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**EXTRAORDINARY ENDEAVOURS OF HELEN KELLER IN
HELEN KELLER'S *THE STORY OF MY LIFE* (1903):
AN INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH**



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2012

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ABSTRACT

This article represents the result summary depicting an individual psychological criticism which is included in a novel entitled The Story of My Life by Helen Keller. This paper elaborates the extraordinary endeavours of Helen Keller reflected in the novel that are analyzed through individual psychological approach. The research result is that the personality of Helen Keller is influenced by her inferiority feelings of her physical lacks to strive for superiority to limit her boundaries by using her extraordinary endeavours. The basic principles of an Individual Psychology construct a unity viewed from Helen's personality to penetrate her boundaries.

Key words: *Individual Psychological Approach, Extraordinary Endeavours, Helen Keller*

1. Introduction

Every person in the world is born with his weaknesses and excesses. Generally, weaknesses as well as excesses of human beings are different to each other. Some people may have physical lacks, such as deaf, blind, and dumb. Nevertheless, the others may have mental lacks. Additionally, there are two characteristics of people when facing their future. Some people possibly will be pessimistic to face their future with their weaknesses since they assume that they cannot do anything, on the contrary the others are optimistic since they believe

they can do something to change their destiny for their better future. Even, they will do extraordinary endeavours to penetrate their boundaries, particularly for a person who has more than one physical lack. An extraordinary endeavour itself is related to psychological condition since the condition of an individual psychology may influence how the person attempts to achieve his life goals. Moreover, something can be called an extraordinary when it is becoming further than the limits of what something ordinary is and may not be predicted by the other persons to be able to be done.

According to Abrams (1985: 227), psychology deals with a work of literature primarily as the personality, feelings and desires of its author. Psychology also becomes an interesting aspect to be used in the literary work because indirectly the literary work has been influenced by its author's psychology. Gordon Allport gives the definition that, "personality is the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his unique adjustments to his environment" (Allport, 1937: 48).

Wellek and Warren (1956: 75) state that author's life history is an old genre of literary since it is a part of historiography of the author. It also can be viewed as the creation of art related to psychology. It means that the author's memoir which has been written is related to the psychology of its author. Moreover, it is one of the old literary works. One of literary works having a value about psychology aspect of the author is *The Story of My Life* by Helen Keller.

The Story of My Life is a 1903 memoir written that tells about the life of an amazing deaf and blind woman. The novel tells in details of Helen's memoir from

childhood until girlhood at about 21 years old. Helen Keller wrote her memoir at the early age of 22 when she was still in college. The book is in three parts. The first is Helen Keller's story of her life. The next part of this book is the extracts from Helen's letters as supplementary story of her life. The third part is additional explanation of Helen Keller's life and education.

The memoir written by Helen Keller is worthy of note, thus two directors, Nadia Tass and Arthur Penn are getting interested in making a movie with different title from the novel. The movie is entitled *The Miracle Worker* in 1962 and 2000. Both directors just take the beginning of Helen's life story that shows Helen's days at late age of seven.

Helen Keller is a person who does attempt to be able to speak with people around her. She started for learning speech in speech classes at the Horace Mann School for the Deaf in Boston in 1890. She would work hard for 25 years to learn speaking in order to the others could understand her. From 1894 through 1896, she attended the Wright-Humason School for the Deaf in New York City. In 1896, she attended the Cambridge School for Young Ladies, a preparatory school for women (<http://www.biography.com/people/helen-keller>).

The setting of *The Story of My Life* generally sets at United State, America in 1880s. The point of view of the book is single first person with Helen Keller as the teller of the story. In her book, she likes bringing the readers to imagine how she feels in the difficult condition by using words.

There are five reasons why the work is important to be studied. Firstly, the work is narrating the individual psychology within the author as the major

character of this book when attempting to penetrate her own limits. Psychology itself focuses on individual thought and action. The way of Helen Keller as a blind, deaf and dumb person to be passed is not easy, there must be extraordinary endeavours as well as high motivation. Therefore, it will be interesting to observe the personality of the author as the major character in life as a unity of individual.

Secondly, the story in the book is true. It gives the readers knowledge about how a deaf, blind, and dumb person faces her life and how people around her behave towards her. In her memoir, she covers the individual problems in details. Besides, many novels telling fictitious stories written by their authors without any physical lacks have been studied, so studying the true novel written by its author will be more interesting and also different from the others.

The third reason is the memoir written in harmonious word groupings. Although, she is blind, deaf, and dumb, she can write her memoir with beautiful language to express her experience. With beautiful dictions in each word, she tells her memoir like a normal person writes some sentences in a book. The fourth, the work is very motivating for the readers. It teaches how to stop giving up with all difficulties of life including personality deprivation. It can make the normal human beings aware that they must be grateful to God, the Lord of Universe by facing difficulties in life without giving themselves up.

The fifth is the teaching learning value. Besides telling the author personality, the book also tells about the teaching value which has been applied by the author's teacher. The author tells how the teacher teaches her as a person who has physics lacks. In order to teach Helen, her teacher must have different ways to

educate Helen to be independent. Her teacher must use different methods in teaching because of the author's physical lacks. For that reason, the researcher also wants to know more about how Helen's teacher teaches the blind, deaf, and dumb person that can influence Helen to endeavour in her life. The readers can learn how a teacher teaches their students well, particularly for the students who have lacks of their physics because of the education value inside.

The problem statement of this research is "How are the extraordinary endeavours of Helen Keller reflected in Helen Keller's *The Story of My Life*?" This study is limited to the extraordinary endeavours that Helen does in reaching her ambitions to be able to speak with her own mouth and to take degrees at a college. This study uses an Individual Psychological Approach by Alfred Adler.

The objective of the study is to analyze the personality of Helen Keller as the major character in Helen Keller's *The Story of My Life* based on individual psychological approach. The benefits expected from the research are: (1) based on theoretical benefit, this research can give a contribution in understanding literary knowledge and give a contribution in criticizing a literary work and producing criticism as objective as possible. (2) Based on practical benefits, this research can be used to know how extraordinary endeavours of Helen Keller to reach life goals and can be used by the next researcher to do research related to individual psychological approach, especially on *The Story of My Life* by Helen Keller.

Actually there is no research about *The Story of My Life* by Helen Keller that has been conducted before. Nevertheless, some research papers have been conducted by the other researchers by using different object having a relation with

the novel. The object of the other researcher is a movie entitled *The Miracle Worker* which tells a single beginning part of the story in *The Story of My Life*.

The first literature review related to the research paper is “Annie Sullivan’s Motives of teaching Helen Keller in Nadia Tass’s *The Miracle Worker* Movie: a Humanistic Psychological Perspective” by Dyah Permatasari (UMS, 2011). In the research, she found that the first is based on the structural analysis. Second is based on a Humanistic Psychological Perspective analysis, Annie Sullivan as the centre point. The analysis based on the perspective analysis shows the motives underlying the struggle of Annie Sullivan. The second literature review related to this research paper is “Proving The Disable’s Independence in Arthur Penn’s *The Miracle Worker* Movie: An Individual Psychological Approach” by Muhammad Anwari (UMS, 2009). In this research, he found that first is based on the structural analysis. Second is based on the psychological analysis, Annie Sullivan as the centre point has to prove that the theme is true. The analysis based on the psychological analysis shows the personality of Annie Sullivan is influenced by her inferiority feeling and striving for superiority.

In this research, the researcher uses the object which is different from the first and the second literature review to be studied. The difference is the genre of the object, a movie and a historical novel. The story of the movie also is recycled by William Gibson in 1962 and Monte Merrick in 2000 with some additional elements which often cannot be found in the novel. Then the similarity of the objects is both objects still have a relation since the movie tells one single beginning part of the story from the whole story of the novel.

2. Research Method

In this part, the researcher presents five points of research method. The first is type of the study. The researcher applies descriptive qualitative method. Creswell (1998: 15) states that qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on the instinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher explores the problems in the novel by analyzing the words and conducts the study in natural setting. The second is object of the study about Helen Keller's *The Story of My Life*. It is analyzed by using an individual psychological approach. The third is type of the data and data source. In this study, there are two sources of data. Primary data are taken from a novel entitle *The Story of My Life* and secondary data sources are from other sources related to the primary data supporting the analysis.

The forth is technique of the data collection, such as reading the novel repeatedly, taking notes of the influence information both primary and secondary data, determining the major character that will be analyzed, reading some related books to find out the theory, data, and information required, arranging the data into several groups based on its classifications, and selecting particular parts considered important and relevant for analysis. The method of data collecting is library research, released document to be observed. The fifth is technical of the data analysis. The steps of the data analysis are by analyzing the structural elements of the work and analyzing the individual psychological perspectives of the work. Analyzing the data of this research is trying to clarify the obtained data by selecopting the necessary ones.

3. Striving for Superiority

Each person has a striving for superiority because they want to make their life better. The striving for superiority occurs at both the individual and social levels. The person who is living in concern with their social world, they will strive to create a better world (Hjelle and Ziegler, 1992: 144).

The striving for superiority is looked toward by Helen Keller to overcome her inferiority feelings from her physical lacks. She does all efforts to overcome. She begins to appear her superiority when she feels upper than a child of her servants, namely Martha. She likes dominating to Martha because she thinks that she is strong and active. She also does not care of what will happen. She has her own way to defend her superiority from the others that attacks her (SML, 1903: 21). Those are done by her to strive for superiority when her emotion is unstable before her teacher teaches her about manual alphabets. When her emotion becomes stable, then she continues striving for superiority. She wants to show her capacity to Mr. Anagnos. She gets spirit to represent her skill of writing to him. Her mind is fulfilled by many beautiful phrases that she does not know where the phrases come from. She does not think twice to put all her ideas on the Braille slate, she just writes them as soon as possible before all of them lose from her mind.

I thought then that I was "making up a story," as children say, and I eagerly sat down to write it before the ideas should slip from me. My thoughts flowed easily; I felt a sense of joy in the composition. Words and images came tripping to my finger ends, and as I thought out sentence after sentence, I wrote them on my braille slate (SML, 1903: 106).

In fact, she writes and sends the story to make Mr. Anagnos pleasant; on the contrary it makes her disappointed after he publishes it. He thinks that he has been deceived by both Helen and her teacher. She feels oppressed. She becomes afraid of her mind which invites her to write. Then, she tries to stand up again. Her oppressed feeling drives her to strive for her superiority. She then tries to write for the Youth's Companion a brief account of her life.

She must be more careful to put her ideas on Braille slate because her sad experience of a judged plagiarist direct her to know that words and image coming to her without attempt actually does not come from her mind but appear from books she reads or the ideas which are told by the others (SML, 1903: 106). Hence, she puts a brief account of her life in writing carefully since she does not want to get the failure one again.

As I look back on my struggle to write that little story, it seems to me that I must have had a prophetic vision of the good that would come of the undertaking, or I should surely have failed (SML, 1903: 123).

Striving for superiority does not stop when she can use manual alphabet to participate in a conversation. Next, she strives to be able to utter words with her own mouth. She knows since she was a child that people around her communicate with the others with their own mouth, not with signs. Her desire to strive for superiority to be able to speak with the others with her own mouth appears her great ambition. Although, her friends think that is impossible to achieve, she still thinks positively that she can strive it.

...I was conscious of dissatisfaction with the means of communication I already possessed. One who is entirely

dependent upon the manual alphabet has always a sense of restraint, of narrowness. This feeling began to agitate me with a vexing, forward-reaching sense of a lack that should be filled. My thoughts would often rise and beat up... Friends tried to discourage this tendency, fearing lest it would lead to disappointment (SML, 1903: 98).

Helped by Miss Fuller, Helen learns speaking. Miss Fuller has a method to teach Helen. Firstly, Helen must touch Miss Fuller's face to feel the position of Miss Fuller's tongue and lips to make voice. Helen has to learn elements of speech. When she finally can verbalize a short sentence, it makes her more enthusiastic to learn more and more (SML, 1903: 99-100).

Although, she often feels very tired to attempt hard efforts to get her ambition, she tries to stand up for reaching her superiority. Her difficulties must be faced by her, such as she has to be dependent on her fingers to catch the vibration of the throat, the movement of the mouth, and the expression of the face. Those are very hard to understand all the means since what she interprets is not always right. Facing all difficulties makes her stronger to penetrate her limits and to make her family proud of her (SML, 1903: 102).

Taking degrees at a college, especially at Harvard University becomes her life goals since she was a child. It has been announced by her when she was at Wellesley University. Hence, to strive for her superiority she does extraordinary attempts to struggle her childish ambition. "When I was a little girl, I visited Wellesley and surprised my friends by the announcement, "Someday I shall go to college--but I shall go to Harvard!" (SML, 1903: 139). Beginning to study at Cambridge School for Young Ladies for the preparation to enter Radcliffe is a

close approach to take degrees at Harvard. She must try hard in each lesson at school because not all lectures can use manual alphabets when teaching. Besides, she cannot follow what the teacher teaches in the class with her eyes. It is more difficult when she faces the lessons of physics, algebra and geometry. Without touching geometrical figures, she cannot understand the figures which are drawn on the blackboard. The problems of Helen drive her to endeavour the unusual efforts to solve the problems. She does not give up even it is so hard to face. By learning all of lessons at all days helped by her teachers and exercise speaking to penetrate her boundaries, she indeed strives to perfection of her life. Her ambition finally has been achieved to take degrees at college. “The struggle for admission to college was ended, and I could now enter Radcliffe whenever I pleased... that my dream of going to college was realized” (SML, 1903: 160). After spending long time and striving for superiority, she ultimately realizes. This life goal also represents how much she loves her family since she cannot wait for being at home to make her proud of her.

When I had made speech my own, I could not wait to go home. At last the happiest of happy moments arrived. I had made my homeward journey, talking constantly to Miss Sullivan, not for the sake of talking, but determined to improve to the last minute (SML, 1903: 104).

4. Fictional finalism

Adler (in Feist, 1985: 65) says “the fiction of greatest importance is the final goal of superiority or success”. Generally, fictional finalism deals with individual life goal, which is unreal in nature or as a fiction.

The Story of My Life depicts fictional finalism on the major character of Helen Keller. Actually, Helen desires to speak with people normally and to take degrees at a college. In fact, she cannot speak with the others with her mouth since she loses her sight and hearing as well as her ability of speaking because she cannot input any word into her mind. Her physical lacks may not allow her to take degrees at college, even at school because she lives far from schools.

Helen's ambition is like a fiction that is impossible to realize. Nevertheless, her weaknesses cannot decrease her spirit to attempt to make her life goal real. This condition indirectly influences her personality in facing world. She still tries what she can do. It means that her ambition has existed in her mind. Then, it affects her to do endeavours even if the efforts are not predicted to be able to do.

5. Inferiority Feelings and Compensation

Adler says (in Hall and Lindzey, 1970: 247) "inferiority feeling is feelings as result of psychological and social weakness in individual's subjective perception". Generally, basis of inferiority feeling is from weak feelings in life. Inferiority commonly is feelings which make a person not pleasant in particular condition to effort. Inferiority feeling indicates weak and unskilled feelings which need to be accomplished, but it does not mean being inferior to another person in a universal substance. Human beings face this organ inferiority with compensation. They strive to eliminate their weaknesses with some kinds of manners.

In *The Story of My Life*, Helen Keller as the major character has to face her inferiority feelings. It firstly occurs when her emotion is unstable after losing her sight and hearing. She feels angry that represents her sadness since few signs she uses make her difficult to communicate with the others. She tries to compensate her inferiority feeling actually because she wants to reach her life goals. In the fact, more compensation she does, more inferiority feelings she gets. If she has given up, she will embrace her mother to make her comfortable (SML, 1903: 31).

The second inferiority feeling comes when her emotion is stable after her teacher has taught her. Her feeling appears because of her disability to know the meaning of some abstract words. She feels confused and disappointed when her teacher, her close friend cannot explain the abstract words that no real objects can be touched by her hands to identify.

I remember the morning that I first asked the meaning of the word, "love." This was before I knew many words. I had found a few early violets in the garden and brought them to my teacher... But Miss Sullivan shook her head, and I was greatly puzzled and disappointed. I thought it strange that my teacher could not show me love (SML, 1903: 50-51).

Inferiority feeling that has to be faced by Helen comes over again when she writes and sends her short story, entitled *The Frost King* to make Mr. Anagnos pleasant, on the contrary it makes her disappointed after he publishes it. He thinks that he has been deceived by both Helen and her teacher. She is judged as plagiarist. She feels oppressed. She becomes afraid of her mind which invites her to write. The case as well makes her very sad, worry, and fear. "The winter of 1892 was darkened by the one cloud in my childhood's bright sky. Joy deserted

my heart, and for a long, long time I lived in doubt, anxiety and fear” (SML, 1903: 109). An investigating council who are the teachers and officers of the institution interrogate her to confess that she knows Miss Canby’s writing has been read to her then she writes again. In fact, she does not know that the story has been read to her, but when she puts in writing the story. Her mind shows many phrases about the beautiful world, like Miss Canby writes. It brings her in the deep depression time. To make herself more comfortable she thinks that she will die before being investigated the next day. It makes her more comfortable for awhile. “As I lay in my bed that night, I wept as I hope few children have wept. I felt so cold, I imagined I should die before morning, and the thought comforted me” (SML, 1903: 112).

Her condition of physical lacks is easy to make the inferiority feelings come. She feels hopeless to face her days with manual alphabet without voice to speak. Hence, to get compensation of her weaknesses, she tries to make voice from her throat as well as her lips. She also usually touches some objects which can produce voice, like her mother’s lips when she speaks (SML, 1903: 97).

Helen is a person with her physical lacks who wants to realize her childhood ambition to take degrees at a college. In her hard efforts in realizing her dream, her inferiority feelings appear. She feels foolish to learn lessons in her school. She thinks that teacher will lose his patience when teaching her because of her. “...my stupidity would often have exhausted the patience of Job...” (SML, 1903: 155). Besides, she feels that inferiority feelings often come in her life, like when her study is cancelled since Miss Sullivan and Mr. Gilman debate even for

giving the best to her. It makes her goal to take degrees at a college delay. "...these disappointments caused me great depression at times.." (SML, 1903: 136).

Moreover, the inferiority feelings of Helen Keller and his personality has a relationship to each other. The inferiority influences her personality to be better in doing to compensate her inferiority feelings. In other words, her weaknesses drive her to stand up and be able to reach her dream. Although her inferiority feelings come many times in her struggle, she is aware that one day she will achieve her hopes by her compensation of her inferiority feelings.

6. Social Interest

Adler states (in Feist, 1985: 71) "social interest is an attitude of relatedness with humanity in general, as well as empathy for each member of the human race". It shows that human beings believe their association to be alive together with the others for social importance rather than for individual importance rather than personal importance. Adler also states (in Suryabrata, 2002: 188-189) "social interest is true and inevitable compensation for all the natural weaknesses of individual human being".

The beginning of the novel, the author tells that the major character has a loneliness relationship since she just knows the darkness without glow; consequently her social interest is not good enough. Nevertheless, it begins to change when she meets Dr. Alexander Graham Bell. He gives warm heart to Helen at first. It makes Helen comfortable to make a friendship with him. "But I did not dream that that interview would be the door through which I should pass

from darkness into light, from isolation to friendship, companionship, knowledge, love” (SML, 1903: 35).

After her feeling is stable, her social interest becomes better. She appreciates with the others, like when her teacher tells about the scenery along their journey of the train to her. It is actually different from the years before (SML, 1903: 72).

In social interest, she can pal up with all friends she meets. Her spirit in struggle of her dream makes her get many friends from the young and older people. She also makes a friendship with blind children, like her. “We had scarcely arrived at the Perkins Institution for the Blind when I began to make friends with the little blind children (SML, 1903: 74).

Moreover, she can be indicated as a good girl who does not make people disappointed. It shows when she is very sad and guilty when the case of *The Frost King* occurs. She also will be responsible with what she pronounces at early years of her. Her social interest includes her compensate to change inferiority feelings into strength to strive her superiority in order to pierce her boundaries.

7. Style of Life

Everyone has a different style in life. Adler (in Ryckman, 1985: 98) states that the style of life, originally called the “life plan” or “guiding image”, refers to the unique ways in which people reach their life targets. The style emerges as responses to weakness.

In the story, the style of life of Helen that does not become different from a child to a girl is her goal of life. Her life goal is developing after her emotional feeling is stable. In the childhood, she is aware that need of communication is vital for every person before her feeling is stable. Her life goal begins developing after she knows how to express her ideas by using her manual alphabets. She desires to be able to speak with the people around her with her own mouth and to take degrees at college. Followed by her ambition, she changes her self concept that a person with her physical lacks can realize her own goals even if those are too difficult to accomplish and her friends disagree with what she wants.

Her life style describes with how she has attitude toward life and others. Helen appreciates what people say, but herself desire cannot change because of it. She has accepted her life with her physical lacks. The author also puts on view of how Helen really wants to make her life goals real. She also wants to balance her life with the social life. She tries to solve three main social problems, including work, love, and friendship.

Those mean that she shows that she has the socially useful type. She strives to superiority and overcome her weaknesses. Helen does not want to make mistake toward someone who is kind with her. Every struggle she does is actually for people around her.

8. Creative Power

Commonly, creative power means influences of genetics of any environment toward a person in overcoming the problem of life. Adler says (in

Hjelle & Ziegler, 1992: 150) that people can create life style since they are empowered with the freedom. He also states (in Wolman, 1960: 285) that creative power merges the inborn capabilities and environmental influences into a movement toward conquering obstacles is life way of human beings.

Creative power comes when she efforts to make her dreams real and solve her problems facing her. At first, her creative self comes when Helen wants to join in the people conversation. To join the conversation, she spells a language on hands as usual. Her desire comes again when she thinks that being able to speak is important to express her feeling. To accomplish her desire, she likes touching the others' mouth and feels the vibration of their voice (SML, 1903: 97).

Creative power also shows when she really wants to compete with the normal people who can see and hear normally, to enter a college. She begins to study at Cambridge School for Young Ladies for the preparation to enter Radcliffe is a close approach to take degrees at Harvard. She must try hard in each lesson at school to overcome her weaknesses. Besides, her creative self also comes when she wants to make real her ambition to speak. She frequently exercises to utter some words into sentences after she knows the basic elements of speaking by Miss Fuller.

9. Conclusion

From the individual psychological approach, the striving for superiority includes how Helen as the major character endeavours to penetrate the boundaries to overcome the weaknesses. Fictional finalism itself begins when she was child

since she wants to strive for her superiority. She wants to speak with people normally and to take degrees at a college. In fact, her physical lacks may not allow her to take degrees at college, even at school because she lives far from schools. It must ask her to do extraordinary endeavours. The weaknesses of physical lack drive her to overcome. She does many efforts to strive for superiority. Social interest of Helen that explains in the beginning of the novel is loneliness relationship consequently her social interest is not good enough, but it changes after her feeling is stable, then her social interest becomes better. Her social interest includes her compensate to change inferiority feelings into strength to strive for her superiority in order to pierce her boundaries. Helen's life style is influenced by her endeavours. She shows that she has the socially useful type. Creative power comes when she efforts to make her dreams real and solve her problems that face her.

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