



## Semar: A Personal Model for Counselors

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### ABSTRACT

*Semar* is an Indonesian *wayang* figure, a servant to other *wayang* characters *Pandawa*. *Semar*'s personality is shown as a good, wise and wise individual, so he is suitable to be used as a counselor's personality model. This qualitative study applied Gadamerian hermeneutics, an objective type of hermeneutic research. The primary data in this study were texts discussing *Semar*, namely "*Apa dan Siapa Semar*" by Sri Mulyono and "*Semar Dunia Batin Orang Jawa*" by Tuti Sumukti. The data were also collected through an interview with Indonesian *wayang* expert, Ki Manteb Sudarsono. This study found that *Semar*'s (1) advisor, (2) congruent, (3) honest, and (4) empathetic personalities could be used as a counselor's personal model.

**Keyword:** *Semar* personality; counselor

### ABSTRAK

*Semar* adalah tokoh wayang di Indonesia yang ditugaskan untuk menjadi abdi tokoh-tokoh wayang *Pandawa*. Kepribadian *Semar* ditunjukkan sebagai individu yang baik, arif dan bijaksana, sehingga cocok dijadikan sebagai model kepribadian konselor. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan hermeneutika Gadamerian yakni jenis penelitian hermeneutik. Data primer penelitian ini dari buku "*Apa dan Siapa Semar*" karya Sri Mulyono dan "*Semar Dunia Batin Orang Jawa*" karya Tuti Sumukti. Data sekunder dalam penelitian ini adalah wawancara dengan pakar wayang Indonesia Ki Manteb Sudarsono. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepribadian *Semar* yang bisa dijadikan model pribadi konselor adalah (1) penasihat, (2) kongruensi, (3) kejujuran, dan (4) empati.

**Kata kunci:** Kepribadian *semar*; konselor

## INTRODUCTION

*Wayang* is an internationally recognized Indonesian performance art with noble and meaningful values. It contains a range of wisdom applicable to everyday life. One of the phenomenal *wayang* characters in Indonesia is *Semar*, who is known for his image (Habsy, 2017; Mulyono, 1989; Sumukti, 2006). In the Indonesian *wayang* story, *Semar* is the servant of *Pandawa*. There are two different versions of *Semar* origin. The first version told

that Sang Hyang Wenang controls heaven and earth. He fathered a son named Sang Hyang Tunggal, who was married to Dewa Rekawati, a daughter of a giant crab named Rekatama. One day, when Rekawati laid her egg, it flew to the sky and hatched before Sang Hyang Wenang. Three anthropomorphic creatures rose from the eggshell: Tejamantri, Ismaya who appeared from the albumen, and Manikmaya, who appeared from the yolk (Mulyono, 1989; Sumukti, 2006; Susdarwono, 2020).

The second version said that the universe emerged as something created simultaneously. It was told that an egg held by Sang Hyang Wenang hatched on its own, and there was a sky, earth, and light or teja, and two anthropomorphic creatures, Manik and Maya. Both versions share similarities: Ismaya (1st version) and Maya (2nd version) were born from egg whites and were tasked to maintain the earth. Manikmaya and Manik are transformations of egg yolks, and both become kings of gods in heaven. In both versions, Manikmaya and Manik became Bathara Guru, whose descendants were spread in heaven and on earth, while Ismaya and Maya were named Semar and made the protector of the earth. It is clear here that Semar is the dominant figure in the universe and, as a protector of the earth, is closely related to the inhabitants of the earth (Mulyono, 1989; Sumukti, 2006).

Semar is known for his patient, loving, compassionate, and easy-to-understand characters. However, it is told that when he is angry, no one can stop him, and gods are even considered lesser than the soles of his feet. Semar always humbled himself towards his children and spoke softly like a servant when conversing with his masters. When he mingles with the Gods, he behaves as he deals with his equals. Semar symbolizes true human character. Yasasusastra (2011) stated that Semar has a patient character, and always leads to goodness and good life philosophies. Notopertomo and Warih (2013) also described that Semar could be a means of peace and glory for the country he occupies. The Pandawa have considered Semar his advisor, and they realize that Semar is actually a god who came down to Earth for peace and justice.

Semar is known to be very wise, can get along with anyone, is responsive to changes, and is clairvoyant. As a servant, he is loyal to his *Bendara* (master). He consistently advocates goodness and virtues in order to achieve the glory of life, practice modesty, abstinence, and pray. This character whispered many suggestions and life advice. Whomever he follows, his life will reach the pinnacle of success, bringing eternal happiness

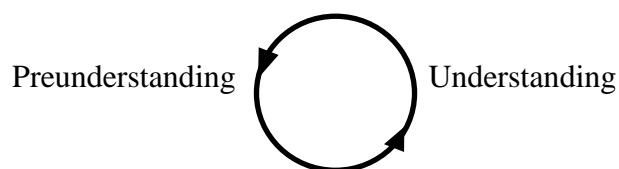
inside and out (Tofani, 2013). Semar has at least the characteristics: *wijaya* (wise in serving the country), *mantriwira* (pleasure to serve the country), *wicaksana maya* (wise in speaking and act), *matangwan* (loving and loved by the people), *satya bakti prabu* (faithful to the state and the king), *wakniwak* (unpretending), *seharwan pasaman* (patient and calm), *dirut saha* (honest, thorough, earnest, and loyal), *tan lelana* (good mind and controlling the five senses), *diwiyacita* (eliminating personal interests), *masisi samastha buwana* (struggling for self-perfection and world welfare).

Based on interviews with an Indonesian *wayang* expert, Ki Manteb Sudarsono stated that Semar was the descendant of the gods Sang Hyang Wenang and Sang Hyang Tunggal. As a servant, Semar tirelessly reminds Pandawa to act according to the truth. In this sense, semar similarly acts as a counselor who provides good service to his clients. Counselors are responsible for providing assistance and guidance and directing clients to better changes (Capuzzi & Gross, 2007; Corey, 2009; Farozin, 2019; Seligman, 2006).

This work aims to thoroughly depict Semar's personality, thus allowing counselors to use Semar character as a role model. It is expected that the counselors could emulate Semar's characteristics while performing their tasks in order to achieve the best results and better transformations for clients. Making *wayang* characters role models for counselors is what makes this research original and distinctive.

## METHODS

This study applied qualitative hermeneutics, i.e., a study of understanding texts (Bingham, 2010; Palmer, 1969). Hermeneutic study could be divided into two: objective and alethic hermeneutics (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000). To be more specific, this study applied objective gadamer's hermeneutic. The paradigm of gadamer's hermeneutics is found in a hermeneutic circle pattern. The circle consists of up and down patterns between parts and whole to understand meaning in a text shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Gadamerian Hermeneutics Cycle**

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Advisor**

Semar has an advisory personality in serving his masters. The advisory role is used when the counselor attempts to help the clients think about solutions to their problems, reflect on ideas, plan actions, or develop existing choices (Doyle, 1998; Musika, 2015). This role can also be raised in the discussion process, where the counselor asks clients to mention any suggestions they have heard and relevant to their problems. The suggestions are then could be tested objectively. The role also applies when the counselors find that it is necessary to refer clients to other specific experts (Doyle, 1998; Gamby et al., 2020). Counselors should be thoughtful with the advice given to clients, as they are likely viewed as very meaningful, practical references by clients. Furthermore, recommendations could be made only if the counselor considers it necessary to advance the counseling process and he/she has adequate knowledge and expertise (Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Cormier & Cormier, 1998; Doyle, 1998; Gamby et al., 2020). As an advisor, counselors are needed to support the school climate (García-López et al., 2016). Counselors play a role in advising clients after alternative problem-solving (Curry & DeVoss, 2009; Dockery, 2011; Steen et al., 2012). The components of cross-cultural counseling competence included beliefs/attitudes, knowledge, and skills (Minami, 2009; Hladik & Jadama, 2016). School counselors need to implement Semar's patient, loving, compassionate, gentle, and simple characteristics in their effort to develop students' autonomy. Counselors need to have patience in solving clients' problems. It is also necessary to refer to goodness and life philosophy when conducting guidance and counseling services.

### **Congruence**

Semar has a congruent personality in serving his masters. In counseling, it equals openness (Corey, 2009; Palmer, 2010; Ray et al., 2014; Rogers, 1957). Authentic counselors present themselves openly, including the feelings and attitudes that exist in themselves, and can establish honest communication with clients. (Corey, 2009; Eremie & Ubulom, 2016; Nelson-Jones, 2006; Palmer, 2010). Counselors should provide comfort in building interpersonal relationships with clients (Brodley, 2013; Lemoire & Chen, 2005; Poyrazli, 2003; Wickman & Campbell, 2003). Collins & Arthur (2007) state that counselors need to develop attitudes, knowledge, and skills for competent and ethical practice. Counselors need to instill cultural values into the counseling process. The meaning behind "When Semar

associates with the Gods, he behaves as if he is dealing with people of his equal (Semar is authoritative and in front of the gods who are known to have extraordinary power and supernatural powers.)” is “when the counselor interacts with the principal and other staff at the school. The counselor behaves the same way and does not feel that his presence in the school is belittled and has authority”. In other words, when the counselor is dealing with the principal and other staff, the counselor does not need to feel inferior and does not influence the school. Counselors need to demonstrate their skills and demonstrate significant progress in providing Guidance and Counseling services.

Semar acts as a servant or guardian of the knights who will grow seeds of virtue that maintain harmony, peace, and balance in the journey of relationships between humans, and the universe of the gods. The figure of Semar has noble values that need to be absorbed and practiced by a counselor, such as being patient, compassionate, and merciful. His speech is gentle and easy to understand (Collins & Pieterse (2007). Competent counselors are aware of their own cultural heritage. This awareness includes the counselors’ understanding of cultural heritage and world view. School counselors need to be prepared to integrate the practice of multicultural diversity into their guidance and counseling services (Packer-Williams et al., 2010) to work effectively in racially and ethnically diverse school communities. According to Rawls (2007), training professional counselors in multicultural counseling is not only at the pre-service level. This shows that being a professional, culturally aware counselor is still a considerable challenge.

### **Honesty**

*Semar* has an honest personality in serving his masters. Guidance and counseling services in schools are an effort to help students develop their personal life, social life, learning activities, and career (Brown & Srebalus, 1996; Cormier & Cormier, 1998; Gladding, 2004; Habsy, 2017; Vacc & Loesch, 1993). Counselors’ honesty is related to their authenticity, transparency, and harmony (Ivey, Ivey, & Simek-Downing, 1997; Leus, Tishby, Shefler, & Wiseman, 2017; Torres-Rivera, Phan, Maddux, Wilbur, Arrendondo, 2006; Rogers, 1970; Schaefer, 1992,). Counselors need to internalize these three aspects to become a unique and comprehensive person (Bass & Quimby, 2006; Ivey, Ivey, & Simek-Downing, 1997; Rogers, 1970). Counselors are also called reflectors because they clarify and reflect back on clients’ feelings and attitudes (Gibson & Mitchell, 2008; Setyaputri, 2017). *Semar* can be a means of peace and glory for the country it occupies. The Pandawa

have considered Semar as their advisor, moreover the Pandawa know that Semar is actually a god who came down to Earth for peace and justice. Even in the Marcapada, Semar has always been a Guardian, Companion and Advisor to kings and noble knights. He always recommends goodness and virtues in order to achieve the glory of life, practice modesty, abstinence, and pray. Brought into counseling context, it could be translated as follows: school counselor needs to be a means of peace and honor for the school. Counselors in schools act as caregivers, educators, mentors, advisors and teachers (models) for students (knights) at school. In providing guidance and counseling services in schools, counselors always advocate the goodness and virtues of achieving the glory of life, practicing modesty, abstinence, and praying. This is a characteristic that school counselors need to have. ACA (2005) mentions Multicultural/Diversity Competence is the capacity in which counselors have cultural and diversity awareness and knowledge about themselves and others, and how awareness and knowledge are effectively applied in practice with clients. Counselors need to internalize noble values contained in the character of *Semar*.

Awareness of the value of counselors: (1) culturally competent counselors are aware and sensitive to their own cultural heritage and value, and respect differences; (2) culturally competent counselors are aware of how their own cultural background, experiences, attitudes, values, and biases may affect psychological processes; (3) culturally competent counselors are able to recognize the limits of their competence and expertise; (4) culturally competent counselors are comfortable with the racial, ethnic, cultural, and belief differences standing between them and their clients; (5) counselors should provide a serious, responsible guidance and counseling services (Pedersen & Marsella, 2016; Sue et al., 1992). Counselors are responsible for their students, students' parents, colleagues and associations, schools and society, themselves and the profession. In the same vein, ACA (2005) describes counselors' responsibilities to several parties: students, parents, colleagues and associations, schools and society, one's self, and profession. By having this responsibility, the counselor will be able to provide independent and professional guidance and counseling services.

### **Empathy**

Semar has an empathetic personality in serving his masters. Empathy is an activity to understand what the concerned person is thinking and feeling about the conditions that are being experienced by others without being dragged into the problem (Dimberg, Andréasson & Thunberg, 2011; Dimberg & Thunberg, 2012; Sonnby-Borgström, 2002). Empathy is

believed to be an interesting aspect of human interaction in general and a major component of the helping profession in particular (Elliott et al., 2011; Rogers, 1961; Rogers, 1975; Zhou et al., 2003). Empathy is the counselors' ability of counselors to enter clients' world (Rogers, 1957; Rogers, 1961). It does not only convey the counselors' feelings through words but also express clients' experience (Clark, 2010; Davis, 1983). Empathy is a counselor's attribute that plays important role and significantly affects the counseling outcome (Chung & Bemak, 2002; DeGeorge & Constantino, 2012; Rogers, 1957; Rogers, 1975). Arthur and Januszkowski (2001) show that counselors with cultural diversity awareness may exhibit more successful counseling outcome than those lacking cultural awareness. Therefore, studying the cultural values of Semar character is expected to help counselors' carry out their counseling process more effectively. School counselors need to internalize Semar noble values (i.e., patience, compassion, gentleness, and easy-to-understand into their efforts in supporting students' development. When the counselor interacts with the principal and other staff in the school, they should not perceive themselves as inferior.

Semar's four personalities identified in this study are valuable to be integrated into professional counselors' personality. The advisory personality is highly relevant to the counselors when they help clients think about solutions to their problems, reflect on ideas, and plan actions or develop existing choices (Doyle, 1998; Kuhn, Gordon, & Webber, 2006; Lowenstein, 2005). Congruent person is defined as an open person. Semar has a congruent personality (open) to anyone including the Pandawa (Mulyono, 1989; Sumukti, 2006). A congruent person is also present in a counselor. Counselors must be open and be themselves in the counseling process (Mercier, 2016). Congruence is helpful for counselors and clients to develop a warm and comfortable relationship (Marmarosh & Kivlighan, 2012). Honesty is also linked to openness and authenticity (Torres-Rivera, Phan, Maddux, Wilbur, & Garrett (2001). Honesty allows counselors to provide objective feedback to clients, making this element highly important (Torres -Rivera, Wilbur, Maddux, Smaby, Phan, Roberts-Wilbur, 2002). Empathy is one of the key factors that help clients solve their personal problems (Ikiz, 2009). Empathy enables clients to understand feelings of pleasure, sadness, suffering, and other people's emotions, such as anger, and fear, among others (Austin, Evans, Goldwater & Potter, 2005).

## CONCLUSIONS

*Semar* is an Indonesian *wayang* figure. He is a servant for the *Pandawa*. *Semar* personality, as a servant, is very much attached to a counselor. The position of *Semar* and Counselor are both servants for their clients. *Semar's* personality include (1) advisory, (2) congruence, (3) honesty, and (4) empathy. These four personalities should be integrated into the professional counselor's personality. This study's theoretical implication is that counselors can use it as a reference when seeking a role model. This study proves that *wayang* character like *Semar* can be an inspiration for counselors. Counselors are expected to discover more role models from *wayang* figures or even other professions.

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