and education in the industrial era 4.0.

Fourth, collaboration has become a way for young farmers to improve their personal and farming performance. The current young farmers are a generation born in the millennial era; one of the characteristics of this generation is the tendency to develop networks, friendships, and cooperative relationships to share workloads. Tapscott (2013) found that one of the profound transformations of this Internet generation is seen in its embrace of collaboration. This generation recognizes achievement and power gains through cooperation with others.

The findings in this study provide suggestions for overcoming youthful reluctance to take up work in the

agricultural sector. It is time for rural development policies to:

- conduct farming resource planning (such as land allocation) and early socialization to encourage future generations of family farm succession,
- provide training and resources for young farmers to build cooperative networks, and
- facilitate young farmers' or beginning farmers' to access technology and Agriculture 4.0.

Restoring the youthful passion of farming in rural areas also means helping to revive villages and maintaining the agricultural sector as the cultural heart of rural communities. Villages with enthusiastic youthful farmers will no longer be deserted, gloomy, hopeless, and depressing areas for the inhabitants. Ebewore (2020) found many cases of depression in rural communities. Encouraging youths to remain in the villages and maintain traditions helps to alleviate the anxiety of old farmers worried about agricultural discontinuity (O'Callaghan and Warburton 2017).

This research has limitations as well as opportunities for future research directions. Although theoretically using two approaches, namely, CTI and self-verification theory, the methodology of this research was limited by its focus on young male farmers and the one-sided examination of tension. Future studies can be carried out examining the formation of young farmers' identities within a farming family.

15 Conclusion

This research shows the potential use of CTI to understand the problems faced by young people building their identity as farmers in the middle of the generational phenomenon of agricultural sector abandonment. Although this research has raised the issue of identity gaps in young farmers who have different views on agriculture in the early phase of their identity establishment, there are still many interesting stories of young farmers in different contexts yet to be studied. Changes in the face of agriculture, evolving technology that removes much of the requirement for physical strength and replaces with collaborative efforts, and digital technology provides opportunities for anyone who has access to land and technology regardless of male or female genders. Research on young female farmers has been generally overlooked and it would be a rich source of new perspectives on the roles of gender and cultural backgrounds.

16 Explanation of terms

1	CTI	Communication Theory of Identity
2	Personal identity	The personal layer is analogous to one's self-concept, self- image, self- feelings about their self
3	Enacted identity	Concept of identity as a performance, as something being expressed
4	Relational identity	Identity formed through social inter- action with others and social roles
5	Identity gaps	Clash among identity layers
6	Tension	Discomfort felt when differences occur
7	Negotiation	The process of building expectation and verifying self-concepts in com- munication activities
8	Self- verification	An individual's active role in vali- dating his/her expectations and ver- ifying one's self-views

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