

Understanding Dwarfism's Identity Negotiation in the Face of Stigmatized Abominations of the Body

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Abstract

Different physical conditions experienced by dwarf humans in Palak Siring Village often give rise to social stigma, even though every individual has the right to express and negotiate their identity despite bodily differences. This study aims to explore how dwarf humans negotiate their identities when facing stigma related to physical differences and how self-actualization is pursued as a pathway toward social acceptance and success. This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach using a case study method. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving three dwarf individuals as key informants. The analysis was guided by Identity Negotiation Theory to understand the processes through which informants construct self-concepts, manage social identities, and negotiate meaning in everyday interactions within community and work environments. The findings reveal that the informants interpret their different physical conditions as part of their identity and self-worth, shaping both personal self-concepts and social identities. In facing stigma and differing societal perceptions, informants actively negotiate their identities through various strategies such as accommodation, competition, avoidance, compromise, and collaboration. These negotiation processes enable them to gain social acceptance, reduce stigma, and demonstrate self-actualization through personal achievements. The study concludes that identity negotiation plays a crucial role in bridging social differences, allowing individuals with dwarfism to maintain dignity, achieve recognition, and foster mutual understanding within a pluralistic society. Theoretical implications highlight the relevance of Identity Negotiation Theory in disability and stigma studies, while practical implications emphasize the importance of inclusive communication practices and social awareness to reduce stigma toward persons with disabilities, particularly those with visible physical differences.

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INTRODUCTION

Persons with disabilities frequently encounter social stigma, discrimination, and structural barriers that limit their participation in social life. In Indonesia, disability is defined as a long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory limitation that may hinder full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (Undang-Undang No. 19

Tahun 2011). Despite the legal recognition of equal rights, individuals with disabilities often experience marginalization manifested through negative labeling, social exclusion, and unequal access to public spaces and employment.

One group that frequently faces social stigma is individuals with dwarfism. Medically, dwarfism—particularly achondroplasia—is a genetic condition characterized by disproportionate short stature resulting from abnormal bone growth (Pauli, 2019). Beyond biological differences, individuals with dwarfism often face social stereotypes that frame them as incapable, dependent, or socially inferior, which can negatively affect their self-concept and social identity (Tyler, 2020; Trani et al., 2020). These stigmatizing perceptions are not merely individual attitudes but are socially constructed through communication practices within communities.

Previous studies on dwarfism have largely focused on medical, genetic, and clinical dimensions, including growth patterns, health risks, and genetic mutations (Pauli, 2019; Hoover-Fong et al., 2021). Meanwhile, communication and social science research on disability has tended to examine stigma, discrimination, and identity negotiation in broader disability categories, such as visual impairment or mental health conditions (Santoso & Apsari, 2017; Trani et al., 2020). However, empirical studies that specifically explore how individuals with dwarfism negotiate their identity in everyday social interactions—particularly within local Indonesian communities—remain limited. This gap indicates the need for research that situates dwarfism not only as a medical condition but also as a communicative and social identity.

Palak Siring Village in Bengkulu Selatan presents a unique social context, as it is locally recognized for having a relatively higher number of individuals with dwarfism compared to surrounding villages. While media reports have highlighted this phenomenon (Okezone, 2015), field data obtained through preliminary interviews with village authorities confirm the presence of several individuals with dwarfism living and interacting actively within the community. In qualitative research, such contextual information is valuable as an entry point to understand lived experiences, provided it is supported by systematic field investigation.

Local narratives within the community suggest that dwarfism in Palak Siring Village is perceived as being inherited within certain family lines. However, it is important to emphasize that this perception represents a community understanding rather than a confirmed genetic conclusion. From a biomedical perspective, the most common form of dwarfism, achondroplasia, is caused by a mutation in the FGFR3 gene and is typically

inherited in an autosomal dominant pattern, with many cases arising from spontaneous mutations rather than lineage-specific inheritance (Pauli, 2019; Hoover-Fong et al., 2021). To date, there is no established scientific evidence indicating that dwarfism is inherited exclusively through the female line. Therefore, this study does not aim to make genetic claims, but rather to explore how such local beliefs shape social meaning and identity negotiation processes.

In this context, identity negotiation becomes a crucial analytical lens. Identity Negotiation Theory explains how individuals communicate, maintain, and adjust their identities in response to acceptance or rejection from others (Ting-Toomey, 1999). For individuals with dwarfism, negotiating identity involves managing stigma, asserting self-worth, and seeking social acceptance in both community and work environments. This study seeks to fill the existing research gap by examining how individuals with dwarfism in Palak Siring Village negotiate their identities amid stigma, and how these processes contribute to self-actualization and social recognition.

By adopting a qualitative approach grounded in lived experience, this research contributes to communication studies by extending the application of Identity Negotiation Theory to disability contexts, while also offering practical insights for fostering inclusive communication and reducing stigma toward individuals with visible physical differences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design to explore the lived experiences of individuals with dwarfism in negotiating their identities within social and work environments. A qualitative approach was chosen because it enables an in-depth understanding of meaning-making processes, subjective experiences, and social interactions that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study design allowed the researcher to focus intensively on a specific social setting—Palak Siring Village—where individuals with dwarfism live and interact within a close-knit community.

Informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives (Moleong, 2013). The criteria for selecting informants were as follows:

1. Individuals diagnosed or socially recognized as having dwarfism.

2. Residents of Palak Siring Village who have lived in the community for a significant period of time.
3. Individuals who actively engage in social interactions within the community and/or work environment.
4. Willingness to participate in in-depth interviews and share personal experiences related to stigma, identity, and social interaction.

Based on these criteria, three key informants were selected. The number of informants was considered sufficient because the data reached theoretical saturation, where no new significant themes emerged from additional interviews (Neuman, 2014). To enrich contextual understanding, supporting informants (such as community members and village authorities) were also consulted for triangulation purposes.

Data collection was conducted over a defined research period using multiple techniques to ensure data richness and credibility. The procedures included:

1. *In-depth Interviews*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the three main informants to explore their experiences of stigma, self-concept formation, identity negotiation strategies, and self-actualization. Interview guides were developed based on Identity Negotiation Theory, while still allowing flexibility for informants to narrate their experiences freely. Each interview was audio-recorded with consent and later transcribed verbatim.

2. *Participant Observation*

Observations were carried out to capture everyday interactions between informants and community members in natural settings, such as neighborhood gatherings and work environments. Field notes focused on communication patterns, responses to stigma, and forms of identity expression during interaction.

3. *Document Analysis*

Supporting documents such as local records, media reports, and previous research related to dwarfism and disability were analyzed to provide contextual background and to triangulate interview and observational data.

The use of multiple data collection techniques enabled methodological triangulation, enhancing the trustworthiness of the findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach, conducted systematically in several stages. The analysis process was supported by NVivo qualitative data analysis

software to enhance rigor, organization, and transparency. The steps of data analysis were as follows:

1. Data Preparation

Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were compiled and imported into NVivo. All data were anonymized to protect informants' identities.

2. Initial Coding (Open Coding)

The researcher conducted open coding by identifying meaningful units of text related to experiences of stigma, self-perception, interaction patterns, and identity negotiation. Codes were generated inductively from the data while being sensitized by Identity Negotiation Theory.

3. Axial Coding

Related codes were then grouped into broader categories, such as self-concept formation, stigma experiences, identity negotiation strategies, and self-actualization. Relationships between categories were examined to understand patterns across informants.

4. Selective Coding and Theme Development

Core themes were developed by integrating categories that directly addressed the research objectives. These themes were then interpreted in relation to Identity Negotiation Theory to explain how informants negotiate identity in social and work contexts.

5. Interpretation and Validation

The final stage involved interpreting the findings by linking empirical themes with relevant theories and previous studies. Data credibility was strengthened through source triangulation, prolonged engagement in the field, and peer debriefing.

To ensure research rigor, the study applied criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was achieved through triangulation of data sources and methods, while detailed methodological descriptions were provided to enhance transferability. NVivo-assisted coding and systematic documentation of analytic decisions contributed to dependability and confirmability.

Conceptual Review

Dwarfism and Social Stigma

Dwarfism is a medical condition characterized by disproportionate skeletal growth, most caused by genetic mutations such as those affecting the FGFR3 gene in cases of achondroplasia (Pauli, 2019). Although dwarfism has a clear biological basis, the lived experiences of individuals with dwarfism are largely shaped by social constructions and societal responses. Tyler (2020) argues that stigma toward “non-normative” bodies is socially produced and reproduced through language, cultural practices, and everyday interactions.

Empirical studies indicate that individuals with dwarfism frequently experience social stigma, including negative labeling, ridicule, workplace discrimination, and social exclusion. Trani et al. (2020) found that stigma toward people with physical disabilities is associated with lower self-esteem, increased psychological distress, and restricted social participation. Similarly, Saville (2018) highlights how media representations of dwarfism often reinforce stereotypes and perpetuate public prejudice.

In everyday social contexts, dwarfism is often associated with assumptions of incompetence, dependency, and limited social capacity (Hakim, 2010). These stigmatizing perceptions influence not only how society treats individuals with dwarfism, but also how they construct their self-concept and social identity.

Identity Negotiation and Disability Experiences

The identities of individuals with disabilities are continuously shaped through social interaction. According to Ting-Toomey (1999), identity is not fixed but is negotiated through communication processes involving acceptance, rejection, and adaptation to social expectations. For individuals with dwarfism, identity negotiation becomes particularly complex due to the stigma attached to visible physical differences.

Gunawan, Sulistyani, and Yuliyanto (2021), in their study on the identity negotiation of veiled women, demonstrate that socially stigmatized individuals often employ communication strategies such as accommodation, assertion, and achievement-based validation to gain social acceptance. These strategies are comparable to those used by individuals with dwarfism in navigating social stigma.

Furthermore, Compton-Lilly et al. (2017) emphasizes that identity negotiation among marginalized groups serves not only to preserve self-identity but also to create safer relational spaces within unequal power dynamics. Identity negotiation thus functions as an adaptive mechanism in response to stigma and social marginalization.

Local Context: Palak Siring and Related Empirical Studies

Empirical research focusing specifically on dwarfism in the Indonesian context remains limited. One notable study is Hidayat (2021), which examined interpersonal communication patterns among individuals with dwarfism in Palak Siring Village, Bengkulu Selatan. The study found that individuals with dwarfism develop adaptive communication strategies to build social relationships and reduce social distance within the community.

Hidayat (2021) also revealed that social acceptance in Palak Siring is achieved through a gradual process involving self-demonstration, adherence to social norms, and ethical communication practices. These findings underscore that the identities of individuals with dwarfism are shaped not only by biological conditions but also by communicative and social dynamics within the community.

However, the study primarily focused on interpersonal communication patterns and did not extensively examine identity negotiation processes in relation to social stigma using a communication theory framework. Therefore, the present study seeks to address this gap by applying Identity Negotiation Theory to understand how individuals with dwarfism in Palak Siring negotiate their identities amid social stigma.

Identity Negotiation Theory

In this concept, identity is defined as a reflection of the self-image created, perceived, and conveyed to others in each context. The developmental process of transactional interactions organized by several individuals to impose, elaborate, alter, and support a desired self-image is known as "identity negotiation". An individual's identity is influenced by his or her membership in a group, along with a stronger affiliation to that group. This involves adhering to rules and adopting a lifestyle that aligns with the group.

Face Negotiation Theory

Stella Ting-Toomey's Face Negotiation Theory predicts how people in different cultures handle conflict. According to this theory, the face serves as one's self-representation in the presence of others; in other words, the face can serve as the identity or self-representation that one wishes to display. There are several ways to deal with conflict, according to Ting-Toomey (Littlejohn, et al., 2017:413): avoidance (low attention to self and others),

competition (high attention to self and low to others), acceptance (high attention to self and low to others), and cooperation (high attention to both parties).

Identity

In this concept, identity is defined as a reflection of the self-image created, perceived, and conveyed to others in each context. The developmental process of transactional interactions organized by several individuals to impose, elaborate, alter and support a desired self-image is known as "identity negotiation". An individual's identity is influenced by his or her membership in a group, along with a stronger affiliation to that group. This involves adhering to rules and adopting a lifestyle that aligns with the group.

Self Concept

Self-concept encompasses a person's understanding of themselves, their perspective, and their description. How a person sees and feels about themselves affects how they interact with others. Images of others, self comparison, cultural teachings, and self evaluation, according to DeVito (2016:76), are the components that make up the self-concept.

Intercultural Communication Competence

Intercultural communication can include things like ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, social class, and more. Intercultural communication refers to the way a person interacts with others who have different backgrounds, experiences, assumptions, understandings, and behaviors (Bennett, 2015: 450-451).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

This section presents the empirical findings derived from in-depth interviews, participant observations, and field notes. The findings are organized into key themes that emerged from the coding process and are supported by verbatim quotations from informants.

1. Interpreting Dwarfism as Personal Identity and Self-Concept

All three informants described their physical condition as an inseparable part of their identity. Although initial feelings of confusion, discomfort, and self-doubt were

expressed, over time they developed acceptance and reinterpretation of dwarfism as a meaningful life condition.

Informant 1 explained:

“At first, I felt ashamed and confused. People stared at me everywhere. But slowly I realized this is who I am, and I cannot deny it. I must accept it.” (I1)

Informant 2 similarly stated: “I used to compare myself with others and felt different. But now I believe this body is not a curse. It is my identity, and I live with it.” (I2)

Informant 3 emphasized a spiritual interpretation: “This body is God’s destiny. I was angry in the beginning, but now I understand that everyone is created differently for a reason.” (I3)

These narratives indicate that self-concept formation among the informants evolved through lived experiences and reflective meaning-making processes.

2. Experiences of Social Stigma in Community Life

All informants reported encountering social stigma related to their physical appearance, particularly during early interactions with community members.

Informant 3 described:

“People used to say I was strange, useless, or incapable. Some even asked why someone like me existed.” (I3)

Informant 1 recalled:

“Sometimes people laughed or whispered when I passed by. It didn’t happen every day, but it was enough to hurt.” (I1)

However, Informant 2 experienced milder stigma:

“Not everyone treated me badly. Some were curious, some were supportive, but stigma still existed.” (I2)

These experiences demonstrate that stigma was not uniform but varied across individuals and social contexts.

3. Identity Negotiation Strategies in the Community

To cope with stigma, informants employed different identity negotiation strategies.

3.1 Accommodation and Explanation

Informant 1 often chose to explain his condition calmly:

“If people ask politely, I explain. I want them to understand, not fear me.” (I1)

3.2 Assertion and Achievement

Informant 2 preferred to assert competence through performance:

“I don’t talk much. I prove myself through work. When they see I can do things, they stop talking.” (I2)

3.3 Avoidance and Selective Interaction

Informant 3 initially avoided confrontation:

“When they insulted me, I stayed silent. I avoided arguing because it made things worse.” (I3)

Over time, all informants reported increased acceptance from the community following these strategies.

4. Identity Negotiation in the Workplace

Stigma also appeared in work environments, particularly related to assumptions about physical ability.

Informant 1 explained:

“My coworkers thought I couldn’t do heavy tasks. I accepted lighter work, but I still showed I was responsible.” (I1)

Informant 2 took a firmer stance:

“I refused to be treated as incapable. I work according to my ability, not my body size.” (I2)

Informant 3 chose avoidance:

“I let them talk. I did my job quietly. The stigma never fully disappeared.” (I3)

These accounts highlight varied negotiation patterns shaped by relational dynamics.

5. Self-Actualization through Achievement

Achievement emerged as a crucial medium for self-actualization.

Informant 2 stated:

“Success is my language. When I succeed, people respect me.” (I2)

Informant 1 added:

“My achievements help people see me as equal, not different.” (I1)

Achievement functioned as symbolic communication to challenge stigma.

DISCUSSION

This section interprets the findings by linking them to **Identity Negotiation Theory** and relevant empirical literature.

Identity Negotiation as a Dynamic Communicative Process

Consistent with Ting-Toomey's Identity Negotiation Theory (1999), the findings demonstrate that identity is not fixed but continuously negotiated through interaction. The informants actively managed how their dwarfism was perceived by others through communication strategies aligned with imposing, explaining, adapting, and supporting self-image.

Stigma as a Trigger for Identity Negotiation

The stigma experienced by informants reflects Tyler's (2020) argument that bodily difference becomes socially meaningful through communication. Stigma acted as a trigger that compelled informants to negotiate their identity rather than passively accept social labeling.

Self-actualizing Against Different Physical Conditions (Abominations of The Body)

According to Effendy (1984: 6) in djkn kemenkeu (2021) explains that if information messages, ideas, emotions, skills, and so on through symbols or symbols that can cause

effects in the form of behavior held with certain media are part of good communication, then an achievement of success owned by dwarf humans can also act as a medium to express meaning and value in actualizing themselves in the community. The meanings and values held by all informants are reflected in the meaning and meaning of success that all informants understand, where the three informants consider that their shortcomings are not an obstacle in achieving and working because with related things, their position and existence can be accepted. In this case, the three informants always process and progress in proving and reflecting that with different physical conditions, they can still carry out activities and work like humans in general. Related to related matters, this is also reinforced by the results of research data from Gunawan, et al (2021) related to the negotiation of the identity of veiled women, which in the results of their research emphasizes that the veil is not a bad thing that often appears in society but an identity of Muslim women in maintaining aurat and sunnah in religion, as well as what goes on with dwarf humans in Palak Siring Village who also have differences in terms of different physical conditions. So that from the existence of related matters, the three informants always take the form of maintaining ethics, behavior, and attitudes when carrying out actualization or interacting in the community so that they can be seen as good and accepted for their existence. Related things are also held to maintain their social identity in the community against the different physical conditions they have in a pluralistic society. So that with related matters and achievements, the existence of dwarf humans in Palak Siring Village can be well accepted and the stigma that is often thrown at them can be reduced.

Relational Context and Strategy Selection

The choice of negotiation strategies depended on relational closeness and power dynamics, supporting Ting-Toomey's concept of salience. Informants adjusted strategies based on whether acceptance, harmony, or self-assertion was prioritized.

Identity Negotiation in the Community

The three informants organized identity negotiations by maintaining the identity of an unequal physical condition (Abominations of the Body) to achieve a sense of being understood or accepted for their existence. In the experience of Informants 1 and 2, both felt that they received acceptance from the community regarding their identities with different

physical conditions, both also did not find any significant differences in opinion regarding their unequal physical conditions. This acceptance allows both informants to consistently maintain their identity when organizing interactions and to easily establish good relationships with people in a pluralistic environment. However, Informant 1 encountered experiences when interacting with people who had different views, so the way he negotiated his identity was by explaining about himself and not discussing sensitive topics or those that could harm each other. This is then slightly different from the experience of Informant 3, who admitted that before he received acceptance, he felt there were obstacles in interacting with the community in a pluralistic environment because he was associated with a stigma which considered that people with different physical conditions could not organize anything, were strange, useless, commented on, and considered different related to social identity related to different physical conditions. In the end, the three informants gained acceptance in a pluralistic society and were able to maintain their social identity in society with different physical conditions. Meanwhile, one informant has experienced a situation of not being accepted and being associated with the stigma of a dwarf condition by the community so that he negotiates identity to maintain his identity.

Negotiating Identity with Society				
Informant	Situation	Negotiation Strategy	Form of Negotiation	Outcome/Consequence
Informant 1	Identity accepted	Compromising,	Explains the identity of the dwarf condition	Identity accepted
	Dealing with people from different backgrounds	Competing, Avoiding	Does not discuss sensitive topics	Mutual understanding of differences
			Maintaining identity	
Informant 2	Identity accepted	Accommodating, Competing, Avoiding	Reflects a friendly attitude Maintaining identity Getting closer to the community	Identity accepted
Informant 3	Not accepted	Collaborating, Accommodating	Explaining the identity of the dwarf condition	Identity accepted
	Dwarfism is associated with stigma		Defending identity and principles	Mutual understanding Relationship improves
	Questioned about why they have dwarfism		Discuss, share views, exchange views	
			Understanding other points of view Agreeing to understand different principles	

Table 1. Strategies in Negotiating Identity with the Community

Identity negotiation is carried out by the three informants by explaining their identity until a good relationship is established and mutual understanding between themselves and the community in a pluralistic environment. In the Compromising strategy, the middle ground is taken by not discussing sensitive topics which can be detrimental, while in the Collaborating strategy, negotiations are held by discussing and exchanging ideas until an

agreement is made to understand each other's differences. Until in the end, the three informants were able to bring closer, position, actualize themselves with the community and get a sense of acceptance from the community environment.

Based on Identity Negotiation theory, the application of the principle of limiting interaction is called salience, which is the affiliation or sense of individual membership of a particular group (Littlejohn, et al., 2017: 79). The stronger the individual's affiliation with the group, for example, carrying out norms and living life in accordance with members of the group. This was also organized by the third informant to get a position that is indeed difficult to organize in the process of assimilation in society.

Then, if you look at the Accommodating strategy, negotiation itself takes the form of explaining the identity of physical conditions that are not the same (Abominations of the Body) and organizing self-adjustment in the community environment. In the Accommodating strategy, the relationship between informants and the community is considered so that the decision to accept the interaction is chosen. The result of this strategy is that a close relationship is established because there is a high consideration for the fulfillment of requests, an effort to establish a close relationship until finally a relationship of mutual understanding is established. In addition, not only feelings of being understood and appreciated, the ability to foster relationships can also make related relationships closer, familiar, and personal.

In the Competing strategy, the negotiation here is in the form of assertiveness related to self-identity, proving the stigma thrown with the achievements possessed, and continuing to maintain the identity of existing conditions. The result of this strategy is self-fulfillment and communicated differences, but not a very close relationship. However, with this, where there is proof that can break the stigma that is often thrown by people who judge if they cannot organize anything, it can be proven by dwarf humans with the results of the achievements and successes held.

In the Avoiding strategy, the form of negotiation takes the form of providing an explanation, which then chooses not to continue the conversation as if agreeing with existing assumptions, but still maintaining identity. The result of this strategy is that although the relationship and interaction can be considered fine because an explanation related to the identity of the dwarf condition has been communicated, the opposing community still believes in the stigma of the dwarf condition so that there is no significant change in views, especially the public.

Furthermore, as described in the Identity Negotiation theory, different attitudes in communicating this identity are available in several ways, including imposing, elaborating, changing, and supporting the desired self-image. In this organized research, the relevant ways are described in the following:

1. Imposing, which is an attempt to maintain the identity of the dwarf condition when it is opposed and receives reprimands, ridicule, choosing not to give in, adjusting, or getting around by organizing proof.
2. Explaining, which provides an explanation of the identity of the physical condition that is not the same (Abominations of the Body).
3. Changing, which is an effort or effort in adjusting self-image related to different physical conditions, for example adjusted to conditions in a pluralistic society.
4. Supporting Self-Image, which is organizing several positive efforts or actions so that self-image and identity can be accepted.

In this research, it was found that the strategies and ways of negotiating the identity of dwarfism (Abominations of the Body) are determined by relational factors. The three informants consider ways and strategies that are not the same when they negotiate their identity with the community. When organizing negotiations with the community, informants organize a process of adjustment, approach, communication process first, to prove their achievements so that their existence and position can be accepted in the community.

In the research also conducted, it was found that the dwarf condition recognized by the three informants was not something that disturbed their process of communicating and interacting while in the community. On the contrary, the three informants faced stigma in the form of prejudice, stereotypes, and several other differences in views regarding the identity of their unequal physical conditions which caused obstacles to the process of interaction and communication in the community. The stigma of the dwarf condition is believed and the different views on the dwarf condition make the three informants need to negotiate their identity, maintain, and adjust themselves, communicate their identity, understand each other's differences in identity and principles, and establish good communication with people who oppose their physical condition in a pluralistic society, especially in ordinary people.

So, although the three informants have physical conditions that are not the same as most people in a pluralistic society, identity negotiation can bridge or as a way of differences to

reach the stage of being understood, and respecting differences. When there is a condition of being understood and appreciated regarding existing differences, even with differences in appearance, principles, attitudes, forms, beliefs, and others, communication and interaction can still be established. At the stage when differences are no longer a problem and obstacle in interacting and self-actualizing, identity negotiation can be said to have reached its success point.

Identity Negotiation in the Work Environment				
Informant	Situation	Negotiation Strategy	Form of Negotiation	Outcome/Consequence
Informant 1	Not accepted	Accommodating	Explaining the identity of the dwarf condition	Identity accepted
	Different understanding		Maintaining identity	Differences communicated
	Associated with stigma		Fitting in	Mutual understanding
	Doing normal work		Accommodating requests from coworkers	Relationships improve and become close
			Efforts to establish a relationship dekat	
Informant 2	Not accepted	Competing	Explaining different physical identities	Self-fulfillment of needs
	Different understanding		Maintaining identity	Identity accepted
	Work according to procedure/portion		Firmly refusing to conform (doing things that are considered in accordance with the conditions that are owned)	Differences communicated
				Relationship is considered good, but not very close
Informant 3	Not accepted	Avoiding	Explaining the identity of the dwarf	Identity differences are communicated
	Different understanding		Yielding and agreeing to the views of coworkers	Views do not change
	Stigmatized as incapable		Not continuing the discussion	Stigma still exists
	Insinuated and also commented on		Maintaining a different physical condition identity	Relationship considered good, but not so close

Table 2: Strategies in Negotiating Identity with Work

Furthermore, the three informants get different views or sneers related to different physical conditions by negotiating identities. Identity negotiation itself is carried out with several strategies that are different between informants, including Accommodating, Competing, and Avoiding.

In the first strategy, namely Accommodating, the negotiation in question is in the form of explaining identities related to different physical conditions and adjusting to requests from coworkers in the work environment in terms of views that say that different physical conditions are difficult to do heavy work. In this Accommodating strategy, the relationship between informants and coworkers is considered so that a decision is made to accept their requests. The result of this strategy is that a close relationship is established because of the high consideration for the fulfillment of coworkers' requests, where there is an effort to

establish a dekt relationship until finally a relationship of mutual understanding is established. In addition, not only the feeling of being understood and appreciated, the ability to build relationships can also make the relationship closer, more intimate, and personal.

Then second, in the Competing strategy, negotiations are carried out in the form of firm explanations related to self-identity, which reject requests from coworkers who give bad views regarding different physical conditions, refusal to adjust and accommodate the wishes of coworkers, and continue to maintain the identity of different conditions. The result of this strategy is self-fulfillment and communicated differences, but not close relationships.

Then in the Avoiding strategy, the form of negotiation carried out is to provide an explanation or information, which then chooses not to continue the conversation as if agreeing with the assumptions of coworkers who give her views, but still maintain an identity related to different physical conditions as a manifestation of pride in the conditions they have. The result of. This strategy is that although the relationship and communication interactions can be considered fine because explanations related to the identity of different physical conditions have been communicated, the opposing coworkers still believe in the stigma of abominations of the body so that there is no change in view.

Furthermore, as explained in the Identity Negotiation theory, there are different attitudes in communicating this identity in several ways. Or strategies that are carried out, including imposing, defining, changing, and supporting the desired self-image. In the research conducted here, these methods are explained as follows:

1. Imposing, which is an effort made by maintaining the identity of different physical conditions (abominations of the body) when opposed and reprimanded, choosing not to give in, adjusting, or getting around the way of delivery related to the existence of different physical conditions.
2. Defining, which provides an explanation of the identity of abominations of the body, principles, and limits.
3. Changing, which is an effort to adjust self-image related to different physical conditions (abominations of the body), for example adjusted to requests from coworkers to follow the advice and directions given regarding work.
4. Supporting self-image, which is making positive efforts so that self-image and identity can be accepted.

In this research, it was found that the different physical conditions recognized by the three informants were not something that interfered with the process of communicating and

interacting while in the work environment. On the contrary, the three informants faced stigma in the form of prejudice, stereotypes, and various other differences in views regarding different physical identities (dwarfism) which caused obstacles to the process of interaction and communication while in the work environment. The stigma of different physical conditions (dwarfism) that is believed as well as differences in views regarding the work that can be done by different conditions (dwarfism), makes the three informants need to negotiate their identity, maintain, and adjust themselves, communicate their identity, understand differences in identity and principles, and establish good communication with coworkers who oppose different physical conditions (dwarfism) while in the work environment.

So, although the three informants have different body conditions and speeds when working that are different from other coworkers in the work environment, identity negotiation can bridge differences to reach the stage of being understood and respecting differences. When differences are understood and respected, even with differences in appearance, principles, physical conditions, beliefs, etc., communication and interaction can still be established. At the stage when differences are no longer a problem and an obstacle in interacting, this identity negotiation can be said to have achieved its success.

In the Negotiation skill stage or the stage where identity negotiation takes place, individuals interact and organize communication activities of their identity that are not the same from their environment. Negotiation skills which in the research conducted refer to Identity Negotiation Theory (INT) or identity negotiation theory which was developed by Stella Ting-Toomey to see and see interactions between individuals can be influenced by individual identity (Bennett, 2015: 419). Based on this theory, identity is defined as a reflective self-image that is built, experienced, and communicated by individuals or individuals in certain situations and conditions. Identity negotiation includes the process of transactional interactions between individuals to try to impose, describe, change, and support the desired self-image. All these individuals with different and diverse backgrounds negotiate their identities to adjust to the differences that exist and to be respected by others who come from different cultural backgrounds (Littlejohn, et al., 2017: 79).

In this research, the negotiated identity is the identity of an unequal physical condition (Abominations of the Body), where there are different views regarding unequal physical conditions that exist in the community. According to Rohadi in Hidayat (2021), it is explained that the meaning of differences in physical conditions between one another depends on the understanding of everyone. Just like the dwarf or midget or small humans in

Palak Siring Village, with different physical conditions, where there are several views about themselves. Stigmas about unequal physical conditions continue to exist until now, some say that dwarfs cannot organize anything, are troublesome, stigmatized as children of the devil, useless, inhibitors of communication and interaction, cultural teachings, and several other assumptions which are often raised by ordinary people. But on the contrary, there are also those who think that dwarfism is a form of self-expression of diversity, a gift from God, and a form of self-protection.

The three informants in the organized research found assessed the dwarf condition as a form of self-application of the belief given to them by the creator. The understanding of the dwarf condition as a gift given and must be accepted means that the three informants see the dwarf condition as an advantage given to them and must be accepted to run without complaining. This is as conveyed by Diana in Hidayat (2021), which says that as a parent, knowing the differences that his child has, he should be proud and grateful because it is destined for his child and the advantages given so he just must run with gratitude.

In the research conducted, it was also found that while facing stigma and differences of opinion about different physical conditions, the three informants organized identity negotiations. While negotiating their identities, the three informants had different reactions. The three informants took the form of maintaining their condition identity and it was found that several strategies were not the same between the three informants in negotiating their identities based on conflict management styles although there were also several similarities (McCorkle & Reese, 2018: 118-121), including:

1. Avoidance, which is a strategy with low attention to the achievement of one's own needs and others, resulting in avoidance of ongoing conflicts.
2. Accomodation, which is a strategy with low attention to achieving one's own needs and prioritizing the fulfillment of the needs of others. In the accommodation strategy, individuals will be shaped to meet the needs of others and ignore themselves. This strategy is organized when individuals consider relationships with others or interlocutors more.
3. Competition, which is a strategy where more importance is given to personal achievement and less attention to the needs of others. In this strategy, the results can be win-lost, where there are parties whose needs and desires are achieved, on the other hand there will also be those who are not fulfilled.

4. Compromise, which is a strategy where both parties pay attention to the needs of each other by finding a middle ground or agreement. In this strategy, neither party is benefited or harmed, which is more likely in the process, and neither party really achieves its goals.

5. Collaboration, which is a strategy that prioritizes the needs of oneself and others so that the needs of both parties can be met. This strategy encourages all parties to discuss and communicate their interests so as to maximize the achievement of the goals of both parties, creative problem solving, and also get the best solution. This collaborative strategy is considered the best form of problem management.

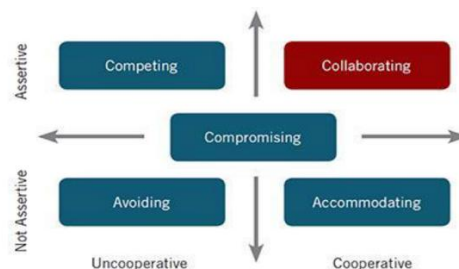


Diagram 1. Conflict Management Strategies in Identity Negotiation

The three informants were found to be able to organize identity negotiation with the aim of obtaining conducive relationships, namely comfortable relationships with other people or communities in their environment, in the form of feeling valued and understanding each other's principles and identities. In this research, it was also found that the relational relationship between individuals is a factor that can affect the continuity of the identity negotiation process so that there are differences in strategies in organizing identity negotiations that run in this case, namely the community. In addition, dwarf humans in Palak Siring Village also emphasize their success with the existence of unequal physical conditions to prove that the stigma that is often thrown is wrong.

Theoretical Contribution

This study extends Identity Negotiation Theory by applying it to visible physical disability contexts, highlighting how achievement and silence can function as communicative strategies.

By separating findings from discussion, this study clearly demonstrates that dwarf individuals in Palak Siring Village actively negotiate their identities through adaptive

communication strategies, enabling self-actualization and social inclusion despite persistent stigma.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The three informants regarded their dwarf bodies as a gift given by the creator that was passed down through their ancestors. The three informants also explained that at first, they were confused and did not accept the conditions they had, but over time they accepted the related conditions and believed they were still the same among other people and could also carry out any activities like humans in general.

2. Three informants used cultural lessons in the form of positive values when they behaved in ways consistent with their belief that napa is a type of cultural instruction. In this case, the third informant persisted in acting in a way that was consistent with the values they had chosen as a means of commitment and in making decisions even in the face of contrary facts.

3. The three informants' model certain behaviors for others in the community, such as not interfering in other people's affairs, adapting appropriately, arranging proper communication, and others. These actions can support the three informants' claims that they have different physical characteristics.

4. In relation to physical conditions that are not the same (Abominations of the Body), the three informants feel that the differences they have also play a role in the process of interacting while in the community. During entering the environment in the community, two of the three informants were found to have the ability to Identity knowledge, which can see the reality of plurality in the community environment where their identity is not the same as the surrounding community. Two of the three informants then reflect the ability of Mindfulness, which can understand differences in views in the community environment due to differences in background and experience.

5. Despite the prevalence of identity differences, the three informants and the community around them have a beneficial relationship characterized by positive engagement and communication, mutual understanding, and a sense of acceptance. The three informants used various methods in their identity negotiation during the study, which included avoidance, competition, adjustment, compromise, and collaboration. Based on Identity Negotiation theory, the application of the principle

of limiting interaction is called salience, which is one's affiliation or sense of membership of a particular group.

6. Both informants use different identity negotiation tactics, such as giving and working together. In the end, when the identity negotiation process is complete, the public can understand and accept the identity of this informant.

7. Thus, three informants continue to engage with the public, but they do so by acting morally and in accordance with the values they respect.

SUGGESTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study offers several important implications at the policy, practical, and theoretical levels, as well as directions for future research.

Policy Implications

The findings of this study highlight the urgent need for inclusive and stigma-sensitive disability policies, particularly at the local and community levels. Although national regulations on disability rights exist, such as Indonesia's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the lived experiences of individuals with dwarfism indicate that policy implementation at the grassroots level remains uneven.

Local governments and village administrations should incorporate disability-inclusive communication strategies into community programs, public services, and employment policies. Training programs aimed at public officials, community leaders, and employers are necessary to improve understanding of physical disabilities and to reduce stigma rooted in misinformation and stereotypes. As demonstrated in this study, stigma often emerges not from formal exclusion, but from everyday communicative practices; therefore, policy interventions should address social interaction norms, not merely physical accessibility.

Furthermore, disability policies should move beyond a medical or charity-based framework and adopt a social and communicative model of disability, recognizing that exclusion is largely produced through social attitudes and communication patterns (Tyler, 2020). This shift would support more inclusive public discourse and foster environments where identity differences are respected rather than problematized.

Practical Implications for Persons with Disabilities

For persons with dwarfism and other visible physical disabilities, this study demonstrates that identity negotiation is a crucial communicative resource for navigating stigma and achieving social acceptance. The findings suggest that strategies such as explanation, selective accommodation, assertive self-presentation, and achievement-based self-actualization can empower individuals to maintain dignity and agency in everyday interactions.

Disability advocacy organizations and community-based initiatives may utilize these insights to develop communication empowerment programs that strengthen self-confidence, identity awareness, and negotiation skills among persons with disabilities. Rather than encouraging conformity, such programs should emphasize agency, self-definition, and strategic communication, allowing individuals to choose how and when to negotiate their identities.

Importantly, the study also indicates that the responsibility to reduce stigma should not rest solely on persons with disabilities. Community members, coworkers, and institutions must actively participate in creating mutually respectful interaction spaces, where difference is acknowledged without being stigmatized.

Theoretical Contributions and Implications

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the development of Identity Negotiation Theory by extending its application to the context of visible physical disability, a domain that has received limited attention within communication studies. The findings demonstrate that identity negotiation among individuals with dwarfism involves not only verbal strategies but also symbolic and non-verbal forms of communication, such as achievement, silence, and selective participation.

This study also refines Ting-Toomey's concept of identity salience by showing that physical embodiment can become a dominant identity marker that shapes interactional expectations and power relations. In this context, identity negotiation is not merely interpersonal but deeply embedded in structural stigma and social hierarchies.

Moreover, the findings suggest that self-actualization functions as a communicative strategy, where success and competence become symbolic tools for challenging stigma. This insight offers a theoretical bridge between identity negotiation, stigma theory, and self-concept development, enriching interdisciplinary discussions within communication and disability studies.

Directions for Future Research

Future studies are encouraged to expand the scope of research by involving a larger and more diverse group of participants across different regions and disability categories. Comparative studies between rural and urban contexts, as well as between different forms of physical disability, would provide deeper insight into how social environments shape identity negotiation processes.

Longitudinal research could further examine how identity negotiation strategies evolve over time and across life stages. Additionally, integrating participatory or emancipatory research approaches would allow persons with disabilities to play a more active role in knowledge production, aligning research practices with inclusive and ethical principles.

In sum, this study underscores that identity negotiation is not merely an individual coping mechanism but a collective communicative process that reflects broader social values and power structures. By addressing stigma through inclusive communication, supportive policy frameworks, and theoretical refinement, societies can move closer toward genuine social inclusion for persons with disabilities.

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