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# Reconstructing the Symbolic Value of Singleness in Strengthening the Religious Character of Adolescents

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## Abstract

The world of teenagers is a world with various forces and demands about freedom that require extra thought and assistance. Adolescent students are an important focus for educators and further in the world of education, where in fact the world of education is still the target of worrying news. Character cultivation is an important choice in cultivating students' religious strength, one of which is through reconstructing the value of being single. The aim of this research is to find out the number of single students at Madrasah Aliyah Al Hidayah. To find out students' understanding of being single at Madrasah Aliyah Al Hidayah. To find out the reconstruction of the symbolic value of being single to strengthen the religious character of students at Madrasah Aliyah Al Hidayah. The methodology used is qualitative. Based on the results of the analysis, it can be concluded that (1) There are many single students at Madrasah Aliyah Al Hidayah due to limited data available. Some schools may not have a system that records student relationship status, so it is difficult to get accurate data about the number of single students at school. (2) The understanding of students about being single at Madrasah Aliyah Al Hidayah is described by informants as being single is not having a boyfriend, so it can be concluded that they understood in their own language the term single. (3) The description of the reconstruction of the symbolic value of being single and strengthening religious beliefs at Madrasah Aliyah Al Hidayah was clearly explained by the results of interviews and observations which explained that their religion was stronger than when they were not single.

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## Keywords

single, reconstructing; religious character; the Symbolic Value of Being Single in Strengthening the Religious Character of Adolescents



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## INTRODUCTION

The world of adolescence is a world of diverse forces and demands for freedom that require extra thought and guidance. Adolescent students are a crucial focus for

educators, and even more so for the world of education. In fact, the world of education remains the target of concerning news coverage. Educators have yet to position themselves as role models for their students; this news can be described as a mental illness whose cure is nothing other than positive character. The phenomenon in the world of education still requires a strong foundation for providing learning to the school community, especially social situations outside and even within the school environment.

In terms of terminology, experts define character with varying wording. Endang Sumantri states that character is a positive quality possessed by a person that makes them interesting and attractive to someone who is unusual or has an eccentric personality. Doni Koesoemo understands character as the same as personality, namely the traits or characteristics, style or distinctive nature of a person that originates from the formations received from the environment, for example the family environment during childhood. (Igreas Siswanto, 2013)

In relation to education which includes the learning process in it, learning itself is always related to changes in people, whether it leads to better or worse, planned or not. Another thing that is always related to learning character building which is an effort to realize the mandate of Pancasila and the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution is motivated by the reality of current national problems, such as disorientation and not yet being understood the values of Pancasila, the limitations of integrated policy instruments in realizing the values of Pancasila, the shifting of ethical values in the life of the nation and state, fading awareness of the values of the nation's culture, the threat of national disintegration and the weakening of national independence. To support the realization of the ideals of character building as mandated in Pancasila and the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution and to overcome current national problems, the government makes character building one of the priority programs of national development. (Tri Sukitman, 2015)

Whitherington states that learning is a change in personality that manifests as new response patterns in the form of skills, attitudes, habits, knowledge and abilities. Meanwhile, Crow and Crow state that learning is the acquisition of new habits, knowledge and attitudes, and Hilgard concludes that learning is a process in which a behavior appears or changes due to a response to a situation. (Nana Sukmadinata Syaodih, 2004)

Describing the readiness of the world of education cannot be separated from the meaning of national philosophy. Education is a crucial key to strengthening the national philosophy in facing the era of globalization. This readiness will be

strengthened by the positive character of students. The national philosophy is the foundation for instilling character in students. The world of education will progress as long as the character of students and educators is strong. The discussion of national philosophy is often initiated by many researchers, but strengthening character as a basis for strengthening philosophy remains a topic that needs to be expanded.

Recent developments in our society are cause for concern. This can be seen, for example, in the widespread circulation of pornographic videos and the pervasive sexual behavior that has infected teenagers. The culture of singleness has become a negative one, with the value attached to single students as unmarketable. Singles are seen as inferior to others, a reality that should be a cultural asset that strengthens adolescent character. These realities are deeply distressing and demand greater attention from us to character education.

Based on the initial exploration on Tuesday, July 4, 2021, the researcher overheard a conversation between several female students, asking, "Ris, where are you going next week?" Then another friend replied, "I want to join the PMR activity," and another friend replied, "That's great, Ris, being single is free." On the second day after the initial exploration on July 5, 2021, the researcher sought information from one of the educators at Madrasah Aliyah Al Hidayah, with the result that there were still several single students at the MA.

As initial data to support the research, the researcher collected documentation of student activities at Al Hidayah Islamic Senior High School, illustrated with photographs. The selection of the research location among Islamic senior high school-aged adolescents was motivated by an environment that tends to support the negative symbolic value of being single. However, it turns out that many students still dare to make the decision to be single at the Islamic Senior High School.

With this background, this research is considered important to provide a new understanding of the importance of singleness in strengthening national character, refreshing the truth that singleness is a good situation and a positive thing in developing adolescent character which ultimately will contribute to strengthening national character. It is important for the researcher to take the research title "Reconstruction of the Symbolic Value of Singleness in Strengthening the Religious Character of Adolescents at Madrasah Aliyah Al Hidayah Jambon Ponorogo".

## METHOD

This research uses descriptive qualitative field research. The descriptive method is a research method that investigates a group, an object, or a class of events in the

present. The objective of this research is to create a descriptive, systematic, factual, and accurate picture of the facts, nature, and relationships of the phenomena being investigated.

The data sources in this study are: Humans, which include the principal, teachers and students of Madrasah Aliyah Al Hidayah Jambon Ponorogo. Non-humans, which include documents and books that are relevant to this study. The author uses this interview method to conduct direct verbal interviews with the Principal and Ustadz and Ustadzah of Madrasah Aliyah Al Hidayah Jambon Ponorogo. The people who are used as informants in this study are determined purposively, more or less namely: students of grades X, XI, XII of Madrasah Aliyah Al Hidayah, educators at Madrasah Aliyah Al Hidayah and several informants from the environment around the school.

In this study, the author used the direct observation method and took part in direct observation of the principal's efforts to improve teacher performance at Madrasah Aliyah Al Hidayah Jambon Ponorogo. The documentation method was used to collect data regarding the principal's efforts to improve teacher performance, vision, mission, and objectives, geographical location, conditions of teachers and students, and facilities and infrastructure at Madrasah Aliyah Al Hidayah Jambon Ponorogo.

Thus, the data analysis method is the process of organizing data analysis aimed at researchers, therefore it is an effort to systematically search for and organize observation notes, interviews, field notes, other supporting data, with the aim of increasing the researcher's understanding of the problem being studied and the findings are also conveyed to the data then organized into patterns, categories, and descriptions.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The number of single students at Al Hidayah Islamic High School**

Based on the results of the interviews conducted, there are several behaviors received from others related to the stigma of being single or single. When meeting other people, subjects are often asked questions about their single status. Subjects are always asked questions about why they don't immediately find a partner. "It's more like asking questions, but it leads to teasing. More like, and more like confirming why I have to be alone, why I don't want to look. More like being nosy, nosy." (said one of the 12th grade students of Madrasah Aliyah Al Hidayah).

Many students receive reprimands from their friends regarding their single status. Others usually corner the subject as if not having a partner is something

wrong. In this case, others usually also advise the subject to immediately find a partner or even to get married soon. In this case, the context of the conversation that occurs is joking, so the subject also responds to his friends with jokes too. "Ehm, if (taunted) not being available, yes I have. But when not being available, the context is joking. Yes, if there is time for talk like that, of course the answer, yes I answer jokingly too," explained the subject.

Faced with various stigmatizing behaviors, subjects felt disturbed by the intrusion into their personal affairs. They felt uncomfortable answering questions from others that were not actually beneficial to them. In some situations, subjects often decided to avoid conversations that referred to their single status. "Because every time I was asked that question, I would leave, go somewhere else. I mean, leave that individual for someone else," said one student. Questions and innuendos about single status often made someone feel disturbed and uncomfortable.

The understanding of singleness in Madrasah Aliyah Al Hidayah is presented with interview data from class representatives for the 2020/2021 academic year. By comparing several theories, the researcher tries to draw the following conclusion. It is conveyed that most people interpret singleness differently from single. A person with single status is considered to be without a partner due to fate, while a single person is not having a partner because of their own decision or choice. This difference in meaning is usually referred to as voluntary single and involuntary single. Voluntary single is a person who chooses to be alone, while involuntary single is a person who is forced to be alone because they actually want a partner. With this difference in meaning between the terms single and single, there is a perception that someone with single status is lower than someone who claims to be single. (Septiana, E. & Syafiq, M. 2013)

Thank God, I'm single, sis, alone without a boyfriend, right?

As far as I know, there aren't many, sis...

Thank God, Sis was there, and we became close friends.

In the presentation of research data obtained through interviews with one of the madrasah students compared with the theory above, it can be concluded that there are several students who know and provide data but it is not significant in mentioning the number of singles among them. Single is a term for someone who does not have (01/1-W/F-1/ 8-IX/2021)

Couple or usually called boyfriend/girlfriend. According to Bowman (1978) in (Natasha Cindy: 2016) dating itself is a fun activity between men and women who are not yet married, where this will be the main basis that can provide reciprocal influence for subsequent relationships before marriage in America. Natasha Cindy,

2016) Meanwhile, according to DeGenova and Rice (2005), dating is a relationship in which two people meet and engage in a series of activities together to get to know each other. Although dating is not a traditional Indonesian practice, and some religions oppose it, dating has become a common occurrence today.

While you're single, bro, you know...

Yes, not many, sis, they are embarrassed when they are single, you know...

It seems better, sis....

I'm single, sis. You know what it's like to be without a boyfriend, right?

In my class, I don't know much, sis.

It seems better, sis....

The issue of singles data at the MA where the research was conducted may be related to the limited data available. Some schools may not have systems in place to monitor or record student relationship status, making it difficult to obtain accurate data on the number of single students at the school. ( . (02/1-W/F-1/ 8-IX/2021,01/3-W/F-1/ 8-IX/2021,)

Other data providing a description of the strengthening of the discussion theme is a (01/1-O/F-1/21-VIII/2021). In addition to data limitations, another issue that may arise is student sensitivity and privacy. Some students may be uncomfortable or reluctant to disclose their relationship status to the school or their classmates. This can make it difficult to obtain accurate or representative data on the number of single students in the school.

Furthermore, single status is subjective and can change over time. Some students may consider themselves single, while others may be in an informal relationship or in the process of establishing one. Therefore, it is difficult to accurately measure the number of single students in a school (01/1-O/F-1/21-VIII/2021).

It can be concluded that the high number of single students at Madrasah Aliyah Al Hidayah is due to limited data availability. Some schools may not have a system to monitor or record student relationship status, making it difficult to obtain accurate data on the number of single students at the school.

### **Students' understanding of being single at Madrasah Aliyah Al Hidayah**

As students, they feel that what people say or perceive about being single isn't entirely true. Not everyone decides to be single because they're unsellable or haven't found the partner they're looking for. Many students decide to remain single because they're still focused on their personal goals. "So I still want to focus on studying, in line with my personal goals and ambitions. After all, our parents send us to school to

study, not to find a partner." (said a 12th-grade student at Madrasah Aliyah Al Hidayah)

One student also shared that some of her friends ended up hiding their single status to avoid being teased or bullied by others. "Actually, I have a friend who recently broke up with her boyfriend, and basically, when I found out she was gone, she didn't want to tell her friends that she was single anymore. She was afraid of being seen as single again."

Being single isn't necessarily sad and can even be considered enjoyable. One student felt more flexible because she could freely manage her own life. Without a partner, the subject felt she didn't need to update her partner every day, allowing her to have more freedom and focus on her personal goals and priorities. According to them, being single doesn't mean always feeling alone. Not having a partner isn't a major issue that makes a single person lonely. "Being alone and feeling alone are different, in my opinion. Personally, I don't. I want to be alone, but I don't think I'm lonely. Because it's a choice."

A person who chooses to be single also has a support system that comes from the school environment, friendships, and family. Friends and family are able to provide support in various ways so that they do not feel lonely. "I don't feel alone or lonely, because behind being alone, I have activities, I have activities outside of school, and there are friends, there are family, there are best friends, so there is a support system," said the subject who explained that he did not feel lonely (Interview Data). The source of a person's happiness does not only come from romantic relationships, but can also come from family, siblings, friends, and other sources.

However, a growing phenomenon is that dating is no longer the primary orientation for someone looking for the right life partner, leading to marriage. Instead, there are other reasons why teenagers date: simply for fun, to keep up with the times, and even sexual exploitation is a primary goal. For some teenagers, dating is even interpreted as a mere arena for prestige, to distance themselves from the negative connotation of being single among teenagers (unmarketable).Nurjanah, 2007)

Singles recognition in schools is the process of familiarizing or establishing an understanding of single status among students within the school environment. This can be an interesting topic to discuss, as single status is often a concern for school-age adolescents.

Single status, and the term "jomblo" in particular, seems to have become popular in various discussions, addressing the negative stigma attached to being

single. Insults and jokes about the perceived plight of single people are commonplace on social media. Indirect insults also occur in conversations about romantic relationships. Those closest to someone often offer to help find a partner even when asked (Septiana & Syafiq, 2013).

Introduction to singlehood in schools can be done through various means, such as group discussions, seminars, or social activities involving students. The goal is to help students understand that being single is not something to be ashamed of or looked down upon, but rather an opportunity to develop themselves, focus on their education, and build healthier relationships in the future. (02/2-W/F-1/09-IX/2021)

In terms of values and ethics, religion often provides moral and ethical guidance for me. Religion can also provide resources for support and counseling for teenagers facing problems in their romantic lives or experiencing emotional difficulties. Activities such as religious study groups can foster positive qualities in teenagers.

A person who is not in a relationship or is known as single Singles tend to have more time and energy to maintain relationships with friends, family, and neighbors. This is because they don't have the burden of a partner, allowing them to focus on broader interpersonal relationships. Singles also tend to be more generous because they have greater financial freedom. This is because they are free to give to others without having to share financial responsibilities with a partner. (Nanik, Tairas, MMW, & Hendriani, W. (2018)

As a single teenager, I have the time and freedom to choose what activities I pursue. Since I'm not constantly being in touch with someone, I have more freedom to pursue other positive activities. For example, with my phone, I'll respond to chats less frequently and spend more time watching religious studies. Religion can give me meaning and purpose in life. As a single teenager, having a religious foundation can help me feel more connected to the greater meaning in life.<sup>103/2-W/F-1/12-IX/2021)</sup>

In terms of values and ethics, religion often provides moral and ethical guidance for me. Religion can also provide resources for support and counseling for teenagers facing problems in their romantic lives or experiencing emotional difficulties. Activities such as religious study groups can foster positive qualities in teenagers.

Rational choice theory states that decisions or choices are made based on the actor's consideration of various options (Baum, 2020). As Janis and Mann (1979) stated, in decision-making there is a process of selecting what is considered best by the individual. This process includes stages that must be passed by the individual,

where at each stage the individual is faced with alternatives that must be chosen to achieve the desired goal. In addition, the tradition of society, which generally searches for a partner in its own way, also plays a role in influencing a person's decision.

Rational choice theory focuses on actors. Actors are considered human beings with goals and intentions. This means that actors have goals, and their actions are focused on achieving those goals. Actors are also considered to have choices, values, and needs. The important thing is that the actions taken to achieve these goals align with their choices. In rational choice theory, there are two crucial elements: actors and resources. These two elements control resources that can attract the attention of other parties (Nur Hidayatus Sa'adah, 2018).

I frequently watch the lectures of many religious figures on various social media platforms. They provide clear moral guidance on how to live an ethical life, such as guidance on relationships, sexual morality, and how to interact with others.<sup>1</sup>

It can be concluded that from the results of the explanation above, students' understanding of being single in Al Hidayah Islamic Senior High School was described by three informants as saying that being single means not having a boyfriend or girlfriend, so it can be concluded that they understand the familiar term "single" in their own language.

### **Reconstruction of the symbolic value of being single strengthens the religious character of students at Madrasah Aliyah Al Hidayah**

Character is the foundation of how humans conduct their activities in society. This is a crucial foundation that we as educators must instill. One of the essential pillars of character is religious character. Researchers will first attempt to explain and analyze one of these pillars in adolescent activities. The researchers will present and analyze the data as follows, juxtaposed with theories that will form the basis for drawing conclusions.

Yes, I participate in religious activities in my community, such as group worship, religious instruction, or religious youth gatherings. This helps me feel more connected to my religious community and receive social support. This has helped me achieve inner peace and deepen my Islamic faith. (02/2-W/F-1/09-IX/2021)

Being single is inseparable from various views of society, both positive and negative. Negatively, singles are considered unattractive and less able to establish good social relationships (Septiana & Syafiq, 2013). In addition, a single person is also labeled as an old maid, considered lonely, insecure, playing hard to get, and

arrogant (Nanik et al., 2018). Being single is indeed inseparable from various negative stigmas, including being considered unhappy, dissatisfied with life, and unattractive. On the other hand, positively, singles are considered as people who are independent, enjoy life, are resilient, and focused on their career or education (Nanik et al., 2018).

The relationship between singleness and religious character development can be influenced by several factors, including free time. As a single teenager, I have more free time than teenagers in romantic relationships. I can use this free time to further explore my religious beliefs and engage in religious activities. Another factor is peer groups. If single teenagers have peers who support their religious values, this can strengthen the development of religious character. (02/2-W/F-1/09-IX/2021)

Connected with other data from field results and researchers tried to explain this through observation:

As a single teenager, I have the time and freedom to choose what activities I pursue. Since I'm not constantly being in touch with someone, I have more freedom to pursue other positive activities. For example, with my phone, I'll respond to chats less frequently and spend more time watching religious studies. Religion can give me meaning and purpose in life. As a single teenager, having a religious foundation can help me feel more connected to the greater meaning in life.

As a Muslim, the main thing that I do is to pray on time, read the Qur'an a lot, attend religious studies or other religious activities and pray a lot.

Yes, I participate in religious activities in my community, such as group worship, religious instruction, or religious youth gatherings. This helps me feel more connected to the religious community and receive social support. This has helped me achieve inner peace and deepen my faith in Islam.

Lickona emphasized that noble character encompasses knowledge of goodness, then fosters a commitment to doing good, and ultimately, actually doing it. These are the three pillars of character that are expected to become habits: habits of the mind, habits of the heart, and habits of action. In other words, character refers to a set of knowledge, attitudes, and motivations, as well as behaviors and skills.

By understanding religious values and principles and adhering to certain boundaries in relationships and social interactions in accordance with religious law, I will maintain my religious values without judging others. When interacting with friends, I will choose places and activities that align with my religious values.

One of the challenges I face is peer pressure to engage in activities that may conflict with my religious values, such as dating. I deal with this by strengthening

my religious beliefs and values and having the courage to say "no" to offers that conflict with my beliefs. If I feel socially isolated for not following their trends, I seek out a supportive religious community where I can interact with people who share my values and accept me.

Religiousness is a process of reconnecting, or rather, a system of traditions that regulates the system of faith (belief) and worship of the Almighty God, as well as the rules relating to human interaction and the relationship between humans and their environment. Religious character encompasses values such as attitudes and behaviors that adhere to the teachings of one's religion, tolerance for the practice of other religions, and living in harmony with followers of other faiths. (Agus Wibowo, 2018)

The relationship between singleness and religious character development can be influenced by several factors, including free time. As a single teenager, I have more free time than teenagers in romantic relationships. I can use this free time to further explore my religious beliefs and engage in religious activities. Another factor is peer groups. If single teenagers have peers who support their religious values, this can strengthen the development of religious character. (03/2-W/F-1/12-IX/2021)

From an Islamic perspective, character is the fruit of the process of implementing sharia (worship and social interactions) based on a solid foundation of faith. Therefore, it is impossible for a person to develop character without sound faith and sharia. In his book, Marzuki, Al-Asfahani outlines the ideas of purifying the soul (noble character) for humans.

Single teenagers can strengthen their religious character by increasing their understanding of their religion. They can take religious classes, attend religious studies, or join religious discussion groups to delve deeper into religious teachings.

According to Lickona in his book, Saptono, there are two fundamental policies needed to shape good character: First, respect and responsibility. Second, these policies are fundamental moral values that must be taught in character education. Character education is a deliberate effort to develop good character based on core policies that are objectively good for both individuals and society.

As part of strengthening their religious character, single teenagers can engage in faith-based social service activities. They might help the poor, visit elderly people in nursing homes, or participate in charitable programs supported by their religious community. This helps them develop empathy, compassion, and a sense of social responsibility. (04/03-O/F-1/06-IX/2023)

In addition to these two fundamental principles, there are ten essential

principles needed to develop good character. These ten essential principles are wisdom, justice, fortitude, self-control, love, a positive attitude, hard work, gratitude, and humility. (Sapto, 2019)

Singleness strengthens religious character. One possible example is someone who lives a single life while focusing on their spiritual and religious development. They might spend time praying, reading scriptures, attending religious activities, and participating in a religious community. By living a single life, they can deepen their understanding of religion, strengthen their relationship with God, and develop a strong religious character. (03/02-O/F-1/05-IX/2021)

Making character a top priority. Teaching children by example. Using direct instruction to shape conscience and habits. Providing opportunities for practice. Encouraging spiritual development. Students learn about goodness, develop a commitment to doing goodness and they actually do it. (Abdul Rohman. 2015)

It's important to create an inclusive and supportive environment for single students, where they feel accepted and valued without the pressure of having a partner. Therefore, introducing singles in schools can help increase understanding of singlehood and reduce the stigma associated with it. (01/II-O/F-1/28-VIII/2021)

This theory attempts to link religious character to aspects of an individual's personality. For example, this theory can look for correlations between personality characteristics such as neuroticism, extroversion, or openness with levels of religiosity. (Saroglou, V. 2011).

Researchers have observed that being single strengthens religious character. One possible example is someone who lives a single life and focuses on their spiritual and religious development. They might spend time praying, reading scriptures, attending religious activities, and participating in religious communities. By living a single life, they can deepen their understanding of religion, strengthen their relationship with God, and develop a strong religious character. The activities of some students reflect their level of religiousness. (03/1-O/F-1/24-VIII/2021)

According to researchers, reconstructing the symbolic value of singleness should be an important aspect of school activities, as this will have a positive impact on students' character. The character that develops most from instilling this value is to strengthen religious character. Madrasah Aliyah Al Hidayah clearly describes the results of interviews and observations which explain that their religiosity is stronger than when they were not single.

## **CONCLUSION**

From the research results above, the following conclusions can be drawn: The

large number of single students at Madrasah Aliyah Al Hidayah is due to limited available data. Some schools may not have a system to monitor or record their attendance, student relationships, making it difficult to obtain accurate data on the number of single students at the school. Students' understanding of being single at Madrasah Aliyah Al Hidayah was described by three informants as being single as not having a boyfriend or girlfriend, so it can be concluded that they understand the familiar term single in their own language. The description of the reconstruction of the symbolic value of being single strengthening the religious character at Madrasah Aliyah Al Hidayah is clearly depicted in the results of interviews and observations that explain their religiosity is stronger than when they were not single.

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